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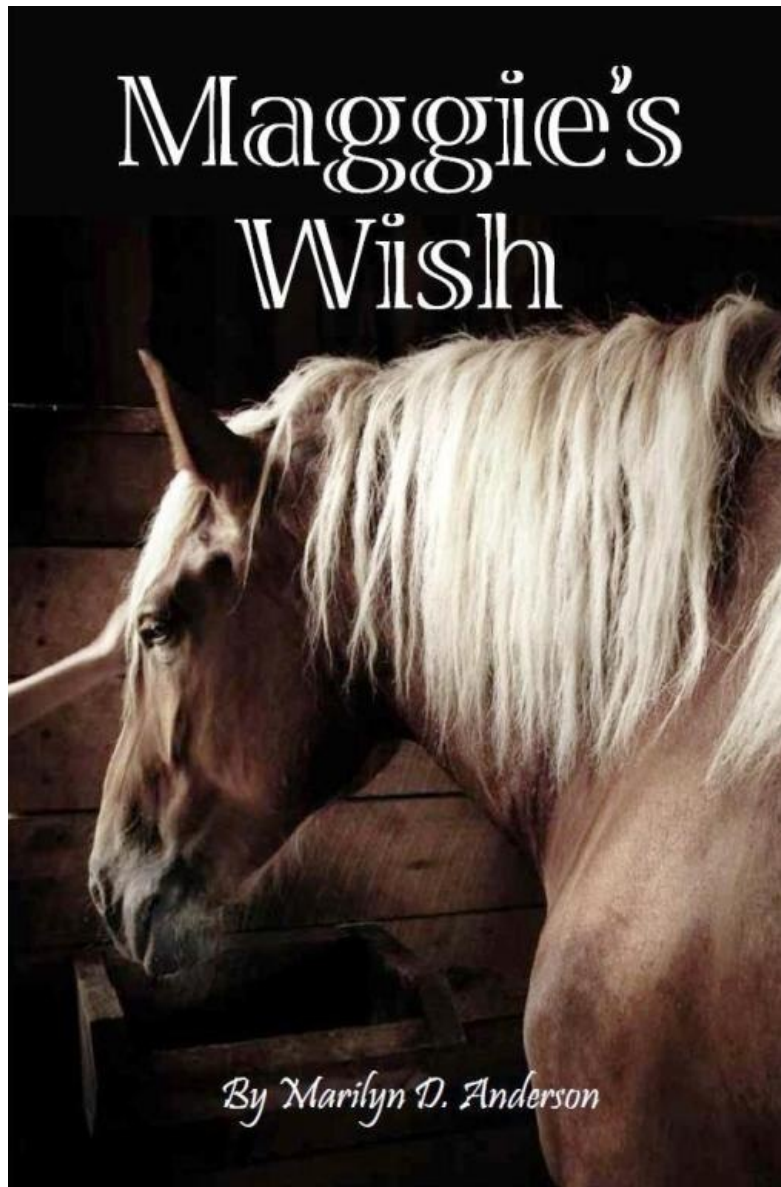
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Illustrator: Dennis E. Miller

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAGGIE'S WISH ***



MAGGIE'S WISH

By

Marilyn D. Anderson

Illustrated by Dennis E. Miller

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Chapter One

Mom called to Maggie over the whine of the vacuum cleaner. "Please go see why Corky is barking."

Maggie put down her toy horses and looked out the window. She saw a gray car in the driveway. "It's Tim and Jodi," she cried as she ran to the door.

Mom shut off the vacuum and pulled in the cord. "Oh, my," she said. "What will I give them for lunch?"

Maggie didn't care what they ate. She was excited that she would have someone to play with. Being an only child on a dairy farm could get lonely.

The Johnson's small brown and white dog was jumping all over Maggie's cousins before she reached them. "Corky, stop that," she ordered, but the dog paid no attention.

Tim leaned over to pet Corky. "We don't mind," he said.

"We like dogs," added his younger sister, Jodi.

"Hello, Andersons," Mom called from the front door. "It's good to see you." Maggie's mom hugged her sister.

"We've got a new bow and arrow set," Tim told Maggie. "Wait until you see it."

Maggie hesitated. Tim was a year younger than she was, but he always had some new toy she had never tried. It seemed she could never keep up with him.

"A bow and arrows?" she repeated. "When did you get those?"

"The day school let out," he said with a grin. "Mom wanted us to stay out of her hair for awhile."

"Well, did you?" Maggie asked.

"Sure," said Tim.

Jodi shook her head and said, "You still put a hole in her lawn chair."

"Tattletale," Tim said, frowning. "Come on, Maggie. Let's see if you're a good shot."

Maggie was not a good shot. Her arrows always dropped right in front of her. She kept forgetting to let go of the bowstring when she let go of the arrow. After dozens of tries, she had only hit the cardboard target once. Even Jodi, who was only 6, did better than that. Tim hit the target almost every time.



After lunch the cousins climbed trees. Maggie was good at that, but she never took crazy chances like Tim did. She often held her breath and waited for him to fall, but he never did.

Later Maggie and the other kids found some old skis in the garage. They skied around the grass until Maggie's dad yelled, "Hey, you guys. Does that look like snow to you? Put those skis away, and Maggie, go get the cows."

"We'll help," Tim said eagerly. "Where are they?"

"In the pasture," Maggie said, pointing out beyond the barn.

"Good, let's go," said Tim, starting off at a run. Maggie and Jodi tried to keep up.

"Wait," Jodi begged. "My legs are too short."

Tim slowed down. "Okay," he agreed. "Maggie, it's a long ways to your pasture. Do you do this every night?"

"Sure," said Maggie. "And it will be a fun job when I get my pony."

Tim stopped dead in his tracks, and Jodi hung back to stare at Maggie. "A pony?" he gasped. "Did your dad say you could get one?"

Maggie had stopped, too. "Well ... not exactly," she admitted. "But he's been saying 'when you're older' for a long time. Now I'm older."

Tim snorted and moved on. "Big deal," he said. "My dad says that too when I'm never going to get something."

Now they could see the herd of black and white Holsteins ahead. "I *am* going to get a pony," Maggie almost shouted. "You'll see."

Chapter Two

Several mornings later Maggie heard her parents talking in the kitchen. Dad said, "Well, you know she wants a pony."

"Yes," said Mom. "But I didn't think you'd spend so much money without discussing it."

"You buy what you want," he shot back. "And this was what I want."

They stopped talking when Maggie entered the room.

"Time for breakfast," said Mom. "Maggie, please wash up and set the table."

They started breakfast. Then Dad said, "Maggie, I bought something special yesterday. I think you're going to like it."

"A pony?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm not telling," he said, grinning. "But it's coming today ... in a truck."

"Fred," Mom scolded. "Don't get her all excited. She might be disappointed."

"But *I'm* excited," he said with a broad grin. "I just had to say something."

After breakfast Maggie sat on the front step watching the driveway. I wonder what color my pony will be, she thought. I wonder what its eyes will be like. I wonder if Dad bought me a saddle.

Hours later, a blue truck turned into their driveway. It was big enough to haul about six or seven cows. The truck stopped in the front of the house, and a man with a beard got out. Corky barked at him.

"Corky, stop," Maggie demanded, and she ran toward the truck. "Is my pony in there?"

The man laughed and said, "Something like that. Is your father home?"

"Yes, he's in the barn," said Maggie. "I'll get him for you."

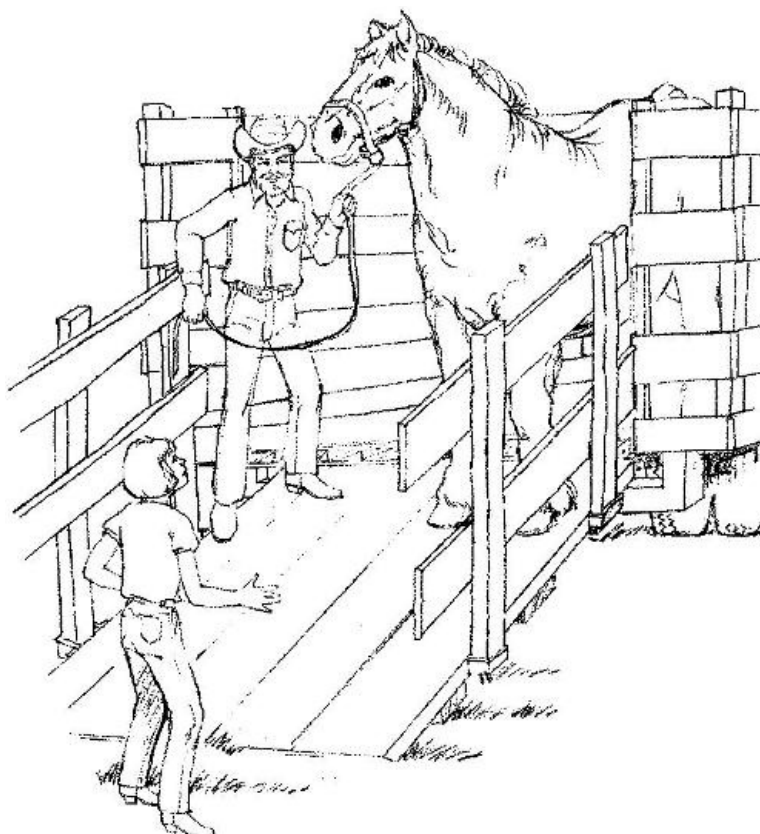
But Dad stuck his head out the barn door and waved. Meanwhile Maggie circled the truck trying to see inside. But the openings between the boards were too high up.

"Hi, Chuck," said Dad, offering his hand. "Let's unload right here."

"Fine," said Chuck. He reached up below the truck's back door and pulled out a ramp. He and Dad brought gates from the sides of the truck and fitted them into slots on the sides of the ramp. Chuck walked up the ramp into the back of the truck.

Maggie saw a flash of gold and heard a nicker. It sounded like a pony.

But it *wasn't* a pony. Chuck appeared at the top of the ramp with ... the BIGGEST horse Maggie had ever seen. It was gold with a white mane and tail and white blaze down its nose.



The ramp shook as the huge animal tromped down it. The horse towered over even Dad's head. Maggie could have almost walked under the animal's belly.

Dad took the horse's halter, and Chuck went back into the truck. He reappeared leading another

horse as big as the first.

Maggie wailed, "Hey, I only asked for one pony." She felt like crying.

Mom got there just then and put her arm around Maggie. "Well, your father always liked driving his grandfather's team, so he bought his own."

Dad walked by, leading the horses and Chuck to the barn. "Neat, eh?" he said, eyes sparkling.

"Yeah, neat," said Mom, and she and Maggie followed.

The men tied the horses in wooden stalls in a very old part of the barn. The horses sniffed their feed boxes and the walls. Then they found hay in the feed boxes and started to eat.

"They look happy now," said Chuck. "I'm sure they'll work just fine for you."

Dad nodded. "I know they will. I just hope I can tell them apart."

Chuck laughed. "Molly is lighter colored than Polly. That's Molly." He pointed to the smaller of the two horses.

"I'll remember that," said Dad.

"Did you talk to Larry Croon?" asked Chuck.

"Yes," said Dad. "I bought some equipment from him, and it should be here later today."

"Good," said Chuck. "You'll love working with horses. They're a lot more fun than tractors."

"Come on," said Dad. "I'll write you a check."

When the men left, Mom looked down at Maggie. "So, what do you think of our new horses?"

Maggie sniffed. "They're too big."

Mom sighed and nodded. "I know. Sometimes your father gets so carried away with things I just can't talk to him."

Mom left too, and Maggie studied the horses in silence. Dad came back. He said, "Well, do you like your surprise?"

"They aren't *my* surprise," she replied. "I wanted a horse I could ride."

Dad's grin faded. "You can ride them," he said. "In the olden days all the kids rode draft horses like these."

"No way," Maggie said under her breath.

* * * * *

Later Dad brushed the horses. Maggie watched, but she didn't offer to help. They weren't *her* horses.

When Dad went to milk the cows, Maggie walked around to the front of the new animals. At least they're more interesting than cows, she told herself.

Molly had dropped a piece of hay over the side, so Maggie handed it to the horse. The huge nose sniffed. The long lips popped, taking in the wisps of hay.

Maggie went to the oats bin and got some for both horses. She gave them each a handful and patted their noses. They wanted more, but she said, "That's enough. Dad already fed you."

The horses seemed very disappointed, and Maggie decided to pat their necks. She started to crawl into Polly's feed box. But Polly rolled her eyes and threw herself back against the end of her rope. Maggie quickly got down.

Instead, she got into Molly's feed box. Molly gave Maggie a friendly sniff and waited. Maggie scratched Molly's ears, and the big horse closed her eyes with pleasure.

"Well," Maggie said at last. "I'd still rather have a pony, but you're pretty nice. I guess you can't help being so big."

Chapter Three

At breakfast the next morning, Dad said, "Maggie, do you want to ride one of the horses?"

"Fred!" cried Mom. "They're so big. What if she gets stepped on?"

"Relax," said Dad. "Maggie has been around big animals all her life. She knows how to watch out for herself."

"She never tried to *ride* a cow," Mom shot back.

Dad laughed. "How about that, Maggie? Ever try to ride a cow?"

Maggie smiled and said, "Sure. You put me up on Jeannie once, but her back was really bony."

"I might have known," Mom said with a sigh.

"Well, these horses' backs are nice and soft," Dad said. "So how about it?"

"Okay," said Maggie. "But only if we use Molly."

Dad looked surprised. "What difference does it make?"

"Polly is spooky," said Maggie.

"Hmm," said Dad. "You know that already? Well, come on." He got to his feet and so did Maggie.

Mom said, "Corky better stay in the house. He could frighten the horse." She grabbed her barn jacket.

Maggie and her parents went out to the barn. Dad bridled Molly and led her out the door. Polly whinnied frantically and jumped around in her stall. Molly ignored Polly.

"I'll go first," said Dad. "Just to be sure it's safe."

He led Molly to a hay wagon and crawled on from there. He clucked to Molly and rode off. He turned Molly right and left, and they even trotted a little. Dad slid off again.

"This is a good horse," said Dad. "She handles as well as most riding horses. Ready, Maggie?"

Maggie looked up at the huge horse and gulped. "I guess so," she said.

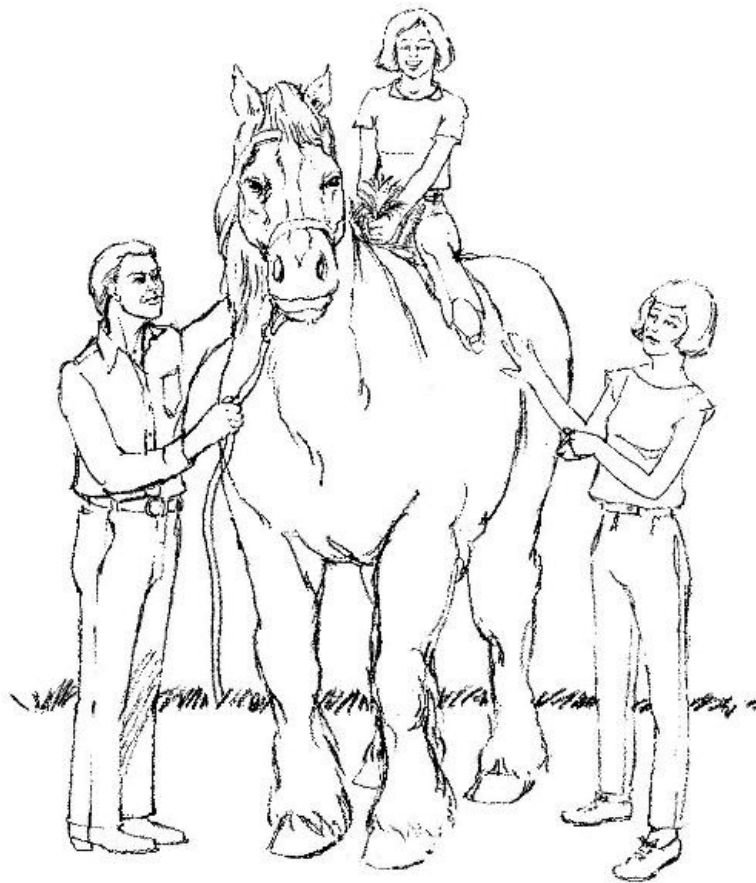
Dad boosted her on, and she looked down. Yipes, it was like being on a tall building that breathed. And Molly's back was so wide that Maggie's legs were doing the splits. She was scared.

"Slide up by her neck," said Dad. "She's not so wide in front."

Maggie slid forward and grabbed a big handful of mane. She felt a little safer, but then Dad led Molly forward a few steps. The whole huge body twisted under Maggie. She held on for dear life.

"Relax," said Dad. "Let your body go with the horse."

Maggie tried, but it was hard. Finally she realized that she hadn't fallen off yet, and let out her breath. She felt sort of proud. Not many kids had ridden a horse this big, she told herself.



When Dad said it was time to stop, Maggie looked down. It was too far to jump, but Dad grabbed her around the middle and lifted her off.

Just then a green truck drove up hauling a wooden wagon. Dad grinned and waved at the driver of the truck. "That's Larry with the wagon he sold me."

"Good morning," called Larry as he got out of the truck. "That's a mighty nice horse you've got there." His tent-like bib overalls rocked as he considered the horse from every angle.

"Thank you," said Dad. "I'm glad you brought the wagon so I can start driving my team."

Larry turned to Dad. "Ever drive a team before?" he asked.

"Well, not since I was a kid," Dad admitted. "I did more riding than driving, but my grandpa had a team."

"I see," said Larry. "A fellow can get in a lot of trouble with horses if he doesn't know what he's doing."

Dad frowned. "Did you bring the harnesses?"

"Yes," said Larry. "Where do you want them?"

"Follow me," said Dad, and he and Molly led the way to the barn.

Larry brought in a huge armload of straps and buckles and two big leather collars. Then he studied Polly. He said, "This horse is even better than the first one. Let me know if you ever want to sell them."

"Okay," said Dad. "Now let's get that wagon unloaded."

The green pickup was barely out of sight when Dad said, "Girls, let's go for a wagon ride."

Mom looked at him sideways. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"Of course," said Dad. He picked up a harness and dropped it on Molly. He straightened out the pieces of leather, but then he just stood there for a long time.

"Gosh," Dad said at last. "I think I've forgotten a few of the details." Mom shook her head. "That's what I thought," she said. "Let's just forget about the ride for today."

Maggie said, "A pony would have been cheaper."

"Never mind," Dad snapped. "Tomorrow I'll go ask Chuck about the harnesses."

Chapter Four

After breakfast the next morning Dad said, "I'm going to let the horses out in the barnyard. I want to see how they get along with the cows. Coming, Maggie?"

"Yes," she said and followed him.

Dad told Maggie to open the barn door while he untied the horses. Molly charged out and stopped to look around. Polly was right at Molly's heels and ran into her. Both horses pranced around the barnyard with nostrils flaring.

Polly's head went up, and she slid to a stop. Her ears pointed at the cows standing by the water tank. Polly blew air through her nose. She turned to "talk things over" with Molly. Both horses trotted towards the cows.

The cows looked worried, and then they galloped off. All the animals ran for awhile, but soon they stopped to stare at each other.

"What if they go through a fence?" Maggie worried.

"I don't think they will," said Dad. "But you stay here and watch them while I clean the barn."

Maggie watched until all the animals settled down.

* * * * *

That afternoon Mom went to get groceries. She dropped Maggie in town at her friend Kelly's house. The girls didn't see each other much during the summer, and Maggie was excited.

When Kelly opened the door, she squealed, "Maggie, wait until you see what Dad made for me."

The girls raced up to Kelly's room, and Kelly showed Maggie a small wooden stable. "See, it has box stalls, places to hang bridles and saddles, and even hay." Sure enough Easter-basket grass waited in the mangers.



"Wow," said Maggie. "I love it." She dropped to her knees and said, "We've got something new at our house too."

"A pony?" asked Kelly.

"No," said Maggie. "Something much bigger. Dad bought two big work horses."

"Really?" said Kelly. "What are their names?"

"Polly and Molly," Maggie reported. "They're golden brown with blond manes and tails."

"Neat," said Kelly. "Maybe we can each ride one."

"Maybe," said Maggie. "At least Dad thinks so."

"When can I see them?" Kelly wondered.

"Well, not tomorrow," said Maggie. "Dad is taking us to visit the farm where our horses came from. Want to come along?"

"Sure," said Kelly.

The girls asked Maggie's mother, and she said, "Yes."

* * * * *

The next afternoon Mom and Dad and the girls got to see Chuck's whole herd of horses. Maggie thought the foals were sweet, even though the draft horse babies were as big as full grown riding horses.

Finally Chuck said, "Okay, Fred, let's see how you put on a horse harness."

"All right," said Dad, "but don't laugh."

Dad picked up the armload of harness and threw it on the back of a huge animal named Babe. He pushed and pulled all the straps for a few minutes. Then he stopped and looked at Chuck.

Chuck laughed and slapped his leg. "You've got it on sideways," he said.

Mom and the girls laughed too.

"You weren't supposed to laugh," said Dad with a grin.

"We couldn't help it," said Chuck. "Here let me show you how."

* * * * *

When the Johnsons got home, they were late with the milking. Dad said, "Maggie, I'll help you get the cows. They might be silly with those horses running with them." He picked up a bucket of oats and a bridle and set off with Maggie on his heels.

The horses came right to Dad and started eating oats. He slipped the bridle over Molly's ears, climbed on a rock, and jumped up on Molly.

"Can I ride, too?" asked Maggie.

"No, that would be too dangerous," said Dad. He clucked to Molly and they started after the cows.

Humph, thought Maggie. I'm the one who wanted a pony.

The cows started toward the barn at a fast walk. Then they broke into a trot, and the horses did too. The cows began to gallop, and the horses kicked up their heels as they joined the excitement. That's when Dad fell off.

Maggie ran toward him yelling, "Dad, are you all right?"

He was on his feet immediately, but he rubbed his shoulder. "Yeah," he said, "but I'm going to be sore tomorrow."

* * * * *

After her father's fall, Maggie was a little afraid to try riding again. But Dad said, "It will be okay. Molly only kicked up because she got excited."

"All right," said Maggie, "but you hang on to her."

Dad put Maggie up on Molly's back and led her around a few times. Molly was fine.

"Show me how to steer," Maggie begged.

Dad showed her how to pull on one rein until the horse turned her head. Of course, Maggie also had to let go a little bit on the other side to make that possible. At first it was hard, because Molly's neck was so thick. The big mare ignored Maggie instead of turning.

"Kick her over in the direction you want to go," said Dad.

"No," said Maggie. "I don't want to hurt Molly."

Dad laughed and said, "Honey, you're too small to hurt that big horse. She'll barely feel you."

So Maggie kicked and the big lazy horse turned.

Chapter Five

A few days later Maggie was riding Molly when a red car drove up. Kelly got out and ran over. "Hi," she cried. "Oh, Maggie your horse is beautiful."

"Yes!" said Maggie. "I can ride her all by myself? Want to try it?"

Kelly's mother hurried over waving her hands. She said, "No, Kelly, step away from that big horse. We need to get into town. You've seen the horse, and that's what you wanted."

"But it's fun," said Maggie. "Come on."

"No, that's all right," said Kelly. "We do have to get going, and she's awfully big."

Maggie was disappointed. She wanted to share Molly with her friend, but they left after only a few minutes.

Later that day Dad baled hay. He dropped the bales in the field. "I'll use the team to get them," he told Maggie. "You can drive the wagon."

"Oh boy," said Maggie.

Dad harnessed the team and they set off. When they reached the first three bales, Dad handed Maggie the reins. He loaded the bales and stayed on the ground to pick up the rest.

"Okay," he said. "Bring the wagon."

"Get up," said Maggie slapping the reins against the horses' rumps the way Dad had done. The team followed Dad to the next group of bales. Maggie felt important to be driving these big horses. Dad loaded all the bales on the wagon and they started home.

Dad drove, and the horses strolled along. He said, "Come on, Girls. We don't have all day." The horses walked slightly faster.

"Maybe they're tired," said Maggie. Then something in the cornfield on the right caught her eye. It was black and white, and the corn was moving.

"Dad," she yelled, "the cows are in the corn."

Polly rolled her eyes at the cornfield and leaped to the left. She dragged Molly along and started to run. Maggie and her dad were thrown back against the hay as the wagon picked up speed. They had a runaway!



Bales flew off the wagon as it bounced over rocks. The wagon tipped and almost turned over, but Dad managed to steer a little. The wagon rocked back onto all its wheels. Maggie hung on for dear life.

Soon the team got to the barn, and they stopped. Dad jumped down to grab Molly's bridle. "Darned crazy animals," he fumed. "I've got cows in the corn, hay bales all over, and these horses to unharness. Get your mom."

Maggie jumped off the wagon and ran toward the house.

"Bring Corky, too," Dad called after her.

Soon all three Johnsons entered the cornfield carrying clubs.

"Be careful," said Dad. "There's nothing crazier than cows in a cornfield. It tastes so good to them that they go a little nuts."

"Yes," said Mom. "We need to stick together."

They started through the corn, each taking a row next to the other. The cows were hard to see because the corn was so tall. They yelled, and Corky barked.

Maggie saw two cows just ahead chewing the corn. "Get out of here," she yelled, waving her club.

The cows danced away like naughty children and tried to get behind the Johnsons. Maggie ran to head them off. She saw more cows. The Johnsons ran and yelled and waved their clubs until they were exhausted.

Finally the cows were all back in the barnyard. "Whew," said Mom, hanging on the fence while she panted. "Life is never dull around here."

"Nope," said Dad. "The cows ruined some of our corn crop too. We lost money out there."

"I'm glad the cows don't act like that all the time," said Maggie.

* * * * *

The more Maggie rode Molly, the better she liked the big horse, but now Dad was too busy to help her get on. Maggie wished she could just jump on the way Dad did.

One day Maggie went to the pasture to visit the horses, and they were lying on their sides snoring. "Hello!" Maggie said loudly.

The horses jerked to attention and started to get up. But when they saw it was only Maggie, they relaxed. Molly's back was now even with Maggie's waist. It was the perfect chance. Should she crawl on?

Maggie hesitated. What if Molly jumped up and ran? Even Dad had fallen off when that happened. With no bridle, Maggie wouldn't be able to steer the horse. It might be dangerous.

But this was such a perfect chance, that Maggie put her leg over Molly's back. She grabbed a bunch of mane and held her breath.

Molly just yawned, and gradually Maggie relaxed. She loved the feel of the horse under her. First she pretended she was herding cows. Then she was riding in the Kentucky Derby. Finally Maggie lay back on Molly's soft wide back and studied the clouds.

Suddenly Maggie heard barking. Molly heard it, too, and her front end shot up. A surprised Maggie slid right off the horse's rump. Then she was looking up at two back legs and a white tail.

Corky ran up barking, and Molly quickly swung around to get between the dog and Maggie.

"Corky, be quiet," Maggie ordered. She got up and went to Molly's head. "Good girl," she said. "You wanted to protect me, didn't you? I like that."

Molly nuzzled Maggie's pockets, but gave up when she didn't find a treat.

Chapter Six

The following day Tim and Jodi showed up. Tim was out of the car before Aunt Jane had turned the engine off.

"Hey Maggie," he said, "look what we have. Dad bought us model airplanes, and they really fly."

Maggie grinned and said, "Well, that's nothing. I can ride a horse that's as big as an elephant."

Tim's eyes opened wide. "What?" he said. "Show me this horse."

"I want to see too," Jodi added.

"Okay," said Maggie. She started toward the barn, but Tim and Jodi raced past her. Maggie had to run to keep up.

Dad looked out of the barn just in time to wave them to a stop. "Hey, slow down," he said. "You can't go running up to horses like that. You'll spook them."

Jodi said, "Look! Horses! And they are big!"

"They're ... enormous!" gasped Tim. "Can we ride them?"

"Sure," said Dad.

"Do they have saddles?" Jodi asked.

Dad laughed. "No," he said. "I don't think they make saddles that big. But you don't need a saddle. I'll put you up there."

"Up there?" Jodi asked, looking frightened. "I don't think so."

Tim said, "Are they fast?"

"Fast enough for you guys," said Dad. "Maggie, get Molly's bridle, and we'll show them."

When Dad put the bit in Molly's mouth, Tim said, "Golly, look at those big teeth."

"Sure," said Maggie. "But Molly never bites us."

"And," said Dad, "she doesn't have teeth where I put my hand. Come here, and I'll show you."

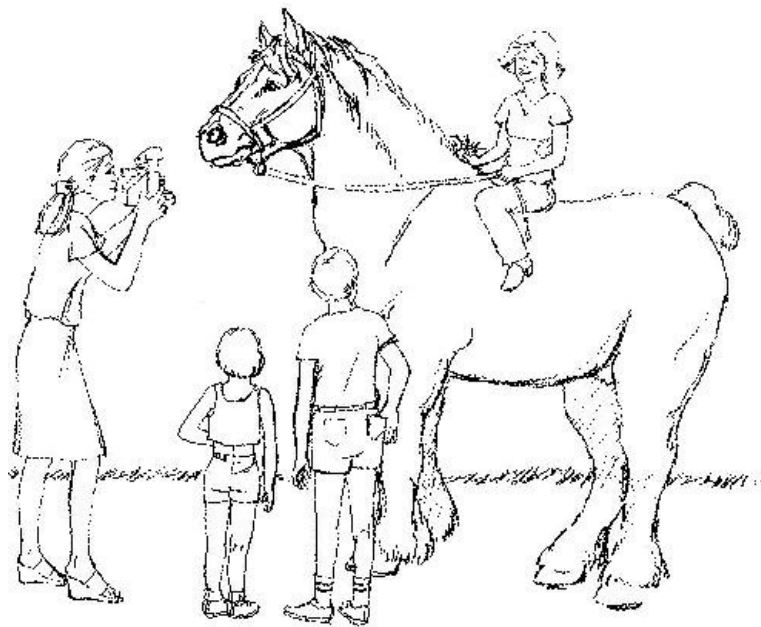
Tim inched forward, and Dad held Molly's mouth open wide. She had a few teeth in front, then a long gap before there were more.

"Wow," said Jodi. "That's awesome."

Dad finished putting the bridle on and said, "Let's go." When Tim started to run to the door, he added, "And please walk."

Aunt Jane and Maggie's mom joined them, and Aunt Jane had her camera. Tim was gung ho to ride, and Dad was ready to help him on. Maggie was feeling a little left out.

Aunt Jane said, "Maggie should ride first. She can show us how it's done."



That made Maggie feel better. At last she had something important to show Tim and Jodi. She rode proudly around the yard twice, before she stopped and slid off.

"My turn," Tim insisted. "Can we gallop?"

Dad shook his head. "Let's try a walk first." He boosted Tim onto Molly's back. "Slide forward and get hold of the mane."

Tim grabbed the mane in both hands and began to wiggle his body. "Giddy up," he said eagerly.

Dad shook his head and led Molly forward. Tim's eyes got big. "Steady, horse," he said nervously. "Not so fast." Everyone laughed. After awhile he said, "This is awesome. Mom, can we get a horse?"

Aunt Jane groaned. "Oh, sure," she said. "That's all we need. We've got a dog, a cat, two gerbils, and we live in town. Where would we put a horse?"

"And horses are very expensive pets," Maggie's mom added.

"Jodi's turn now," Dad said.

Tim slid off into Dad's arms. As he landed on the ground he said, "Can I ride again after Jodi? Can I ride by myself like Maggie did?"

"We'll see," said Dad. "Maggie's been practicing for awhile." Maggie felt proud.

Once Jodi was on, she hugged Molly's neck and kissed the horse. She looked worried when they started to move, but soon she was beaming. "I want to do this forever," she announced.

"Sorry," said Dad. "I have work to do. Better get down."

"My turn," said Tim, pushing forward. "You promised I could ride by myself this time."

"Funny," said Dad with a frown. "I don't remember making that promise. He put Molly into the pasture, and the three adults left for the house.

"Let's fly those airplanes now," said Maggie.

As they walked back to the Anderson's car, Jodi eyed Maggie. "Do you get to ride every day?" she asked.

"Well, not every day," said Maggie.

"I wish I were you," said Jodi. "I love your horses."

"They're pretty awesome," said Tim. "But a pony would be better. You can't get on and off Molly by yourself."

Maggie almost told him about her pasture ride, but she knew Tim. If he heard about that, he'd want to try it. Maggie wasn't ready for that.

Chapter Seven

The day after her cousins' visit, Maggie went out to the pasture again. The horses were standing head-to-tail under a large oak tree. Polly was keeping the flies off Molly's nose, and Molly was returning the favor.

Maggie looked around the pasture for some way to get on Molly. The rock Dad had used was too short for Maggie. The barbed-wire fence around the field was high enough, but she couldn't crawl up on that. If only their farm had wooden fences.

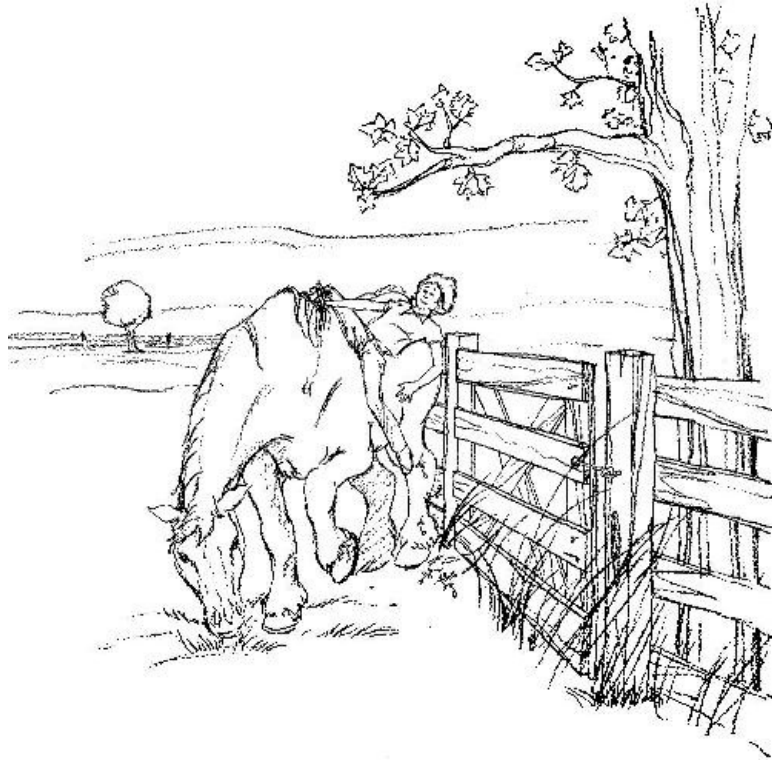
Then Maggie remembered a wooden gate at the far end of the pasture. That might work, she decided. She went off to check it out.

Yes, there was the old gate nearly hidden by tall grass and low-hanging branches. Maggie stepped on the gate to see if it was strong enough to hold her, and it was.

Maggie hurried back to the horses and grabbed the halter Molly was wearing. At first Molly refused to move, but Maggie picked some clover from the other side of the fence. Then Molly was willing to follow.

Finally Molly was standing next to the gate. Maggie climbed up and prepared to slide on the horse. But just as Maggie was ready to jump, Molly swung her rump away. Maggie got down. She pushed and pulled until Molly's rump was again next to the gate. Maggie crawled up, and again she got ready to slide on. But Molly moved again.

After five or six tries, Maggie was finally able to leap on. But just as she did Molly stepped aside. Maggie grabbed at the mane and managed to stay on.



"Whew! I did it!" Maggie crowed. "I'm riding all by myself. Giddy up, Molly."

But Molly didn't move. She simply put her head down and started eating. Maggie kicked and kicked, but Molly ignored her.

Finally Maggie slid off and started home. Next time she would bring the bridle. She would get Dad to teach her how to put it on.

Dad laughed when Maggie said she wanted to bridle Molly. "You're too short," he said. "You can't even reach the top of her head."

"Then Molly will just have to put her head down," said Maggie.

"What if she won't?" asked Dad.

"I'll feed her oats while I put the bridle on," said Maggie.

And that's what she did. While Molly gobbled oats from her hand, Maggie pushed the bit into the horse's mouth. But that was the easy part. Molly spit out the bit before Maggie could get the rest of the bridle over the horse's ears. Dad had to hold the horse's head down until Maggie could get the bridle completely on.

"Good work," said Dad. "Molly's pretty stubborn, but so are you." Then he lifted Maggie onto the big horse, and she rode for awhile.

Mom came along just as Maggie put Molly back in the pasture. "Well," she said, "at least our horses are giving pony rides. I don't see them doing anything else that's useful."

Dad heard that, and he said, "I'll use them tomorrow when I haul in straw bales."

Mom made a face. "Let's hope you don't have another runaway."

Maggie knew Mom thought Dad's horses were a waste of money. But Maggie had learned to love Molly. Now she wanted to keep the team.

Later, when Mom went to town for groceries, Maggie begged to go along and visit Kelly. When the girls got to Kelly's room, Maggie said, "I can ride Molly any time I want now. I can bridle her, and I can get on her by myself."

"But how?" Kelly wondered. "Molly is so tall."

Maggie said, "Come out for a visit, and I'll show you."

Kelly shook her head. "No, I don't think so. I'll wait until you get a pony instead."

Chapter Eight

The next Sunday, Maggie's family went to St. Paul to visit Tim and Jodi's family. Tim and Jodi had lots of new things to show Maggie, but they also wanted to hear about the horses.

"I ride Molly whenever I want now," said Maggie.

"Boy, are you lucky," said Jodi.

Maggie nodded and added softly, "I even ride Molly in the pasture, but Mom and Dad don't know about it. Mom would have a fit if she knew."

"Wow!" said Tim. "How do you get on?"

"I crawled up on a gate and jumped on."

"Awesome," Jodi and Tim said in unison.

Tim asked, "Can I ride in the pasture when we come out next time?"

Maggie had to think about that. She was afraid Tim would be reckless, but he never ever seemed to get hurt.

"Okay," she said. "When can you come?"

"Maybe next Wednesday," said Tim. "I'll start begging tomorrow."

* * * * *

At breakfast on Monday morning Dad said, "I should bale the rest of the straw today, but first I have to fix fence. I don't want the cows in the corn again."

Mom looked at him with her arms crossed. She said, "I noticed you used the tractor for the straw bales."

Dad scowled and said, "Well, I'll use the horses for the fencing." Then he jammed his hat on his head and headed for the door. "Maggie, please come and help."

Maggie went with her father, and they caught the horses. She could tell Dad was in a bad mood because he slammed the harnesses on the horses' backs.

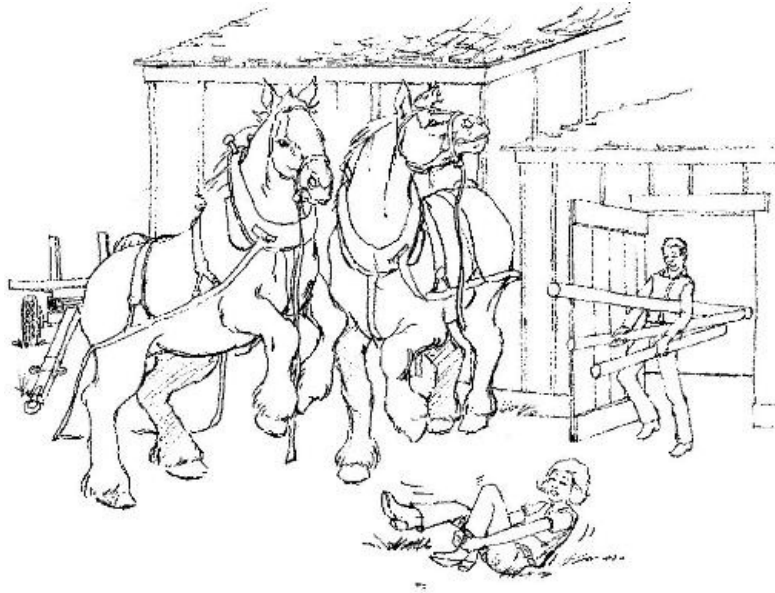
When they were ready, Dad led them to the wagon. He had Maggie hold the horses while he walked around to hook up. "Doggone it," he growled. "I'm missing a trace chain. I'll be right back."

Dad went into the barn, and Maggie stood between the two huge horses, holding them still. Dad seemed to take forever, and Maggie's mind began to wander.

Suddenly Dad burst through a door just behind the team. A bunch of fence posts swung crazily in his arms.

Polly leaped forward, knocking Maggie to the ground. "Owww," she wailed as her ankle bent under her. She had to scramble to avoid being run over.

Molly stood her ground, and since the horses were hooked together, Polly couldn't go far. But Maggie's ankle HURT.



Dad dropped the fence posts and caught the horses. He tied them up and ran over to Maggie. "Oh, I'm SO sorry, Maggie," he said. "I never thought about the fence posts scaring those silly horses. How bad is it?"

Maggie rolled back and forth on the ground holding her throbbing ankle.

Dad picked her up and started toward the house. "Betty, Betty," he yelled as they neared the back door. "Get some ice. The horses stepped on Maggie."

Mom met them saying, "Oh, no, those darned horses again. I knew someone would get hurt." She bent over Maggie's ankle.

Mom put ice on the ankle and gave Maggie a pill for the pain. At first her parents discussed taking Maggie to the hospital, but it didn't seem to be broken.

When Maggie was resting on the couch, Dad said, "Betty, I think you're right about those horses. I'll see if Larry still wants to buy them."

"No," said Maggie. "I love Molly."

Mom lips made a tight line. She said, "Maggie, those horses are too dangerous and too expensive. The sooner we get rid of them the better."

Chapter Nine

By Wednesday Maggie's ankle was almost back to normal. She was out feeding calves when Tim and Jodi's car drove in.

They ran over, and Jodi pointed at Maggie's purple ankle. "What happened?" she asked.

"The horses knocked me down," Maggie said with a sigh. "And now Dad's going to sell them."

"But Molly is your friend," said Tim.

"Yes," said Maggie, "but Mom never wanted Dad to buy them. When I got hurt, he said he would sell them."

"How soon will they go?" Tim wondered.

"Soon," said Maggie. "Mr. Croon already said he wants to buy them."

"Then we have to ride Molly today," Tim whispered.

"Children!" Tim's mom called. She and Maggie's mom looked excited. "Aunt Betty says the blackberries are ripe. Let's all go pick some for supper."

Maggie looked at Tim and made a face. Normally she liked to pick blackberries, but not today.

"Do we have to?" asked Tim. "Maggie said her ankle hurts." Maggie wondered what he was talking about. He added, "And you know how whiny Jodi can get."

"I don't whine," Jodi protested. But then she caught on to what Tim had in mind. "Well," she added, "maybe I would with the mosquitoes and sticker bushes and all."

"Why don't you two go by yourselves?" said Maggie.

Aunt Jane frowned. "We can't leave you kids alone for the whole day."

"Uncle Fred can watch us," said Tim.

"Sure," Maggie agreed. "He said he's going to be greasing machinery in the machine shed today."

"Well ..." said Aunt Jane. "... maybe that would be okay. But you kids stay close to home. Do you hear?"

Three heads nodded solemnly. She didn't say how close, thought Maggie.

So the women set off for the woods with their berry buckets looking very happy. The minute they were out of sight Maggie gave Tim a pat on the back.

"Good work," she said. "That bit about my leg was really smart. Just let me lock Corky in the house, and we can get going."

They slipped into the barn by the back door so Maggie's dad wouldn't see them. Tim took Molly's bridle, and Maggie filled her pockets with oats. Then they cut through the cornfield instead of going up the lane in plain sight.

"How's your ankle?" asked Tim as they hurried through the tall green stalks.

"I'll be fine," she assured him.

At first the horses seemed to be hiding. They weren't in the meadow or under the oak tree. They weren't in the brushy spot along the south fence row. That meant they were probably in the small trees next to the neighbor's wood lot. But where?

Maggie saw a flash of white in a thicket next to the fence and stopped.

"What the matter?" asked Jodi.

"Shh," said Maggie. "There's a cow lying in there. She's all by herself, and she could be sick or something. You guys stay here, and I'll check on her."

Maggie crept forward until she could see the cow more clearly.

"Is she okay?" Tim whispered from right behind Maggie. Jodi was right behind him.

Maggie turned and scowled at them. "You were supposed to stay back there," she said crossly.

Tim shrugged, and Maggie looked back at the cow. It was Splash, one of their best milkers. Maggie wondered why she was here all by herself. Cows usually liked to stay together.

Then the answer was clear. A pair of tiny ears and a darling little white nose appeared from behind the resting cow. Splash had a new calf.

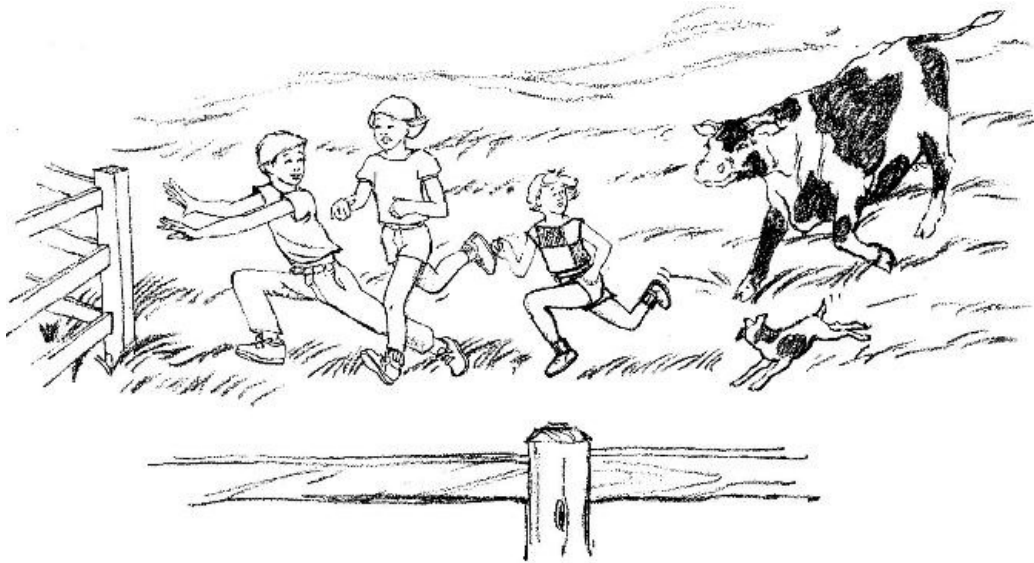
Maggie turned to tell Tim and Jodi, but then she froze. Corky was bouncing toward them. In a flash, Maggie remembered other mother cows charging after dogs. She and her cousins were in the way. They could get trampled.

"Get back!" she shouted.

Sure enough, as Corky got closer, he began to bark. Splash lurched to her feet, and swung her head from side to side searching for the danger.

"Run!" yelled Maggie, pushing her cousins back. "Run to the fence."

The three kids sprinted toward the fence as Corky barked with delight. He nipped at the cow's nose, and she charged at him.



"Yip!" Corky cried. He put his head between his legs, raced after the children, and passed them.

Splash crashed out of the brush toward the dog and the children. The fence wasn't far away. They just might make it.

But just then Maggie's bad ankle gave out and she fell. She knew she'd never get up in time. The cow was coming fast. Maggie shut her eyes and prepared to be attacked.

Chapter Ten

Maggie pulled her body into a tight ball and waited for the pain. But instead she felt the ground shake and heard an unearthly squeal.

Opening her eyes, she saw Molly run full speed into Splash. Before the cow could hurt Maggie, she was shoved away. Splash stumbled and almost went down. When the cow regained her feet, she shook her head and stared at Molly. Molly stood over Maggie, and Splash went back to her calf.

Maggie shuddered. At first she was too shaky to get up, and Molly sniffed her anxiously.

"Wow," Tim exclaimed as he slid back under the fence to join Maggie. "That was like something you see on TV."

"We thought you were a goner," Jodi added.

Just then Dad arrived looking very angry. "What the heck is going on?" he demanded. "Don't you know that a cow with a calf can be dangerous?"

Maggie was so surprised to see him that she was speechless.

After catching his breath, Dad continued. "I never expected you kids to leave the yard. When I realized you were gone, I let Corky out to find you. What were you thinking?"

"Corky started all the trouble ..." Maggie began.

"Oh, no!" Dad shot back. "You kids started the trouble when you left without telling me. I am going to give you guys such a spanking."

And he did. When Mom and Aunt Jane got home, the kids were standing in different corners of

the kitchen with tear-stained faces.

"Mom," wailed Jodi. "Uncle Fred spanked us."

"Why would he do that?" Aunt Jane asked, looking upset.

"Because they almost got themselves killed," said Dad. Then he explained what had happened.

Mom crossed her arms and scowled at Maggie. "I told you to stay close to home. You disobeyed me."

"I'm sorry," Maggie sniffed. "But Dad is going to sell Molly, and I wanted to ride her before she leaves."

"Ride Molly??" cried her mother. "By yourself? She already hurt your leg. She could have killed you this time."

"Molly wouldn't hurt me," said Maggie. "I sometimes ride her in the pasture." She was sorry the moment she'd said it.

"You do?" Dad shouted. "How could you be so foolish? Thank goodness Larry Croon is buying those animals. He's coming after them tomorrow."

"Good," said Mom. "The sooner the better."

"But you can't sell Molly now," Maggie protested. "She saved my life."

Dad sighed. "Yes, she did," he admitted. "But she'll be better off with Larry. He understands horses better than I do."

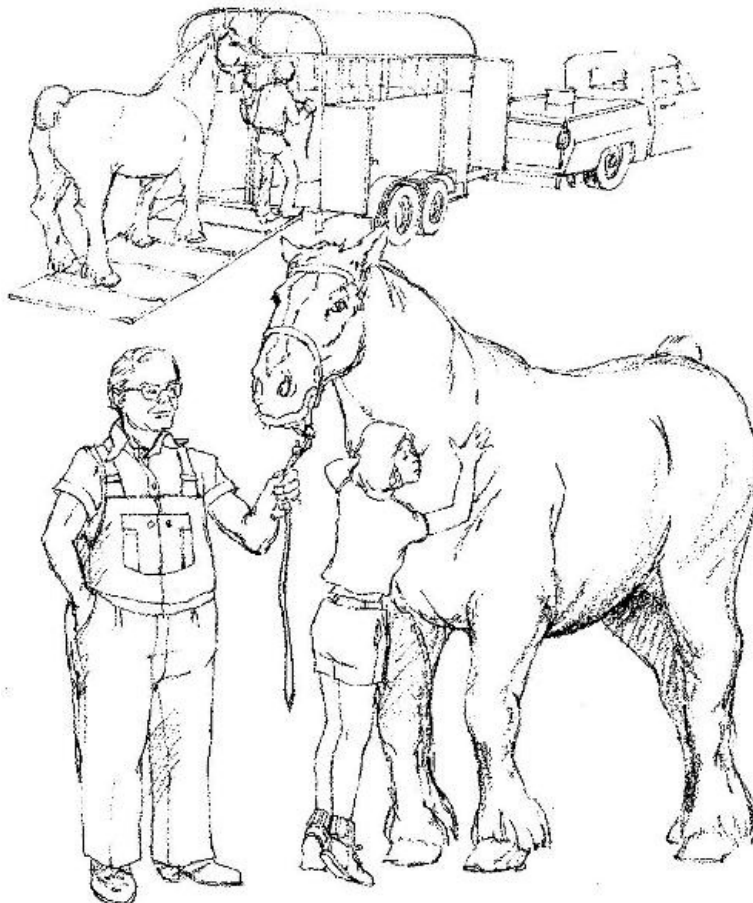
Tim and Jodi went home not long after that. Mom and Dad wanted to ground Maggie, but she convinced them she needed to thank Molly.

Maggie hugged Molly and said, "Thank you for being so smart and so brave. I'm sorry Dad still wants to sell you, but maybe you'll be happier with Mr. Croon."

* * * * *

Maggie told herself she wouldn't watch Molly leave, but she couldn't just stay in the house. Mom and Dad were already watching Molly climb into the truck when Maggie got there.

"Wait, please," called Maggie. "I have to give her one more hug." Molly put her head down so that Maggie could get her arms around the huge neck. Maggie even cried a little.



"Good-bye, girl, and be good," Maggie sniffed. "I'll come to see you when I can."

As Molly nuzzled Maggie's neck, Mr. Croon said, "Yes, Maggie, be sure to come and visit her."

Then it was time for Molly to go. The men closed the door of the truck and it pulled away. Maggie stood there with a big empty spot in her heart.

Finally she gave a huge sigh and turned toward the house. But she heard a motor, and a little red pickup drove into the driveway. It was Chuck.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. "Is the team gone already?"

"Yup," said Dad, "and I'm glad you're here. I can see Maggie's lonesome for horses already."

"Maggie," said Mom, "come and see what's in the pickup. I don't think you'll be disappointed in what Dad bought this time."

Maggie allowed herself to be led to the pickup. She looked in. And there was ... her pony! It was the same color as Molly, but much, much smaller.

"Oh, it's beautiful," gasped Maggie.

"Her name is Honey," said Chuck. "Because she's a honey of a little horse."

"Awesome!" said Maggie. "Wait until Tim and Jodi see her. And Kelly. Even she will want to ride a pony."



Maggie hugged her mom and dad. Then she hugged Honey and led her to the barn.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAGGIE'S WISH ***

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