



Night
Mare

Backyard  Horses

Dandi Daley Mackall

author of the bestselling Winnie the Horse Gentler series



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Night Mare

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To Landri Claire Brigmon

Backyard horses are the opposite of show horses. They don't have registration papers to prove they're purebred, and they might never win a trophy or ribbon at a horse show. Backyard horses aren't boarded in stables. You can find them in pastures or in backyards. They may be farm horses, fun horses, or simply friends. Backyard horses are often plain and ordinary on the outside . . . but frequently beautiful on the inside.



The Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

1



Sunsets

Ellie James and her famous horse, Dream, have ridden for miles and miles. Ellie sits tall in the saddle, not looking like the shortest kid in fourth grade. Finally she sees the pet store, home of the international Pet Help Line.

A crowd comes running out to greet Ellie and Dream. A tall boy with long hair shouts, "Far out! You made it, man! Groovy!" Ellie would recognize Catman Coolidge in a heartbeat, even if he weren't carrying four fat cats. And

*she knows at once that the dark-haired,
freckle-faced girl next to him is Winnie the
Horse Gentler. Winnie leaps onto her white
Arabian, Nickers. Then Winnie and Ellie ride
off into the sunset on Nickers and Dream.*

Something hits me in the head, knocking me out of a great daydream and back into my classroom. I spot a paper wad on my desk. I don't have to look far to see who threw it. Colt Stevens, my most-of-the-time best friend.

I spread my hands apart, palms up. It's sign language for *What?* Colt and I learned sign language so we could talk to Ethan, my little brother. But knowing sign comes in handy at school, too.

Colt faces Miss Hernandez, our teacher. Then he sticks his hands behind his back and signs to me, *You're next.*

I touch my chin and bring my hand down,

signing, *Thanks*. Colt can't see me, but my mom says being thankful is like breathing. You might not notice when you're doing it, but you sure miss it when you aren't.

"Ellie and Cassie?" Miss Hernandez smiles our way. She has a great ponytail. It swishes behind her. After today, we only have one more day of school before summer will be here and Miss Hernandez won't be our teacher anymore. I'm going to miss her. One of the best things about our fourth-grade teacher is her ponytail. But there are lots of other best things too. Like her laugh. And the way she doesn't yell, even when she's mad. And how she doesn't make us feel stupid if our work isn't as good as somebody else's, like Larissa's.

Cassie stands up. She jerks her head for me to join her in front of the class.

I shake my head. "You're the spokeswoman," I remind her.

Cassie giggles, sounding a little nervous. “Ellie and I split the work on our blog project. Ellie collected all the recipes for horse treats. We made them together and tried them out on real horses. But Ellie did most of the work on the recipes. So you’re stuck with me as spokeswoman.”

The class laughs, in a nice way. Everybody loves Cassie. I’m lucky I got to be her partner for our final project—creating our own blog. The best thing about Cassie, besides that she has a horse named Misty, is that even though she’s one of the most popular kids in our school, she doesn’t act like it. When Miss Hernandez paired us up to develop a blog for our class project, Cassie seemed honest-to-goodness happy to be getting me for a partner.

“Well, it sounds as if you girls worked out your partnership very well,” Miss Hernandez says.

Cassie smiles at me. “It was fun. Tell them how we came up with the idea, Ellie.”

I feel my face turn hot. But I don't really mind telling this part. "You guys know how skinny my horse, Dream, used to be."

"No kidding!" Larissa says. "That pony looked like a scarecrow."

Larissa Richland is as tall as I am short. She thinks she knows everything about horses. But I don't see how she can know that much because she doesn't take care of her horse. She lets a fancy stable do everything for her. The best thing about Larissa is . . . well, I guess it's that maybe she won't be in my fifth-grade class next year.

"Larissa," Miss Hernandez says, "it's not your turn now, is it?"

"No, Miss Hernandez," Larissa answers. "But on *my* blog—I mean, Colt's and my blog—we're always looking for funny stories to tell. So we might want to write about how animal control had to chase that scraggly pinto all over the school lawn."

With her teacher stare, Miss Hernandez gets Larissa to stop talking. Only it's too late. Larissa already got my mind off track. Now all I can think about is the day I first saw my horse out this exact same school window. Everybody thought it was just my imagination. But it wasn't.

Who could have known that the skinny horse I saw that day would end up being my very own Dream?

"Ellie, please go on," Miss Hernandez says.

But I can't go on because I don't remember where I was.

Colt signs, *Skinny pinto, needed treats.*

"Right!" Now I remember. "Skinny. When I got Dream, she was so skinny you could see daylight through her. Not really. But that's how my mom put it. She also said my horse was so skinny she disappeared when she turned sideways."

Larissa fake gags.

“Once I brought Dream home, I had to fatten her up,” I continue. “We used special feed, and that worked. But I started searching the Internet for horse treat recipes. Some were awful. They used peanut butter, and that’s not great for horses. Then I found the coolest thing. A pet help line. Several kids get together to answer questions about animals. They’ve got this guy named Catman who knows everything about cats. And this kid Barker answers all the dog questions.”

Larissa yawns. It’s as loud as the fire alarm.

“Anyway, a girl named Winnie knows more about horses than anybody in the world, I’ll bet.”

“I’ll bet,” Larissa mutters.

I press on. “Her recipes for horse treats were the best.”

Cassie takes over. “We’re not using anything without permission. Winnie wrote back to Ellie and said she could use the recipes. We give Winnie

credit on our blog. Plus, we blog about how our horses liked the treats.”

“Good job, girls,” Miss Hernandez says. She calls the next team and the next.

Larissa and Colt go last.

Larissa starts to get up, but Miss Hernandez stops her with that look again. “Colt, let’s hear from you first. Tell us about your blog.”

Colt looks like he wasn’t counting on this. “Well, Larissa wanted to call it *Starring Larissa*, and I didn’t care. So that’s what it is. Her mom’s helping us a lot with all the blog and computer stuff. She’s got lots of ideas.”

Miss Hernandez tugs her ponytail. “So your blog is about Larissa?”

Colt shrugs. He told me he didn’t care what it was about. He just wanted school to end.

“It’s not *just* about me,” Larissa says. She stands and walks to the front of the room. “*Star-*

ring Larissa is fun, entertaining, and educational.” She glances at her note cards. “Just click on ‘The Larissa Show’ and read about horse shows. You can see pictures of my trophies and ribbons. Click on ‘Larissa’s Logic’ for advice about horses and anything else. Or read ‘Larissa Laughs,’ and you may find a good joke or story.” She looks at me. “That’s where I could write about Ellie’s little pony.”

Larissa knows Dream isn’t a pony. She’s a horse—a beautiful pinto horse. Larissa just calls her a pony to make me mad.

But too bad for Larissa. Even she can’t get me upset on a day like this. There’s too much to be thankful for. Tomorrow, Saturday, I’m going on a trail ride. Monday is the last day of school, thanks to only one extra snow day this winter.

Colt and I have better things to do than worry about a blog. Summer will be filled with trail rides,

horse shows, early-morning breakfast rides, and moonlight horse strolls.

Nope. Even Larissa Richland can't mess up a summer like that.

*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the
God whom we serve is able to save us. . . . But
even if he doesn't . . . we will never serve your
gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.*

Daniel 3:17-18

Horse Talk!

Bay—A reddish-brown color for a horse. A bay horse usually has a black mane and tail.

Blaze—A facial marking on a horse (usually a wide, jagged white stripe).

Canter—A horse's slow gallop; a more controlled three-beat gait.

Cutting horse—A horse (usually a quarter horse) bred to separate cows from a herd. Some cutting horses also cut around barrels in barrel racing or compete in Western horse show classes and events.

English—A style of horseback riding that is often considered more formal and classic than Western style. Riders generally sit on a flat saddle, post (rise from the saddle) on a trot, and hold the reins in both hands.

Farrier—Someone trained to care for a horse's hooves. Farriers trim hooves and put shoes on horses, but many also treat leg and tendon problems.

Flanks—The indented part of a horse's body between the ribs and the hip. Flanks may be tender to the touch.

Foreleg—One of a horse's front legs.

Forelock—The piece of hair that falls onto a horse's forehead.

Gait—The way a horse moves, as in a walk, a trot, a canter, or a gallop.

Gallop—A horse's natural and fast running gait. It's speedier than a lope or a canter.

Gelding—A male horse that has had surgery so he can't mate and produce foals (baby horses). Geldings often make the calmest riding horses.

Habit—An outfit for horseback riding or showing, usually including some kind of tailored jacket and hat.

Halter—The basic headgear worn by a horse so the handler can lead the animal with a rope.

Hand—The unit for measuring a horse's height from the withers (area between the shoulders) to the ground. One hand equals four inches (about the width of an average cowboy's hand).

Hindquarters—The back end of a horse, where much of a horse's power comes from.

Hoof pick—A hooked tool, usually made of metal, for cleaning packed dirt, stones, and gunk from the underside of a horse's hoof.

Hunter—A horse that's bred to carry a rider over jumps. In a horse show, hunters are judged on jumping ability and style.

Lead rope—A length of rope with a metal snap that attaches to a horse's halter.

Lope—The Western term for *canter*. The lope is usually smooth and slower than the canter of a horse ridden English.

Mare—A female horse over the age of four, or any female horse that has given birth.

Muzzle—The soft portion of a horse's nose between the nostrils and the upper lip.

Nicker—A soft, friendly sound made by horses, usually to greet other horses or trusted humans.

Palomino—A horse that is cream or yellow-gold in color. Palominos may be found in a number of breeds, such as the quarter horse. Even backyard horses may be palominos.

Pinto—Any horse with patches or spots of white and another color, usually brown or black.

Post—To rise up and ease back down in the saddle when the horse is at a trot. This makes the gait more comfortable for the rider. English-style riders generally post at every step.

Quarter horse—An American horse breed named because it's the fastest horse for a quarter-mile distance. Quarter horses are strong and are often used for ranch work. They're good-natured and easygoing.

Quirt—A Western-style crop, or whip, with a short handle.

Saddle bags—Bags or pouches that balance across the back of a saddle and are used to carry supplies.

Saddle horse—A saddle horse could be any horse trained to ride with a saddle. More specifically, the American saddlebred horse is an elegant breed of horse used as three- and five-gaited riding horses.

Shetland pony—A small breed, no bigger than 10.2 hands, that comes from the Shetland Islands off Scotland. Shetland ponies are the ideal size for small children, but the breed is known to be stubborn and hard to handle.

Sorrel—A horse with a reddish-brown or reddish-gold coat.

Stallion—A male horse that hasn't had surgery to prevent him from mating and producing foals.

Swayback—A sagging back on a horse, or a horse with a deeply dipped back. Being swayback is often a sign of old age in a horse.

Three-gaited—Used to describe an American saddlebred horse that has been trained to perform at a walk, trot, and canter.

Throatlatch—The strap part of the bridle that helps keep the bridle on. It goes under a horse's throat, running from the right ear and loosely fastening below the left ear.

Trot—The two-beat gait where a horse's legs move in diagonal pairs. A trot is generally a choppy ride.

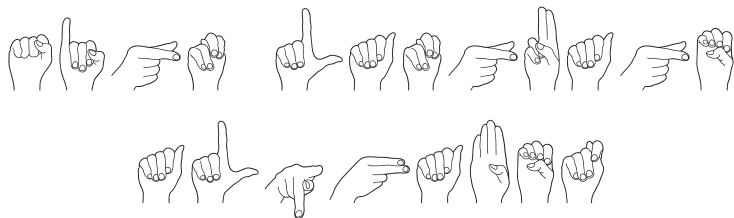
Western—A style of horseback riding used by cowboys in the American West. Western horseback riders usually use heavier saddles with saddle horns and hold both reins in one hand.

Whicker—A low sound made by a horse. A whicker is sometimes thought to be a cross between a whinny and a nicker.

Whinny—A horse's neigh, or to make a neighing sound. A whinny may be a horse's call to another horse or a cry of alarm.

Whorl—A twist of hair that grows in the opposite direction from the surrounding coat. This patch is usually on a horse's forehead.

Withers—The top of a horse's shoulders, between the back and the neck. The height of a horse is measured from the withers to the ground.



Sign Language Alphabet


A 

B 

C 

D 

E 

F 

G 

H 

I 

J 

K 

L 

M 

N 

O 

P 

Q 

R 

S 

T 

U 

V 

W 

X 

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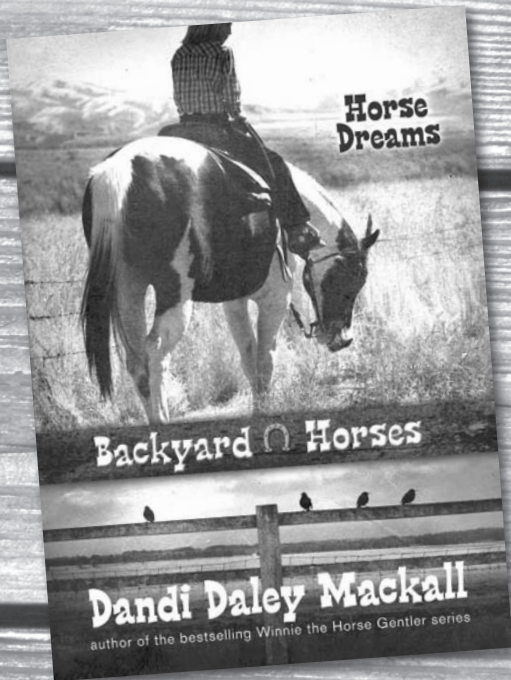
About the Author

Dandi Daley Mackall grew up riding horses, taking her first solo bareback ride when she was three. Her best friends were Sugar, a pinto; Misty, probably a Morgan; and Towaco, an Appaloosa. Dandi and her husband, Joe; daughters, Jen and Katy; and son, Dan (when forced), enjoy riding Cheyenne, their paint. Dandi has written books for all ages, including Little Blessings books, *Degrees of Guilt: Kyra's Story*, *Degrees of Betrayal: Sierra's Story*, *Love Rules*, *Maggie's Story*, the Starlight Animal Rescue series, and the bestselling Winnie the Horse Gentler series. Her books (about 450 titles) have sold more than 4 million copies. She writes and rides from rural Ohio.

Visit Dandi at www.dandibooks.com.

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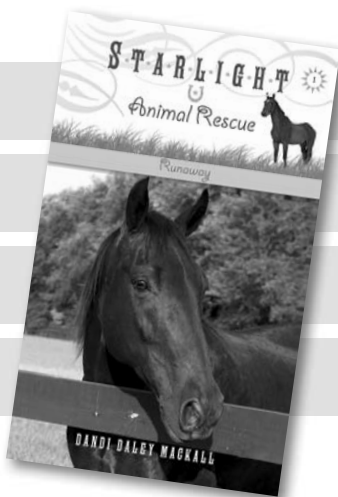
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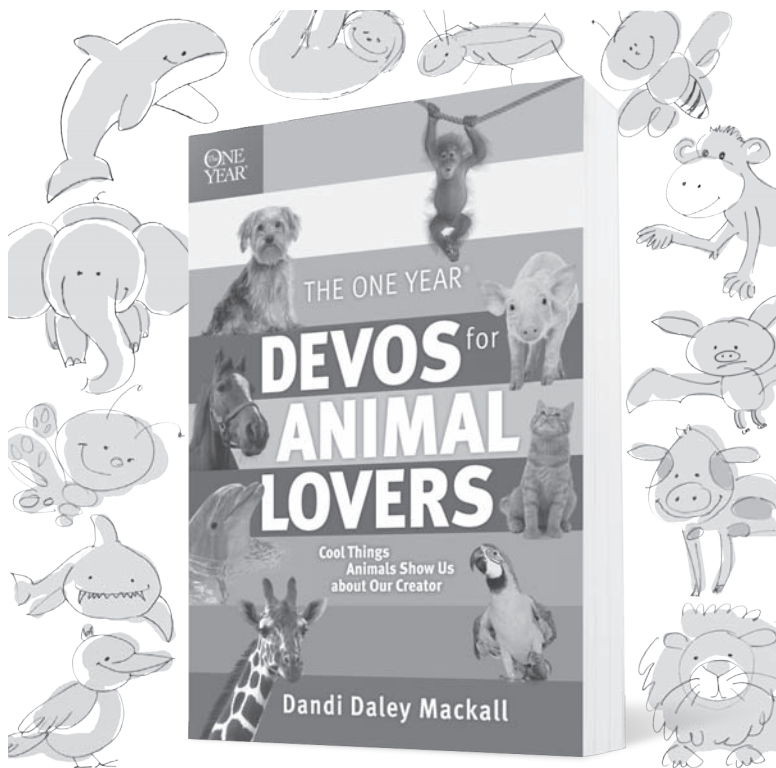
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