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opening extract from

Mustang Mountain: Night Horse

written by

Sharon Siamon

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Mustang Mountain

Night Horse

Sharon Siamon

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To Reid

I wish to thank Dr Wayne Burwash, an equine practitioner who lives near Calgary, for his advice on equine injuries and recovery.

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Chapter 1

Lost Luggage

'Where's my bag?' Meg O'Donnell stared at the ramp above the airport luggage carousel. The last suitcase slid down the ramp. The final passenger grabbed his luggage and hurried away. Meg was left, watching the carousel going around and around.

Meg's two friends, Alison Chant and Becky Sandersen, twirled their full luggage carts

impatiently.

'I should go and look for my dad.' Becky's rosy cheeks were bright with excitement. 'He must be wondering where we are!'

'I'll come with you.' Alison thrust her cart through the crowd after her cousin Becky. 'Meg, you stay here and watch for your suitcase!'

'As if I could leave!' Meg shouted after them, but Becky and Alison were giggling and running with their piled-high luggage carts, pushing through the doors that led to the international arrivals area of the Calgary airport.

The carousel was almost empty now. Only a few lonely suitcases spun slowly around. Watching them, Meg felt like lost luggage herself. She tugged her long brown ponytail tight. Why had she let Alison talk her into coming to Mustang Mountain Ranch when she didn't want to be there – when she wanted to be home training Silver?

Meg thought of the beautiful three-year-old

colt standing alone in the paddock. She wished she were there right now, stroking Silver's soft mane, offering him a carrot. He wasn't actually her horse, but he had been given to her to gentle and train until it was time for his serious education as a jumper. She hated to waste a second of their precious time together.

Meg glared at the empty ramp as if she could make her grey and blue duffel bag magically appear. What if it never came? What if she just turned around and flew home?

Why had Alison insisted she come to the Mustang Mountain for the summer? Meg wondered. She didn't belong at the ranch like Becky and Alison. Becky lived there, when she wasn't going to school in the east. Her parents, Dan and Laurie Sandersen, ran the ranch. Alison was Becky's first cousin. As for herself – she was just Meg – Alison's almost invisible friend.

She saw Alison and Becky now, hurrying towards her. Becky's blonde hair floated around

her happy, heart-shaped face. Alison, as usual, looked perfect, her dark hair smoothly in place, her clothes neatly pressed even after hours in a plane.

Becky's dad was with them. He was a tall, skinny cowboy who looked like someone who spent most of his life working outdoors.

'Hi, Meg,' he shook her hand shyly. 'You sure have grown up this year. I wouldn't have recongised you!'

'Hi, Mr Sandersen.' Meg suddenly felt shy. She knew she had grown over the winter – almost six inches! But she hated it when people made a fuss about the way she looked.

'Any sign of your lost suitcase?' Dan Sandersen finally stopped staring at her and scanned the circling carousel.

'Nope,' Meg shook her head.

'I don't see why it matters if you don't get your luggage,' Alison laughed. 'There's nothing in it but a bunch of baggy old sweatshirts and three



pairs of leggings. That's all you ever wear!'

Meg winced. She had never realised what Alison thought of her clothes.

'You can borrow stuff from me until your suitcase shows up,' Becky said. 'We're almost the same size.' She tossed back her honey-blonde hair.

'But the picture I made for your mom was in there,' Meg said. She had done a pencil drawing of Windy, Laurie Sandersen's favourite horse. She had wanted to give it to Laurie as a gift when she arrived. It showed Windy, a sturdy little chestnut mare, galloping over the mountain meadow above the ranch.

'I'll see what I can find out about your suitcase.' Dan Sandersen shoved back his big cowboy hat. 'But we can't afford to wait around. We have to get up to the ranch before dark and it's a long drive and a long ride, as you remember.'

He strode away to the lost luggage department.

As she watched him go, Meg remembered the exciting ride to Mustang Mountain a year ago. She had been so thrilled that Alison had actually asked her to spend the summer on a real ranch in the Rocky Mountains. But that was last year. This summer, everything had changed.

