

Arts and Humanities Commission

2016 Writing Contest

First Place

Division – Adult

Category – Short Story

“A Whisper of Love”

by Alan Winn

A Whisper of Love

Roots run deep inside all of us, and this theory seems to hold true within the animal kingdom as well. I've always been fascinated by stories of dogs and cats that run away after moving to a new house only to be found loitering at their former places of residence, sometimes even miles away. I get lost driving to the store. These animals, on the other hand, are like homing pigeons that are able to navigate their way back to their previous homes across great distances. How is it done? Home is where the heart is, so this great feat must be accomplished by following one's heart.

Whisper was my 4 year old Painted with a documented bloodline. She was truly a dazzling horse, and "dazzling" is not a word that I use often. She was as majestic as a queen in a faraway land and as beautiful as the painted sky at sundown. She was gentle, too, with the inherent innocence of a lamb. Somehow she knew that kindness extended translates to kindness returned.

The previous spring, Whisper and I made the move to this newer and smaller ranch here in Southern Wyoming. A month before our move, my husband of more than 40 years had passed away unexpectedly while doing the morning chores. So just as unexpectedly, I packed up all my memories and moved to this smaller ranch to help ease the pain of my broken heart. Whisper, of course, came along to keep her beautiful brown eyes on the progress of my healing soul.

One morning while walking through my front room at the break of dawn, I caught a glimpse of Whisper standing outside her large horse pen located a ways off from the house. My initial thought was "That beautiful horse down there looks just like Whisper," before it dawned on me that it was her indeed. How could that be? The fence was strong and the gate was always locked, so to this day, I'll never know how she got out. What caught my eye the most, however, was the fact that she was staring at me through the window; I was quite sure of it. For what seemed like minutes on end, I stared back, feeling both curious and amazed at this singular event. Finally, Whisper glanced back at her stable, glanced up at me once more, and then turned and started trotting down the long driveway to the main road.

In the time that it takes to throw on some boots and run 40 yards to my truck and horse trailer, I was driving down that long, winding driveway to the main road myself. Where would she be and how would I find her? Besides my ranch, she was all that I had, and I was convinced that it would be next to impossible to find a replacement horse that could hold a candle to Whisper. She was more human than she was horse, and I couldn't stand the thought of losing her. For me, it was a matter of life and death -- my life and my death.

I drove to the Country Store two miles from my ranch and started asking everyone I could find to see if they had seen a missing Painted horse. Stuart Wright, the store owner, shook his head with grave concern. The store was not crowded at that early hour, but the few who were there all expressed their condolences. It was not what I wanted to hear. As I jogged back to my truck, panic and fear started to overtake any remaining hope that was left inside me. How could she have disappeared so quickly and where did she go? It had only been a matter of minutes. Could someone have stolen her, and if so, how could they have done it so quickly?

I fought back tears as I climbed back into my truck, not knowing where to look next other than to simply drive in circles for the confusion that I felt. Besides driving aimlessly down the main road into town some 12 or so miles away, I didn't know where to go next. From far behind, I heard someone calling my name. "Ms. Simmons, wait a second," the voice said. The request came from Leland Montgomery, a young teenage boy who helped around the Country Store.

"Have you gone back to your old ranch?" he asked.

"You mean where I lived before moving last year?" I asked with surprise. "Leland, it's been almost a year since I lived there, and besides, it's at least six miles from here. How could Whisper ever find her way back there?" Simply verbalizing the thought sounded ridiculous to me.

"I've heard that horses are like dogs and cats that way, where they can find their way back to where they lived before moving," he said thoughtfully.

I thanked Leland for his help. For me, it was a shot in the dark as far away as the moon, but it was a shot no less. With no other ideas or plans on the table, it was worth a chance, albeit a razor thin one at best. At least it represented effort on my part, no matter how half-hearted I felt about it or how harebrained it seemed. It was worth a try.

A few minutes later, I was back where I had lived nearly half of my life, driving up my former driveway in quiet reverence. It felt like I was in a time machine, coming back to a place that I had never left in the first place. The sun was starting to peek over the tree line as I stopped my truck and got out in front of that familiar two-story farmhouse that held so many memories. The early morning air was still cool and smelled as sweet as the honeysuckle flowers that lined the meadow off in the distance. There was little activity that I could see, especially none whatsoever coming from a runaway horse.

It was while I was contemplating my next move that I heard the soothing sound of children's laughter floating lightly on the cool morning air. Few things can heal a broken heart like the sound of laughter from a child. Truly, laughter is the best medicine, especially when administered by a young child.

It was coming from off a ways near the old hay barn that my husband had built decades before. I followed the therapeutic sounds of the giggling past the hay barn and into the meadow where I saw two young girls, still in their nightgowns, laughing and petting a beautiful Painted horse named Whisper.

It was a sight to behold. These two young girls, who I guessed to be 9 and 6 years old, laughed and danced around Whisper who seemed to be enjoying every bit of the attention she was getting. The older girl was wearing oversized rubber boots while the younger of the two danced barefoot in the tall grass.

As I tried to slip away unnoticed, I was met by a handsome young couple who I guessed to be the girls' parents. I explained who I was and what had happened. Though we had never formally met, I had seen this couple before from a long distance at the closing of the ranch sale the previous year. They were very cordial and understanding.

"Look," I said. "I know this won't be easy, but why don't I leave my horse here for the morning so that your girls can play with her. Then I'll be back around noon to pick her up." With the couple in agreement, I drove off to the local diner to grab a bite to eat.

I stayed there at the diner all morning and into the early afternoon, thinking about and pondering the curious events of the day. I thought of those little girls and their absolute euphoria at making a new equestrian friend and how difficult it would be to say good-bye. I thought of Whisper and how happy she seemed to be now that she was back home. And then again, I thought about how difficult it would be to say good-bye.

At one o'clock, I drove back to the ranch where the young couple, the small girls, and Whisper were all waiting for me.

"Whisper," I said, putting my head next to hers, "it's time to say good-bye." I tried to make it quick. Like a bandage being pulled quickly from a wound, a faster good-bye would be less painful, I reasoned.

As I drove off, I stuck my arm out of the truck and waved one last time. Oddly, never did that empty horse trailer I was pulling seem so full of love.

Those little girls had a new family member named Whisper.

And I had a heart that had been healed.