

BEANIE

The Horse That Wasn't a Horse



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CHAPTER

1

A Dream Comes True

Nine-year-old Alex Jahns pulled the blankets over his face so that only his short, blond hair showed, and closed his eyes. But even though Alex's eyes were closed, he was not asleep. Instead of being tired, Alex was wide awake. How could he sleep when tomorrow was going to be the most wonderful day of his entire life?

It's like an answer to prayer! Alex thought happily. I prayed for a horse, and God finally answered my prayer with a "Yes"!

Alex was horse crazy. His father was horse crazy. Alex's mother was *not* horse

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crazy. “*Horses* are crazy,” Mom liked to joke, “and a person would have to be crazy to like them!”

Alex had read dozens of horse books. He knew every part of *The Black Stallion* and *My Friend Flicka* and *Black Beauty* by heart. But until now Alex’s dream of owning a real live horse had seemed impossible.

“With God all things are possible,” Alex said out loud. And then he smiled again, remembering Grandpa Stevens’ phone call that evening.

“Alex,” Grandpa had asked, “would you like a horse of your own?”

“Of course I would,” Alex said.

Alex’s mother was standing nearby, and she shook her head when she heard Grandpa’s question. “We don’t have enough money to buy a horse right now,” she said. “Unless it’s a toy horse—a cheap toy horse.”

“What if the horse were free?” Grandpa asked, “would you want it then?”

“A free horse?” Alex’s heart began to pound. He’d wanted a horse all his life—

A DREAM COMES TRUE

a beautiful horse, an elegant horse, a wonderful horse. Alex shook his head to clear his thoughts and pressed the phone closer to his ear, wondering if he had heard correctly.

Grandpa chuckled. "That's right," he said. "I know where you can get a good horse, free."

"A free horse?" Alex asked again.

"Any free horse probably has only three legs," Dad grumbled when he overheard Alex. "Or two heads."

"Dad!" Alex hissed.

"Or maybe it has three legs *and* two heads!" Dad continued.

"We don't want a two-headed horse," Mom said. "Think how much hay it would eat!"

"I'm sure it doesn't have three legs and two heads," Alex said quickly.

"Alex, I know how much you'd like a horse," Dad said, "but good horses are very expensive. There has to be something wrong with a horse that's free."

Grandpa explained that his friend, Roger Jacobson, had fallen and broken his hip.

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The doctors said Roger shouldn't ride his horse anymore. "Roger just wants him to have a good home," Grandpa told the family. "He's a really nice animal, but he needs someone to love and care for him."

"I'll love him!" Alex shouted into the phone. "I'll take care of him! I'll do anything for a horse of my own!"

"Alex," Grandpa laughed, "you don't need to yell. I'm not deaf. Or at least, I wasn't deaf before this!"

"Sorry," Alex said, lowering his voice, "but I'm just so excited, Grandpa! A free horse! For me!"

"You need to come and look at him," Grandpa said.

"What's his name?" Alex asked. Horse names flew through his head—wonderful, elegant, powerful horse names such as *Flame* and *Blaze* and *Thunder* and *Beauty*.

"Beanie," Grandpa replied.

"Beanie?"

"Roger calls him Beanie," Grandpa said. "Although I imagine you could change the name if you wanted."

A DREAM COMES TRUE

Alex's mother snorted in the background, sounding a bit like a horse herself. "Beanie!" she exclaimed. "What sort of name is that?"

"Mom!" Alex frowned, covering the phone receiver so Grandpa couldn't hear them. "Be nice."

"Bean Brain is probably more like it," Mom continued.

"Don't make fun of my horse," Alex said. He felt protective of Beanie already, as though the horse were on the other end of the phone line, listening to someone tease him.

"Alex," Grandpa said, "let's meet tomorrow at the Jacobson farm. You need to have a good look at Beanie before making any decisions. After all, owning a horse is a big responsibility."

"Oh, Grandpa," Alex said, "you don't need to worry. I'm very responsible."

Mom cleared her throat. "What about your hamster?" she asked.

"I take good care of Hammie," Alex insisted.

"No, *I* take good care of Hammie,"

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Mom said. "And I imagine *I* would have to take good care of your horse, too."

"That's different," Alex said. "You can't ride a hamster. You can't train a hamster. You can't do anything with a hamster."

"I told you that you'd have to be crazy to like hamsters," Mom said. "But you insisted a hamster would be fun. Now we're stuck with one, and it does nothing but sit around and eat all day."

"Mom!"

"And you'd have to be crazy to like horses, too," Mom continued.

"A horse is different from a hamster," Alex said.

"That's for sure," Mom agreed. "A horse smells worse and eats a lot more!"

"Alex," Grandpa asked, "are you still there?"

"I'm here, Grandpa," Alex answered quickly.

"Why don't you three talk about the horse tonight," Grandpa suggested. "I'll phone you back tomorrow, and if you're still interested, we can drive out and look at Beanie in the afternoon. OK?"

A DREAM COMES TRUE

“Thank you, Grandpa,” Alex said. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

“Don’t thank me until you see Beanie,” Grandpa said. “He’s actually a funny looking thing—brown with big white spots—and you might not even want him. But he’s very well trained. Roger rode Beanie in the mountains for years, and a few summers ago they even won a bunch of ribbons at the Stettler Gymkhana Races.” Alex knew that “gymkhana” races just meant a variety of events for riders and their horses to perform in. They were sponsored by the local riding club in Stettler.

When Alex hung up the phone, he looked at his parents. His father was smiling an enormous smile that almost split his face in two. But Alex’s mother didn’t look so cheerful. “Of course the horse is a funny-looking thing,” Mom said. “I’ve never seen a horse that wasn’t funny looking.”

“Mom!”

“They have those great big hooves that can squash your toes, and those long

teeth to bite you with, and fuzzy hair that they shed everywhere. I'm certain this horse won't be any different from the rest."

"Don't you want me to have a horse?" Alex asked. "If it's free?"

"Not really," Mom said. "Remember, I hate horses. Besides, I think you're busy tomorrow, Alex. You'll never find the time to look at a horse."

"Busy?"

"Homework," Mom replied. "You're going to be very busy with homework tomorrow."

"It's the summer holidays!"

"That's no excuse," Mom said.

Alex was about to argue when he looked closely at his mother. Her blue eyes were sparkling, and a smile twitched on her lips.

Alex raced over to his parents and threw an arm around each of them. "This is the best day of my life!" he shouted. Then he thought for a moment. "No, tomorrow will be the best day of my life. Because that's the day that I get a horse of my own!"

A DREAM COMES TRUE

After Mom had tucked Alex into bed, he lay hidden under the covers, too excited to sleep. A horse of his own! Yes, tomorrow was going to be the most wonderful day of his life. The most wonderful, incredible, amazing day of his life! Alex tossed and turned for a long time before he finally drifted off to sleep. Almost immediately he began to dream.

Alex was riding on the most beautiful horse in the world. It was jet black like the Black Stallion. His coat gleamed in the sunlight, and his thick mane and tail rippled in the wind. Alex was riding the beautiful horse like an expert. They were galloping, free and wild, across a field thick with brilliant yellow flowers. Alex could feel the breeze in his short blond hair and the swaying of each enormous stride. Up and down, up and down, up and down.

Suddenly the dream became weird. The Black Stallion began to change. His jet black hair began to turn a dull white color. The mane and tail disappeared,

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and the horse became short and chubby and furry.

It was Hammie! Alex was galloping across the field on Hammie, his hamster! And now that he was close to the ground, he could see that the beautiful yellow flowers were nothing more than dandelions.

A hamster and a bunch of weeds. What a horrible way for a perfect dream to end!