

TWIST OF FATE

THE MIRACLE COLT AND HIS FRIENDS



CHAPTER ONE

BY CHRIS STUCKENSCHNEIDER

The 165-acre ranch I call home sits in a Missouri valley outside Union, surrounded by hills and wildflowers. At Longmeadow Rescue Ranch, Mama and I wake to the sounds of woodland birds, the coo of doves, the chip of cardinals, the drum of woodpeckers drilling towering oaks for creepy-crawlies.

Mama says we've been through a lot. I wouldn't know, don't know much about our history, but I've heard about the accident. It's a subject Mom doesn't like to talk about, says it brings back awful memories. But I can't begin my story and introduce you to my friends without explaining how fate intervened and brought us all to Longmeadow, a ranch operated by the Humane Society of Missouri.

The date of the accident is imprinted in Mother's mind, like a tattoo on the inside of a race horse's lip—Sept. 27, 2006. That's the night a tractor-trailer

truck carrying Mom and 41 other horses to a meat-packing plant in Illinois careened off Interstate 44 and landed on its side, its body ripping like paper, trapping us. Twenty-four horses and one hinny lived; many were badly injured and received emergency care on-site before being transferred to area veterinary hospitals.

Mama had bumps and cuts and was shaken up. I didn't feel a thing because I was cushioned inside her. It would be seven months before I saw the light of day. When the veterinarians who treated Mom realized she was pregnant, they named her Mama. Two of the other mares on the truck were expecting colts too; their babies didn't make it.

The Longmeadow staff thought Mom might lose me, but all went well. The expert care Mama received did much to assure my safe delivery.

You can credit Mom with doing all the work the night I was born; at least, that's what Earlene says.

She's the ranch director at Longmeadow, and was in charge of the rescue operation—Earlene lives on the Longmeadow property and met me before anyone else.

On April 18, 2007, around 9 p.m. she walked into the barn to check on us, like she does every night. Bazonka Donk, a Hinny who's our stablemate, was hollering to beat the band. Earlene knew the sentry was alerting her. She heard a tiny whinny and got a gander at newborn me. Mom said Earlene was all smiles.

My birth caused quite a stir at Longmeadow. Overnight, strangers appeared with pens in hand, reporters, I guess, and writers eager to be the first to ink the news that a "miracle colt" had been born. The folks at Longmeadow even had a contest, and people voted on their favorite name, which made me feel important. Mom nickered and called me "Baby," but the ballots decided my official name: "Twist of Fate." My buddies call me Twister—you can, too.

Being the center of attention wasn't bad, except for the cameras. Sticking close to Mom was a comfort. Once Earlene released me to the round pen, it was sheer bliss. I could kick up my heels. Now that I'm getting older, Mom doesn't cut me as much slack; neither does Earlene. The staff insists I wear a halter, walk along politely and keep my teeth to myself.

It's a lot more fun to chase squirrels, romp with the goats and listen to Snortin Norton tell tales. Norton is the ranch heavy, a hog with a soft heart, who weighs in at 1,000 pounds. Though he's a porker, Norton's well adjusted, not the least bit squeamish about his chops. Thanks to Norton, I know how to spin a yarn and am chomping at the bit to tell you about some other horses who came to Longmeadow to recover from injuries suffered in the accident. They've all got a story.

Everybody loves Stan the Thoroughbred. Regal Stan is a whopping 17 hands tall and has something none of the rest of us have. But there I go again, putting the cart before the horse. You'll meet Stan in the next chapter.

MAMA AND TWISTER



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