

Chancey *of the* Maury River

*Every horse
needs a girl
to love.*

GIGI AMATEAU

★ CHAPTER ONE ★

Prophecy

Tonight, the moon was high and full; it cast a light so pure that all fell quiet and still under its watch. Even I felt its pull.

A fire star raced across the winter sky, causing quite a stir among us. The younger ones were afraid and ran to their mothers. I no longer feared the wild streak, as I had in my youth. Instead I dropped my head and gave thanks for a long and good life lived here by the Maury River and in these blue mountains. I gave thanks, too, for the friends who have stood beside me through these many years.

When I was still a colt, I once saw a fire star burning with such a fury that it scared me greatly. I thought it was coming straight for me. I raced to the corner of our field and, unable to find my dam, became filled with an anxiety so invasive that I began to breathe too fast and thus found no breath at all. But I was in no danger. My dam came to me. She wrapped me in her neck, and I was no longer afraid.

My dam explained that when a horse of great beauty or wisdom enters the world, a star chosen especially for that horse lights across the night sky, announcing the new arrival. Dam told me that we should not fear the fire stars; instead we should drop our heads and say a word of thanks for life's many blessings. Dam allowed that occasionally the blaze is so bright and so near that it is frightening, as most things are if you don't understand them. She encouraged me then, and on many such occasions, to seek understanding in all things. I have remembered this for my whole life and only rarely do I feel afraid. When I do, I try to remember Dam's words, then find my breath, and examine that which frightens me.

After that night, I sought out fire stars in the sky. Most nights, I did not see any at all. Sometimes, in the late summer, it seemed that the night held so many that I quickly lost track and would fall asleep watching them, still standing in the field.

“Was there a fire star on the night I was born?” I often asked Dam.

Each time I asked, she would pull me in to her and recount the story of my birth.

“Oh, yes, Chancey. On your night, a star raced across the sky with such brilliance that all present knew you would grow beautiful, wise, and great. Something very special is planned for you.”

For years, I believed her; I held tight to Dam’s faith that I would become a great horse.

My owner, too, had grand hopes of me. She had planned that I would become a champion, and a beautiful one at that. She bred my dam, a fancy snowflake Appaloosa, to an identical stallion, certain that I would turn out the same, black as night with white snowflakes blanketing my hind. Dam’s markings were so vibrant that at her own birth she was given the name Starry Night, not for the sky under which she was born but for the way in which she was adorned with a midnight quilt of icy diamonds.

Yet I am very nearly the inverse of my stunning parents; I was born without pigment. Black stripes do cut through the middle of all four of my hooves, the one physical characteristic I possess which proves to all that I am a true Appaloosa. And so, despite my lack of pigmentation, I believed my dam. I believed greatness awaited me.

Here now, in my old age, I comprehend what I could not before comprehend. I understand now that mothers are apt to wish on stars; every mother prays to heaven on behalf of her child. Sometimes, it seems that a mother's prayers for her child will never be answered at all. Yet is it not possible that one day, when that child is very, very old, he might see that his mother's prayers have been perfectly, beautifully answered all along?

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