

Winnie

The Early Years 

Homesick Horse



Dandi Daley Mackall

Author of the Bestselling Winnie the Horse Gentler Series

illustrated by Phyllis Harris

Winnie: The Early Years Series

Horse Gentler in Training

A Horse's Best Friend

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Homesick Horse

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Wild Thing

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Friendly Foal

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Homesick Horse





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Homesick Horse

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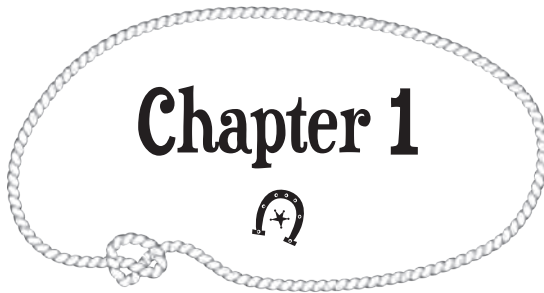
For my granddaughter Harper, who is a twirling joy

*Don't let your hearts be troubled.
Trust in God, and trust also in me.
There is more than enough room
in my Father's home. If this were
not so, would I have told you that
I am going to prepare a place for
you? When everything is ready,
I will come and get you, so that you
will always be with me where I am.*

JOHN 14:1-3

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The One Horse

Shivering, I stomp my boots on the frozen ground and wonder how Mom and my little sister, Lizzy, can look so calm. “Shouldn’t Dad be back by now?”

Mom smiles. Her patience makes her the best horse gentler in all of Wyoming and maybe the whole world. “Winnie, everything in its own time. Aunt Betty refused to fly, so

your dad had to fly to California and drive all the way back to Wyoming. Since Uncle Will died, she hasn't been able to keep up with the farm, so she's leaving her house and the farm for good. That can't be easy."

"Aww, poor Aunt Betty," Lizzy says.

My sister is a year younger and an inch taller than me. We both have brown hair, but Lizzy's always looks curly cute, even under her llama hat. We both got Mom's green eyes, but Lizzy dodged the freckles.

Lizzy's eyes fill with tears. "If Aunt Betty doesn't have a home, can we keep her?" My sister is always bringing home strays—lizards and bugs mostly.

Mom tugs at one of the yarn braids on Lizzy's llama hat. "She's welcome to stay as long as she needs us. I think she's planning

to move into an assisted living home next month, though.”

Until this week, I’d never heard much about Aunt Betty. Mom fixed up my room for her, even though Dad says it’s too horsey. But Lizzy keeps part of her bug collection and her favorite lizards in her room, and Mom wasn’t sure how Aunt Betty feels about creeping creatures.

“He’s coming!” Lizzy shouts. “They’re here!”

I spot the nose of Dad’s car poking over the hill. Lizzy and I take off running up the lane. But a minute later, I stop in my tracks. Dad’s car is pulling a black one-horse trailer.

Lizzy reaches the car, then jogs beside it as car and trailer inch up the lane. When they pass me, all I can do is stare.

In that one-horse trailer . . . is one horse.

Lizzy grabs my hand, and I fall in step with her. I can't believe it.

"I didn't know she had a horse." I've been wondering what Dad's aunt would think of me. I'm not good at talking to humans, especially ones I don't know. But now we can talk horses. Plus, she even brought her own horse.

Note to self: Maybe this is a good thing after all.

We watch Dad help Aunt Betty out of the front seat. She's about a head shorter than Dad—most people are shorter than my dad. Her gray eyes are slants above a small nose, with a straight line for a mouth. In spite of the cold, she's not wearing a hat, and her short, wiry hair forms a fence around her face.

Aunt Betty gazes around our property like she's deciding if she'll stay. "*This is the Willis Wyoming Ranch?*"

All I want to do is see the horse, but Mom nods me over to meet Aunt Betty.

Aunt Betty frowns down at me. “Is this Winifred?” she demands, like she doubts it. “You’re short. Willis women are tall.”

“Not this one,” I say. “Lizzy’s tall for her age, taller than me.” I clear my throat. “You



brought your horse. I guess Willis women love horses.”

“Ha! My husband bought that beast and left me saddled with it! The only reason I brought it along is because nobody in California was dumb enough to buy the thing. Jack, if your wife is as great with horses as you say she is, she can train mine so I can get a good price for him.”

Clang! Clang! The one horse wants out of the one-horse trailer.

“I’ll get him.” This is what I’ve been waiting for anyway.

“Lots of luck,” Aunt Betty mumbles. “Jack, my bags.” She heads for the house.

I rush to the back of the trailer and pull down the ramp. But before I can step in, a big bay rump backs out. I jump away just in time.

Once out, the horse thrusts his head from

side to side as if scouting out the ranch, just like Aunt Betty did. Then he lowers his head and bucks three times before racing toward the barn.

I don't even know his name to call him back. "Aunt Betty—wait!" I shout, as I take off after the horse. "What's his name?"

Without turning around, Aunt Betty answers, "Buck!"

Note to self: Never has a horse been better named.