

CHAPTER SEVEN



1 Mary hoped a great idea for saving Illusion would arrive with the rise of
2 the morning sun. As nothing came, she sighed and wrote one more name
3 on her list of horse books. Then she made a wild guess of what it could sell
4 for. Adding up the column brought a tense frown to her face. "I wish my
5 math was wrong. I've never been good at math, but I'm sure I still don't
6 have enough." She spread the sketches across the desk as she waited for
7 Laura.

8 Laura lugged a box into the library and dropped it with a thud. "I
9 remembered this box of books in the attic that used to belong to my mother
10 and her sister. Look at this book, it's not a horse book, but that won't
11 matter, will it?"

12 "It's signed. Wow." Mary exaggerated her mouth as she repeated, "Wow."
13 She held it to her chest with her arms wrapped across it. "I think we could
14 get a lot of money for this."

15 "Mother said a Laura Ingalls Wilder autobiography is rare. She didn't like
16 the idea of selling it, but she said the final decision is Aunt Claire's since it
17 used to be hers." Laura opened the book to a pencil drawing of a girl on a
18 blanket in the tall prairie grasses. "Aunt Claire gave me permission to sell
19 any of them I needed to. She said she'd send my birthday money early, if
20 it would help."

21 "I wish I had an Aunt Claire."

22 "She's mine, all mine. Oh. Look what I got for you." Laura lifted a huge,
23 reddish brown textbook from the box. "Miss Dann. I love her. Ordered it for
24 us from the veterinarian college. You need to read this section on the club
25 foot."

26 "Thanks. Wow, it's heavy. I want to read it now."

27 "We should get ready for the sale first." Laura scanned Mary's book list.
28 "You have a signed copy of *The Black*? No way should you sell it."

29 Mary pointed a finger to the right and followed the motion with her head.
30 "Illusion." Flipping to the left, she said, "Or *The Black*?"

31 "You're right," Laura agreed. "What am I thinking?"

32 "Maybe you could take my list of books to show Miss Dann. She might
33 know what they are worth."

34 "That's a great idea. She's so nice; I know she will help us."

35 Mary moved a pile of drawings across the polished wooden table to Laura.
36 "Help me pick out some sketches."

37 "When do we start baking the cookies?" Laura searched through the
38 drawings.

39 "Tomorrow morning, first thing. Papa should be home tomorrow, so he'll
40 be surprised."

41 "In a good way, I hope. I'm sure he'll be proud of you for all this."

42 "I'm not holding my breath. He doesn't get I'm doing what I have to do."



43

44 The next day Mary waited on the porch as the evening sky blushed pink.
45 It was almost dark when Papa got home. He closed the door to his car and
46 strode to the porch. "Hello, my Mary. What's that wonderful smell?"

47 "Papa! I'm so glad you're home. I have tons to tell you."

48 "You don't have to yell. I can hear you fine." Even his voice smiled at her.

49 Mary straightened her back and lowered her voice. "Laura and I have
50 come up with a plan to raise money to pay for Illusion's surgery. I reserved
51 a booth at the fair to sell cookies tomorrow. Laura and I have been baking
52 with Mrs. Tate all day."

53 "Good for you." Papa nodded along as her words rushed out.

54 "Will you help us tomorrow? We have to take tables and lots of things to
55 set up the booth."

56 "Tables? How many tables do you need to sell cookies?"

57 "Three. One for cookies, one for books, and one for my art. Laura is clever
58 or crazy. Maybe both. She thinks my sketches are so good they will raise a
59 lot of money."

60 "Laura sounds like a girl who knows fine art when she sees it. I guess you
61 have a few books you don't need anymore."

62 "Well, yes, sort of. Laura brought books from her collection too. She has
63 a signed book called *Little House In The Big Woods*."

64 "A girls' classic. Should fetch a good price. I'm surprised her parents will
65 let her sell it."

66 "I guess they understand Illusion is worth it to Laura and me." Mary
67 crossed her arms, uncrossed her arms, and crossed them again. "We're
68 going to hang a sign on the table to tell people we're raising money to save
69 a foal. Most of the sketches for sale are of Illusion and her dam."

70 "I'm impressed and proud of you, Mary. You are resourceful and
71 determined." He patted her knee. "I'm starving. What do you say we go see
72 what Mrs. Tate has for dinner, besides cookies?" Papa stood and opened
73 the door to the house.

74 A sweat broke out on Mary's forehead. "Wait, Papa. I have something
75 else."

76 "My word! What is this?"

77 "P-Papa," Mary stammered. "These are for the sale tomorrow."

78 "You cannot sell everything in the house to do a surgery on that foal." He
79 let the door slam.

80 "No, I wouldn't do that. These boxes are my books. I didn't want to tell
81 you like this."

82 "There is no good way to tell me something like this—ever." Papa slapped
83 his hat down on top of one of the boxes. "You can't sell your horse book
84 collection. Most of those are your legacy from your mama."

85 "It's my collection. You said so yourself." Her jaw jutted forward.

86 "Don't play semantic games with me, young lady."

87 "I love them, but if selling them can save Illusion, then I have to sell
88 them."

89 "Over my dead body!" He bent at the waist to look her in the eye.

90 "What about Illusion's dead body?"

91 "You are incorrigible. I won't allow it, Mary."

92 "Are they my books or not?"

93 Papa's face twisted red and tight. "Yes, yours. To keep, to treasure—not
94 to sell."

95 "I have to. It's my only choice."



96

97 Mary cheered for the sun in the morning because rain would have ruined
98 everything. As she arrived in the kitchen for breakfast, Mrs. Tate finished
99 wrapping sandwiches.

100 "I've made some lunch for you and Laura," Mrs. Tate said.

101 "Thank you. At least you understand." Mary folded her hands in her lap
102 and pressed her fingers together. "I had a terrible fight with Papa last
103 night."

104 "This is harder on him than you realize. He misses your mama, and selling
105 things she loved is painful for him." She slid brownies into the brown paper
106 lunch bags. "I know you don't remember much about your mama. You were
107 so little when she died." Mrs. Tate slid her hand on top of Mary's. "You know
108 the cedar chest by the window in his room?"

109 Mary nodded.

110 "It's full of your mama's treasures and precious things he's kept all these
111 years to remember her by." Mrs. Tate leaned toward Mary, her voice almost
112 a whisper. "Are you sure about this? You could have serious regrets."

113 She shrugged and looked away. "You're right. Mostly what I know about
114 Mama is what you've told me. Papa tries to talk about her sometimes, but
115 he never gets past saying, 'she was an angel.' I love my books, but what
116 else can I do?" With a deep sigh, Mary asked, "Where is he?"

117 "He went out."

118 "He wasn't supposed to go to El Paso until next week."

119 "He didn't say one word to me this morning. I'm worried." Mrs. Tate
120 pulled a plate out of the oven and placed it in front of Mary. "Mr. Joe almost
121 has the truck loaded, so best eat your breakfast."

122 Mary pushed the eggs around the plate and mashed the cinnamon banana
123 pieces with her fork. "He left me?" she whispered. Her eyes lost focus as
124 the sunlight fractured her pooling tears.



125

126 Mary waited at the fair booth by her pile of boxes as Joe unfolded the
127 tables' legs. "There you go, Miss Mary. Good luck."

128 Laura hurried toward them. She clutched a book in her arms. "I wasn't
129 sure I should even bring this, but it's best if you decide." She extended
130 Mary's treasured copy of *Black Beauty*.

131 Mary nodded and took the book, gently stroking the cover.

132 Laura flipped the tablecloth over a table and arranged the cookie trays.
133 "Want me to tape up the sign I made?"

134 "That would be great. Let's display the art in the middle with the sign,
135 then the cookies and books on either side."

136 "No second thoughts?" Laura asked.

137 "Lots of them. If you have any other ideas, I'd jump at anything."

138 "I wish." By the time the girls had the items for sale spread out, people
139 crowded the fairgrounds. Music from the carousel horse ride tinkled
140 cheerfully nearby. Mary extended her arm, holding her most loved book and
141 suspended it in the air. With a deep exhale, she finally placed *Black Beauty*
142 on the table with the other books. Nothing could be spared, and nothing
143 was left to do now except hope and pray lots of people would buy art,
144 cookies, and books.

145 "Mary, I have some extra-bad news."

146 Mary looked hard at Laura. "What?" she snapped.

147 "I grabbed carrots for Illusion and sneaked to the barn last night. Father
148 was standing outside Illusion's stall with Mr. Todd. He said he couldn't allow
149 this to go on any longer." Laura stared at her toes. "He told Mr. Todd to
150 make a vet appointment. 'It's time to end it,' he said."

151 "But he gave us six weeks!"

152 "Only if she didn't get worse. She's worse."

153 "What did you do?"

154 Laura hung her head. "Nothing. I was so shocked. Father wouldn't listen
155 to me anyway. I ran back to the house, and they never knew I was there.
156 I'm a coward, and I let you down. I let Illusion down."

157 "I was there when you raced to save the driver from the truck that
158 crashed. I've watched you gallop across the fields and leap that massive
159 tree jump. A coward—no way. Anyway, if anybody's let Illusion down, it's
160 me."

161 Laura bit her upper lip, nodded, and her eyes closed on her pain.

162 Most people strolled past the booth without stopping. Some looked
163 casually at the offerings. After an hour, they'd sold a couple cookies and
164 one sketch. A girl in an upper grade from Laura's school searched through
165 the books for an eternity before she bought a fiction book about a rescue
166 horse.

167 "I've always hated that book," Mary confided.

168 Laura flashed a puzzled look.

169 "It has a scene where a lady goes out to the barn in the middle of the
170 night to put a blanket on a sleeping horse."

171 "That's dear."

172 "The horse is wild, and the lady can't get near it in the daytime. I'm
173 supposed to believe the horse is going to sleep through that. That scene
174 makes me crazy."

175 "You're right. That couldn't happen."

176 A few minutes later, the girl returned with a friend who bought a trilogy
177 about girls at a dressage horse show barn and a book of mustang
178 photographs.

179 "Why aren't people buying my art? I knew it wasn't any good." Mary
180 grabbed one of the sketches, crumpled it into a rock, and pitched it to the
181 ground. "I'm kidding myself. I can't sell enough to save Illusion."

182 Laura spread her fingers and smacked her hand down on the sketches.
183 "Stop. Just stop."

184 Mary nodded and bowed her head. Her fingers balled up the fabric of her
185 cotton skirt.

186 Three boys zigged past them. One boy made a face, snatched a cookie,
187 and disappeared into the crowd.

188 "I'm telling your mother, Davy," Laura yelled after him.

189 "I'll pay for it," said a tall, thin woman approaching the table. Her brown
190 hair twirled neatly into a bun at the nape of her neck.

191 Laura sprang up to hug her. "Miss Dann. I'm so excited you're here."

192 "Thank you for all your help," Mary said.

193 "It's what I love. Books and horses. How's the sale going?"

194 Laura answered with a shrug. "Not great."

195 Miss Dann picked up a sketch. "This is nicely done, Mary. Save it for me,
196 because I want it." She pointed to an art booth nearby. "I'm going to wander
197 the fair. I'll be back."

198 Mary and Laura nibbled on their sandwiches at the booth, afraid to miss
199 even a single customer. Two girls carried between them a crispy, fried
200 funnel cake. Laughing, they licked white sugar from their fingers. But Mary's
201 gaze whisked past the donut and followed Miss Dann. "She doesn't walk.
202 She floats. You didn't tell me she was so pretty."

203 "Prettiest librarian—ever."

204 After lunch, cookies were the best seller, and soon they were gone.
205 "We've hardly sold any books. Cookies can't pay for surgery." Mary sighed,
206 and her shoulders drooped. "This has to work! Let's count how much money
207 we've made."

208 Laura counted and recounted. The look on her face was all the answer
209 Mary needed. "What are we going to do?"

210 "What's left after you've tried everything?"

211 A woman with a big-brimmed hat examined the drawings. "I see from
212 your sign you hope to save this foal in the sketches. That's a worthy cause,
213 and I'm happy to help." She tucked the art into her bag. "She is precious."

214 Laura's throat tightened. Her voice cracked. "She means the world to us."

215 Another woman with long gray hair in a tight braid picked up *Black*
216 *Beauty*. Mary's eyes blurred as the woman selected her precious book. The
217 woman's wrinkled hands opened the book and flipped the pages. She
218 paused, admiring the artwork. "Lovely book. I had a copy as a girl, but I
219 don't know what became of it."

220 Laura pointed to Papa, weaving through the crowd, headed toward them.

221 "I'm tempted," the woman continued. "It's marked quite high. I'll think
222 about it."

223 "It's signed by Anna Sewell's mother," Mary explained. "She was Anna's
224 caretaker because she had an accident that left her lame."

225 The lady replaced the book on the table. "That's interesting. Maybe I'll
226 come back a little later."

227 "It's a collector's..."

228 Laura pinched Mary's arm to shush her. "Thank you, anyway."

229 Mary strained to see Papa around the masses of people milling about.

230 "Your papa! Does he look angry?" Laura asked.

231 "He looks... intense."

232 Papa removed his cap and stood squarely in front of the tables, scanning
233 the sale items for a long moment.

234 "Papa, I have to," Mary whispered. She waited as if in a trance. The crowd
235 still moved around her, but they were a mere blur of color and voices. The
236 music tinned to her ear.

237 As he snapped his cap back onto his head, the commanding sound of his
238 booming voice cut through her daze. "I'd like to buy a book, please. How
239 about the one called *Black Beauty*?"

240 Mary's face warmed. Her hand covered her mouth, and joyful tears
241 gushed from her eyes.

242 "I'd also like to have these two books. And this one."

243 "Oh, Papa, You love me," she blubbered.

244 "In fact, I think I need a small box. Make it a big box. Actually, I'll take
245 all the books, so I need a truck." Papa leaned over the table toward Mary.
246 "Can you arrange delivery, young lady?"

247 Mary and Laura both bawled and hugged each other. People passed by
248 staring at them.

249 Mary rolled her chair to Papa and slid her hand into his. "Where did you
250 go this morning, Papa?" Her voice barely cracked a whisper. "I thought
251 you'd left me?"

252 "Mary! I would never leave you." He squatted to look directly into her
253 eyes. "You are what keeps my heart beating. I ask myself all the time what
254 would your mama do with you. I finally drove over to the Athens cemetery
255 to talk to her." He took Mary's hands and rubbed them with his thumbs.
256 "Then I knew what I had to do. I'm sorry I let you suffer through worrying
257 about what would happen to Illusion. If your mama were still alive, she
258 would be making as much effort to save the foal as you are." He kissed her
259 fingers and held them to his cheek. "If it was the only way, she would have
260 hawked the books herself."

261 As her mouth puckered up again, Mary's tears flowed. She threw her
262 arms around him and buried her face in the crook of his neck. She sniffled
263 and wiped her eyes. "I'm so afraid, Papa. I'm so afraid we're too late. She's
264 limping more every day. Laura's father told Mr. Todd they can't wait any
265 longer and to call the vet."

266 "Then we better get busy," Papa called out to people. "Support a worthy
267 cause, ladies and gentlemen." He waved art in the air. "Buy a sketch of a
268 foal and save the little horse's life."

269 The girls wiped their eyes as they reached out to collect money handed
270 to them even by people who didn't take a sketch.

271 Papa's energy gathered a crowd, all with outstretched hands to accept
272 the art. He froze. Miss Dann's skirt swished around her legs as she moved

273 toward him. His hand hung in midair, extending a drawing of Illusion toward
274 her. It was as if the noise and bustle of the fair vanished. She smiled and
275 looked down. He stammered a "hello" which Mary could barely hear.

276 Laura looked at Mary. Wide-eyed, Mary looked at Laura. Their heads
277 snapped to look at Papa and Miss Dann.

278 "She likes him," breathed Laura.

279 Mary bent closer to Laura and whispered, "He likes her more. I can't
280 believe this."

281 "I think it's sweet."

282 "You would." Mary scowled.

283 Miss Dann's lace handkerchief floated to the grass. Papa scooped it up,
284 stepped closer, and placed it gently in her hand.

285 "He's touching her." Laura pointed.

286 Miss Dann glanced away, and then up into his eyes. Papa laughed at
287 something she said, leaned a little closer, and whispered to her.

288 "Is she flirting? I think she's flirting."

289 "He's flirting too. Your papa's smitten," Laura teased.

290 As Miss Dann walked away, she cast a smile over her shoulder. She
291 clutched a sketch rolled up like a scroll. Papa stood with his back to Mary.
292 His fingers worked around the brim of his hat as he watched her go.

293 "Drool! I better do something before he runs after her."

294 "Your papa's smitten," Laura sang and giggled.