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Untitled

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enjoyed being surprised. Mike was always snooping around the house before his birthday and Christmas, trying to find his presents. Even after he found them, it was amazing what a good job he did at acting surprised. He was really a character.

Mike was now running ahead of her, threatening to open her presents if he reached the house first.

"You better now!" she yelled running after him.

Mike was pretty fast, but not fast enough. She beat him to the porch just a few seconds ahead of him. Dinner smelled heavenly and she realized that she was starving.

Mom called, "Git on in here and wash up, dinner will be on the table in five minutes."

Mike was already racing to the bathroom, this time she was running a close second. There was the usual scramble at the sink, with Mike leaving more dirt on the towel than down the drain.

Sitting down at the table, she saw that Mom had made her favorite things for dinner, pork roast with homemade apple-sauce, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, and, for dessert, dutch apple pie! There was the usual talk around the dinner table and Mike's exaggeration about all the fish that got away. She was really hungry and was eating faster than usual, hoping the sooner she finished, the sooner she would get to open her presents.

"Hey, slow down, you're splattering food all over me!" Mike teased.

After dinner they usually helped Mom clear the table and wash the dishes, but she said they could skip it today and that maybe they should start the chores a little earlier today. Dad said they could help him out in the barn, so the three of them headed outside while Mom started cleaning up the kitchen. Dad told her to take one of the bales of hay and bring it up to the loft.

"This is boy's work!" Ann said, glaring at Mike.

Walking back into the barn she dropped the bale of hay, there was a horse in one of the stalls!

"Dad, there's a horse back here!"

That's when she noticed Mom had come out to the barn and the two of them stood there grinning.

"Is it mine!" Ann cried.

Mike was already telling her that he knew all along and wanted to know if she was going to stand there all day gawking or was she going to saddle her up and take her out.

"She's a real beauty, Mom, Dad."

"Well, saddle her up and take her for a ride." said Dad.

Ann could hardly believe it. She was mine. What was she going to name her? She was really beautiful. She was so black and her coat was so shiny. Mike helped her saddle up and Dad gave her a boost and she was off.

What a feeling to be on her own horse, trotting down the road. She started thinking of names. Maybe, Blackie. No, that sounded too childish. Then she knew, Cinders, because she was as black as cinders! What a free feeling, her hair blowing in the breeze, the smell of the horse and the whole world ahead of her. She could have forever, but it was getting late and she started heading back to the house. This was the perfect day.

Cinders and Ann were inseparable, spending every day together, in the mornings getting up early to brush her down and feed her, and then after school, out riding in the fields. At the time, Ann felt she could share her most inner thoughts with Cinders and that she would understand. Mike was even a little jealous.

Then one day Cinders came down with some sort of flu that that horses got and the Vet told her not to worry because most of the horses in the area that had this flu, had no real problems. He gave her some medication and suggested she rest for a week or two. Ann stayed with her from the time she got home from school until it was time to go to bed. She seemed to get better with each day.

One day after school, Mom insisted Ann help her with dinner and she remembered telling her that as soon as she had looked in on Cinders she would give her a hand. Just by looking at her face I knew something was wrong.

"Mom, what is it, what's wrong? Is it Cinders?" the words rushed out.

Tears started welling up in her Mom's eyes and then Ann knew something was wrong. She ran out of the house toward the barn. Mike was sitting there on a bale of hay with tears running down his face.

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"They took her away," he choked.

"Where!" "Why!" Ann really didn't have to ask, she knew.

Mom was right behind her. She took her into her arms and Ann cried like she hadn't for a long, long time.

It took Ann so long to get over Cinders. The most painful part was putting her things away. Just seeing another horse would cause that painful lump in her throat. No one could ever replace Cinders, and she never even tried.

"Morning, Mom, can I help with breakfast?" said Jenny, as she stepped onto the porch.

Ann didn't even hear her up and around the house. She came back from her daydream.

"No, thanks, everything is just waiting for you to roll out of bed. Well, this is your day, what would you like for breakfast?" she teased.

"Oh, Mom, you know what I want for breakfast. The same thing I've been having for the last umpteen birthdays."

The two of them walked arm in arm into the house and sat down for breakfast. They were just starting to clear off the table when there was the sound of a car coming up the road. Jenny ran out to the porch.

"Ma, someone's here," she yelled, "and they're pulling a trailer."

Following her out to the trailer, Ann gave Jenny a hug.

"Happy Birthday, Jenny."

Jenny knew what was in the trailer and ran out to meet her new friend. Words couldn't describe the joy on her face, but Ann knew that was probably just the way she looked 22 years ago on her 16th birthday. Some day the horse will no longer be in Jenny's life, but hopefully he'll bring to Jenny the freedom, love and peace Cinders had brought to Ann so long ago.



THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE IS, "SURVIVE,"
THE FIRST LAW OF SOCIETY IS, "CONFORM,"
THE FIRST PRACTICE OF POLITICS IS TO
EQUATE THESE TWO ADMONITIONS.

BUT

ALTHOUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF SURVIVAL AND
CONFORMANCE ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE,
THEY ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE EITHER.

— George A. Whittington



Listen Very Carefully

"All things considered
I will make my stand."

. . So speaks Liberty.

Edward Happel