



# Horse Drifter

- Adventures of a Western Horse

Written by Ilpo Halo, 2024

## # Chapter 1: A Morning at Camp

The morning sun peeked over the Texas plains as I stretched my legs and shook out my mane. My name is Light, and I'm not your ordinary horse. While other horses might only think about grass and carrots, I notice everything that happens around me. And believe me, there was plenty to notice that morning at the army camp.

My best friend and rider, Lance, stood beside me, looking out at the dusty landscape. All around us, soldiers were busy getting ready for the day. Some mended their uniforms with careful stitches, while others wrote letters to their families back home. The smell of coffee and breakfast biscuits drifted through the air, making my nose twitch.

"These soldiers and their breakfast," I thought to myself, watching them munch on dried fish and hard biscuits. "At least I get to enjoy fresh, crunchy oats!"

In the distance, I heard loud booms that definitely weren't thunder - my sensitive ears could tell the difference. Lance gave my neck a gentle pat, and I leaned into his touch. We understood each other perfectly, Lance and I. Even though I couldn't talk to him with words, we had our own special way of communicating.

"Let's find Troy," Lance said, and I knew exactly where to go. You see, wherever Troy was, his horse Ball Lightning would be nearby. Ball Lightning was... well, let's just say he wasn't the brightest horse in the stable, but he was friendly enough.

We found Troy sitting with some other soldiers, playing cards and sharing stories. I watched as Lance and Troy greeted each other with big smiles - they were best friends, just like Ball Lightning and I were friends (even though I was clearly the smarter horse).

Soon we were all trotting along the Rio Grande River, the morning sun warming our backs. Lance and Troy rode side by side, while Ball Lightning tried to keep up with my graceful pace. I couldn't help feeling a little proud - after all, I was a specially trained officer's horse!

We climbed a small hill where Lance pulled out his favorite tool - a telescope that stretched out longer than my tail! He used it to look far into the distance, searching for... well, I'm not sure what. All I could see was lots and lots of dust.

"Race you back to camp!" Troy challenged Lance, and before anyone could say "whoa," Ball Lightning took off running. I didn't worry though - I knew my long legs could catch up easily. Lance gave me the signal, and we thundered across the plain, the wind whistling through my mane. Poor Ball Lightning tried his best, but we won easily, just as I knew we would.

Back at camp, Lance reported to the commander about what we'd seen on our morning ride. I stood tall and proud, hoping Lance would mention what a great help I'd been. After all, a good horse deserves recognition!

As the sun climbed higher in the sky, I thought about how lucky I was to have Lance as my rider and friend. Sure, being an army horse meant dealing with loud noises and dusty trails, but with Lance by my side, every day was an adventure. And this was just the beginning of our story...

I couldn't wait to see what excitement the rest of the day would bring. Though secretly, I was also looking forward to my midday oats. Even special horses like me need a good snack!

## # Chapter 2: Into Battle

The sun was barely peeking over the horizon when the camp burst into action. I was in the middle of a wonderful dream about endless fields of sweet grass when all the commotion started.

"Can't a special horse like me get his beauty sleep?" I thought, shaking my mane to wake myself up.

Lance was already on my back, fidgeting more than usual. Sometimes I think I'm the calmer one of our pair! We stood in a long line with other horses and riders, waiting for something to happen. The morning air was cool and misty, and the Rio Grande River sparkled in the distance.

Then the Colonel came striding past - you know the type, a loud human who loves the sound of his own voice. He shouted something that made all the soldiers cheer. My horse friends and I shared a big yawn. We weren't getting paid extra for this early morning wake-up call!

Suddenly, Lance gave me a gentle kick, and we were moving. Not just moving - we were charging forward! My powerful legs carried us faster and faster across the field. I have to admit, even though it was early, the excitement started bubbling up inside me. The wind whipped through my mane as we thundered across the ground.

BOOM! CRACK! POW!

The air filled with noise and smoke. I dodged left and right, jumping over obstacles like I was in a fancy horse show. Only this was no show - this was a real battle! Through the smoke, I could see other horses on the opposite side wearing blue uniforms. We shared knowing looks that seemed to say, "Oh, these humans and their silly fights!"

Lance raised his sword high, the metal gleaming in the morning sun. I concentrated on keeping him balanced - the last thing we needed was for him to fall off while doing his sword-waving dance!

"Careful where you step!" I wanted to shout as I nearly tripped over a soldier in a blue coat who was lying on the ground. Really, some people should find safer places to take naps!

Our side was winning - I could tell because the blue-coated soldiers were running away as fast as their two legs could carry them. Ha! If they had four legs like us horses, maybe they'd have better luck! Captain Robinson threw his arms up and shouted about victory, but all I could think about was dinner. Fighting battles makes a horse hungry!

As the dust settled and things got quieter, I wondered if this would be our last battle. But something told me our adventures were far from over. At least I hoped there would be extra oats waiting for me back at camp - I'd definitely earned them!

I let out a happy neigh, proud of how brave Lance and I had been together. Sure, battles were noisy and dusty and sometimes scary, but with my best friend on my back, I knew we could handle anything. Though next time, I hoped they'd let us sleep in a little later!

"Neigh-ha!" I called out, celebrating our victory. Another exciting day in the life of a very special horse!

## # Chapter 3: The Day Everything Changed

The battle was in full swing now. My nostrils filled with the sharp smell of smoke as Lance and I leaped over a stone wall like champion jumpers. Lance swayed in the saddle, still holding on tight as we moved through the chaos together. Just like we'd practiced so many times, I followed every signal from his hands and legs perfectly. When someone tried to sneak up behind Lance, I knew exactly what to do. A quick kick from my strong back legs sent the troublemaker running away. After all, I had to protect my friend! Lance had his sword, and I had my hooves - we made the perfect team.

Together we dashed across the battlefield, moving faster than I'd ever run before. Lance guided me toward another rider in the distance. My powerful legs carried us closer and closer, my hooves drumming against the ground like thunder. We moved as one, and I felt so proud when Lance completed his task perfectly. For a moment, everything seemed wonderful.

But then the world exploded with noise. BOOM! The ground shook beneath my hooves. The air filled with dirt and smoke, making it hard to see. I felt a sharp sting in my side, like an angry bee had stung me. I let out a surprised neigh and danced nervously on my feet.

That's when I realized something was terribly wrong. Lance wasn't sitting on my back anymore. My heart started racing as I turned around and saw Lance lying on the ground. His leg didn't look right, and his face was very pale. But what worried me most was that Lance's eyes, usually so bright and alert, were staring at something far away.

"Lance!" I called out with a worried neigh. I stomped my hooves, trying to get his attention. But Lance didn't respond. Two kind soldiers, Troy and his helper, came quickly to take care of Lance.

"We'll take him somewhere safe," Troy promised as they gently lifted Lance. I wanted to follow, but nobody seemed to notice me standing there. For the first time in my life, I was completely alone.

Being alone felt strange and scary. I had always had Lance to guide me, to share adventures with, to be my friend. Now I had to decide what to do by myself. The sting in my side hurt, but I knew I had to be brave. So I ran. I ran like the wind itself, my mane flying behind me. I ran away from the noise and the smoke, not knowing where I was going. But deep in my heart, I kept something precious - hope. Hope that someday, somehow, I would see Lance again.

As I galloped into my uncertain future, I realized something important: being alone didn't mean being lonely. I carried all of Lance's lessons with me - about being brave, being kind, and never giving up. This wasn't the end of Light's story. It was just the beginning of a new adventure.

#### # Chapter 4: The Peaceful Pond

My hip stung where the bullet had gone through. It wasn't too bad - just two small holes, one where it went in and one where it came out. The blood had dried, but it still hurt to lie on my right side. Good thing horses have two sides to choose from! Still, I really missed the familiar weight of Lance's saddle and the gentle touch of his reins.

I found myself at a pretty little pond, the kind that makes you forget your troubles for a while. In the distance, I could still hear the boom of cannons and crack of guns, but they were far away now. I was safe here, but my heart felt heavy. I couldn't stop thinking about Lance and how I'd lost him. If only things had been different! The pond was like something from a dream - surrounded by soft green grass and a perfect little clearing. Sunbeams peeked through the clouds, warming my sore side. When I caught my breath, I stood up and looked around carefully. No danger in sight.

I spread my front legs and bent down to drink, keeping my back legs ready to run - just in case. A lone horse has to be careful! In the pond's mirror-like surface, I saw my reflection: my mane was all tangled, and my coat was dirty and stained. Usually, Lance would have cleaned me up by now, just like he had since I was a little foal. My dark eyes looked different somehow. I closed them and took a long drink. Oh, how wonderful that cool, clear water felt! Nothing beats fresh water when you're really thirsty.

Suddenly, there was a rustling sound from across the clearing. I jumped back from the water, ready to run. A few quick leaps took me to the safety of the trees. Then I realized it was just some birds taking off from the trees - false alarm! Funny how I didn't even feel my hip hurting when I jumped, though it started aching again afterward. My stomach growled, reminding me I was hungry.

After making sure everything was safe, I went back to the clearing. Let me tell you something - people who've never eaten fresh grass don't know what they're missing! I munched happily on the sweet grass, swishing my tail to keep away the pesky flies that were attracted to my wounds. I thought about taking a nice swim in the pond afterward to clean up.

But just then, my ears picked up a new sound - a single gunshot, much closer than the distant battle. That wasn't good! With grass still hanging from my mouth, I knew it was time to go. I took off running as fast as I could.

"Neigh-eigh-eigh!" I called out as I galloped away. This peaceful spot had been nice while it lasted, but a smart horse knows when it's time to move on. I just hoped my next rest stop would be as pleasant - and maybe a bit safer!

## # Chapter 5: Learning to Be Free

Being alone in the wild wasn't exactly what I'd planned for myself. After all, I was a well-trained cavalry horse, used to nice stables and regular meals! But my years with Lance had taught me more than just fancy parade moves. We'd spent four amazing years together, galloping across battlefields, splashing through swamps, and climbing mountain trails. While Lance earned his shiny medals, I collected my fair share of scratches and scars. Those were my "special training years," you could say!

I'd learned to be clever and quick-thinking during battles. Once, someone teased me about having a big head but little sense. Ha! I thought to myself, "Better a big head with lots of brains than a small one with none at all!"

The desert stretched out before me, filled with nothing but sand and prickly cacti. Some horses might find that scary, but not me! We thoroughbreds are born runners, and no desert was going to slow me down. High jumps?

No problem! All we need is room to run.

Speaking of running, Lance and I used to joke about that old Greek story - you know, the one about the messenger who ran all the way to Athens? "Why didn't he just take a horse?" we'd wonder, laughing together. Those were good times.

The only really scary things in the desert are the humans who live there. Even rattlesnakes are friendlier than some of the people you meet! But as long as I stayed near the Rio Grande River, I had everything I needed - plenty of water to drink and fresh grass to eat.

The thick bushes along the river (they call it chaparral) made perfect hiding spots, even for a big horse like me. You just had to know the right paths through it. The local people on both sides of the river knew every bush and trail. Some of them liked to catch horses for work, while others... well, let's just say I stayed away from them!

The muddy riverbank became my favorite spot. Rolling in the cool mud helped heal the sore spots on my side and stopped my old scars from itching. But the sad feelings inside - the ones about Lance falling that day - those weren't so easy to fix.

Life was different now. Back in the cavalry, there was always food waiting for us - hay, oats, everything a horse could want. Now I had to find my own meals. I once saw humans trading little pieces of paper for huge bags of hay. I even tried eating some paper once - big mistake! Trust me, it tastes nothing like hay!

The people around here get very excited about something called "freedom." I guess I understand that better now. Being free means no heavy saddle on my back, which is nice. But being alone? That's the hard part. Even one friend would make things better.

As I watched the sun setting over the river, I wondered what tomorrow would bring. Maybe, just maybe, it would bring a new friend.

"At least," I thought to myself, watching the stars appear, "I know how to take care of myself now. Lance would be proud of that."

## # Chapter 6: Adventures in the Wild

I decided to leave the Rio Grande River behind and head for the open plains. The thick bushes along the river were starting to feel too crowded, like being stuck in a maze where every path looked the same. Plus, there were too many dangerous people lurking around - smugglers and horse catchers with their scary lassos. One wrong step and my freedom would be gone!

"Time for a change of scenery," I thought to myself as I trotted away from the river valley. The wide-open prairie stretched before me, reminding me of home. If only Lance were here to point me in the right direction!

The ground became harder under my hooves, and there wasn't a tree in sight. By afternoon, the wind picked up, blowing sand through the air. Even my long, beautiful eyelashes (which all fancy horses like me have) couldn't keep all the sand out of my eyes.

I needed to rest and find something to eat and drink. Then my nose caught a sweet smell in the air. Through the bright sunlight, I saw something that looked like trees in the distance. My empty stomach urged me forward, and sure enough - there was a small group of trees loaded with colorful fruits!

Now, I probably should have been more careful, but those fruits looked so tasty hanging low on the branches. I took a big bite - juicy and sweet! After eating my fill, I lay down in the shade for a nap.

Big mistake! When I woke up, my head felt heavy as a rock, and my stomach was doing flip-flops. Those innocent-looking fruits weren't so innocent after all! Let's just say I learned an important lesson about trying strange foods in the wild. Next time, I'd stick to good old grass!

The rain started falling - not just a sprinkle, but a real downpour. It actually felt nice, almost like getting brushed. Though thinking about brushing made me miss Lance again. The rain left puddles everywhere, perfect for a thirsty horse.

But nighttime in the wilderness was tricky. You couldn't just lie down and sleep like in a nice stable. Out here, you had to sleep standing up (which we horses are pretty good at, thankfully). The coyotes howled in the distance, reminding me I wasn't alone out here. And somewhere in the darkness, the silent mountain lions prowled, looking for their next meal.

After several sleepless nights, I knew I couldn't stay alone much longer. "Time to find some other horses," I decided. "Even if they're not as sophisticated as me!"

I had learned some important lessons about surviving in the wild:

1. Stick to food you know is safe
2. Always stay alert
3. Keep moving to stay safe
4. And most importantly - sometimes being alone isn't as fun as being free

As I galloped across the prairie under the starlit sky, I hoped my next adventure would lead me to some new friends. After all, even a special horse like me needs company sometimes!

## # Chapter 7: Life with the Wild Herd

Joining the wild horses turned out to be one of my smartest decisions ever. Winter didn't seem so harsh when you had friends to huddle with, and those scary predators - mountain lions, wolves, and bears - thought twice about attacking a whole herd of horses! When wolves got too close, we'd simply move to a safer place. Pretty clever, right?

Living with the wild horses reminded me of something I'd seen during my time with Lance - how soldiers guard their camp at night. I bet they learned it from watching horses! At night, our herd would gather in a tight circle, standing back-to-back to keep warm. While most of us dozed, one horse always stayed awake to watch for danger. If anything scary approached, our guard would neigh and stamp their hooves, and everyone would jump up ready to run - quick as lightning!

Winter brought its own challenges, especially finding food under the ice and snow. The stallions, with their big strong hooves, would help the mares by breaking through the frozen ground. It was quite gentlemanly, really - the stallions would work up a sweat kicking away snow and ice so the mares could eat first. I kept to myself during these times, especially since my horseshoes were getting pretty worn out.

The herd's lead stallion was getting old, and sometimes he struggled to break through the ice. A younger stallion would try to show off to the mares by doing it instead, which often led to some exciting showdowns! The whole herd would gather to watch these matches. They had rules, mind you - no mean biting and no deadly kicks. The old leader usually won thanks to his experience, even against the stronger young challenger.

After spending all winter with the herd, I started feeling like a real wild horse myself. When spring finally arrived, we all celebrated by feasting on the fresh green grass. Though sometimes we got a bit too excited about the tasty new grass - let's just say our tummies weren't always happy with us!

Spring brought another surprise - the wild mares started paying attention to me! I guess they liked my sophisticated thoroughbred looks. They'd come close and try to make friends, especially this one mare named Diara. She was the boss of all the other mares, and she made sure none of the others got too friendly with me. Eventually, Diara and I became special friends.

I thought this might be my new life forever - running free with the herd, spending time with Diara, enjoying the wide-open plains. But life has a funny way of surprising you, even when you're a very special horse like me... "This is nice," I thought as I watched the spring sunset with my new herd family, "but I wonder what adventure comes next?"

## # Chapter 8: Captured by the Comanche

It was a perfect spring day. Our herd was enjoying the sweet new grass and fresh water from the stream. After the hard winter, everything seemed wonderful - but I should have known better! As Lance's trained war horse, I noticed the danger before anyone else.

The sound hit me first - dozens of galloping hooves, thundering like a train charging up a hill. Then came the dust clouds, rising up against the blue sky. Before I could even think about running, they were everywhere - riders moving so smoothly with their horses that they looked like they were part of them!

These were Comanche warriors, famous for being the best horse riders in all the plains. They rode without saddles, wearing almost nothing despite the cool air. And they had a clever plan to catch us.

Each warrior carried a long pole with a rope loop at the end. When they slipped it around a horse's neck, the rope would tighten until the horse had to give up. Some of my wild horse friends were already caught, following their captors with drooping heads.

But I wasn't going to be caught easily! I used all the fancy moves Lance had taught me - jumping, turning, and dashing away. The warriors noticed how different I was from the wild horses, and more of them started chasing me. Their shouts filled the air as they tried to catch this special thoroughbred horse.

It reminded me of training with Lance, except these riders didn't wear uniforms. They worked together like fish swimming in water, each one knowing exactly where to be. When their ropes missed me, they came up with a new plan.

The warriors formed a circle around me, riding faster and faster. As they moved closer together, I had nowhere to run. I was trapped! Even a clever horse like me couldn't find a way out.

Finally, a young warrior named Tawny managed to catch me. As we walked toward the Comanche camp, I held my head high. The older Comanche watched in amazement as Tawny rode me straight to the chief's tent - after all, it's not every day they saw a proud cavalry horse join their herd!

"Well," I thought to myself, "this is certainly different from my days with Lance. But maybe it's just another kind of adventure?"

The Comanche were masters of horses, and even though I missed Lance and my old life, I had to admit - these warriors knew what they were doing. As the sun set over the camp, I wondered what this new chapter of my life would bring.

Looking at the chief's tent with its painted symbols, I remembered something Lance used to say: "Sometimes the best adventures are the ones you never planned for." How right he was!

## # Chapter 9: My New Life with the Comanche

Life sure has a way of surprising you! After being caught by the Comanche warriors, I wasn't sure what would happen next. Would they make me a war horse again, like I was with Lance? But the Comanche had different plans for me.



One morning, Tawny, the chief's son, came to get me. He looked very impressive with a feather in his hair and special decorations around his neck. He led me to a new pen, and when I saw what was inside, my eyes nearly popped out of my head - it was full of mare horses! That's when I realized my new job: I was going to be a father to lots of baby horses.

The Comanche took excellent care of me. Their wise medicine man, Puha, checked me from nose to tail. He even got someone to fix my loose horseshoes! Everyone seemed very impressed with me, which made me stand a little taller. After all, I was the only thoroughbred horse among all the wild mustangs.

They gave me a new name too. A young Comanche named Mowway started calling me Tabby, which means "sunlight" in their language. He said my coat was so shiny it reflected the sun. It was certainly better than some of the silly names Lance used to call me when he got frustrated - like "slowpoke" or "you donkey"!

Life in the Comanche camp was peaceful and colorful. When their chief, Piame (which means White Mountain), rode me around the camp, I got to see everything. There were long rows of tipis (their tall, cone-shaped tents), and lots of women and children would come out to watch us pass. The women wore beautiful dresses decorated with beads and shells, and they always stood up politely when we went by.

It was very different from my time in the cavalry. Instead of battles and training, my days were filled with sunny skies and fresh grass. The Comanche brought me warm blankets on cold nights and made sure I always had shelter from the rain.

Sometimes I wondered what Lance would think if he could see me now. I'd gone from being a brave war horse to living like a pampered prince! But after all the scary battles and long marches, maybe I deserved some peace and quiet.

Still, I never forgot my old life or my friend Lance. Even though my new life was comfortable, those memories stayed close to my heart. The Comanche were kind to me, and I was proud to help them build their herd of horses.

As I watched the sunset over the camp one evening, with the sound of children laughing and women singing, I thought about how strange life can be. Here I was, a fancy cavalry horse, living with the Comanche and helping to raise the next generation of prairie horses. Maybe this was exactly where I was meant to be.

"Life really is full of surprises," I thought to myself as a warm breeze ruffled my mane. "And sometimes the best ones are the ones you never expected!"

## # Chapter 10: Life in the Mare Camp

Even the best life has its funny moments and small troubles! Sure, being in a pen wasn't as exciting as running free on the prairie, but I had to admit - being surrounded by pretty mares wasn't a bad way to spend my days. My job was to help create the next generation of Comanche horses, and I took my work very seriously!

The most interesting part of my new life was dealing with the young Comanche boys who came to watch and learn about horses. They would sit along the fence, cheering and getting excited about the future foals. Each one hoped they'd get to raise one of my babies when they became warriors. Sometimes they'd argue about who would get which foal, but they always stopped fighting when I started my important work!

One day, something really funny happened. A brave girl named Piabo and her friends secretly came to peek through the fence. When they saw what was happening inside, they couldn't help giggling! The boys discovered them and chased them away, making such a racket that it startled my mare friend right in the middle of our... well, let's just say our important business! Everything turned out fine in the end, though.

One of the boys, Mowway, even wrote a funny poem about one of the mares. He talked about how she could be sweet one minute and wild the next, especially when she was expecting a foal. The poem made everyone laugh, but it was true - mares can be quite dramatic sometimes!

As I watched the beautiful sunset one evening, I had a clever thought. People say "War makes boys into men," but I think "Peace makes warriors into gentlemen." After all, I had gone from being a tough war horse to a gentle father of many foal babies!



Looking at all the horses around me - some brown, some black, some spotted like a painting - I thought about how wonderful it is that horses come in so many beautiful colors. We horses are lucky to have our warm fur coats, and we don't care what color another horse is. We're just happy to be horses!

Of course, I still knew I was special - a thoroughbred among wild horses. But I tried not to brag too much about it. After all, a true gentleman doesn't need to show off!

"Life is pretty good," I thought as the stars began to twinkle above the camp. "From war horse to father of future warriors' horses - that's quite a change!" And with that happy thought, I settled in for another peaceful night in my new home.

## # Chapter 11: Freedom Finds a Way

I had hoped my time with the Comanche tribe would end with celebration and honor. After all, I had worked hard teaching their horses to be brave and strong. Maybe they would give me a special award, or at least some extra treats! But sometimes life has different plans, even for a very special horse like me.

"Times are tough," the tribal leaders said as they patted my shiny coat. They praised how well I had trained their horses, but I could sense something wasn't quite right. Soon I learned that the tribe needed money, and they had decided to sell me at the market in Rio Grande City.

A young Comanche named Mowway was chosen to take me to the market. We traveled together with his spotted horse, who wasn't very friendly and kept to himself the whole journey. The road was dusty and dry, stretching endlessly under the hot Texas sun. At least Mowway made the trip a little nicer by softly singing songs and making up poems as we walked.

When we reached Rio Grande City, Mowway carefully brushed my coat until it gleamed. The marketplace was buzzing with activity - people everywhere, horses of all sizes and colors, and the sound of voices bargaining and laughing. I stood proudly as people came to admire me. Everyone wanted to touch my soft mane and stroke my strong sides.

But then something unexpected happened. A tall man with a big mustache discovered a special mark on my hip - a brand with the letters "SCHJ" that had been there since I was very young. The man's face turned serious. "Where did you get this horse?" the man demanded, his voice sharp. "Found him with wild horses," Mowway answered quietly.

The man didn't believe him. I could feel the friendly market atmosphere suddenly turn tense, like the air before a storm. My skin tingled with that familiar feeling of danger approaching - I had always been good at sensing tr

Mowway was clever enough to know we needed to leave quickly. He jumped onto his spotted horse's back, but there was a problem - I was still tied to the other horse! We couldn't run fast enough together. Behind us, angry shouts filled the air. Someone even fired a gun into the sky, making my heart race.

In that moment, Mowway made a choice that would change everything. He reached down and untied the rope that held me.

I felt the rope fall away and suddenly realized what this meant - I was free! As the chaos of the marketplace faded behind me, my heart soared with possibility. I didn't know where I would go next, but I knew this was the beginning of another adventure.

And so I galloped away, my hooves carrying me toward whatever tomorrow might bring. After all, isn't that what freedom is all about?

## # Chapter 12: A Tricky Situation

The hot Texas sun beat down on me as I walked along the dusty road. My hooves kicked up little clouds with each step, and scratchy bushes stretched as far as I could see. I was tired and hungry - I hadn't had a proper meal in days, just dried grass here and there. How I wished I could find that wonderful pond from my earlier adventures!

In the distance, something sparkled on the road like water, but I knew better. It was just a trick of the hot sun - what humans call a mirage. But wait! There was something else coming toward me that wasn't just my imagination: a cart pulled by a slow-stepping mule.

My first thought was to run and hide in the bushes. But my empty stomach made me curious. Maybe this traveler would have food?

The man driving the cart looked different from the cowboys I usually saw. He wore a wide-brimmed hat, round glasses, and fancy city clothes with a checkered pattern on his pants. His cart was piled high with suitcases, boxes, and bundles of all sorts.

"Well, what do we have here? A fine horse with a saddle!" the man exclaimed, taking off his hat to wipe his forehead. I could tell right away that this wasn't someone who knew much about horses - you could see it in the way he handled his mule.

The stranger reached into his cart and pulled out something that made my nose twitch - a piece of bread! My stomach growled. Should I trust this stranger? He wasn't like Lance at all, but I was so hungry...

"Easy there, beautiful horse," the man said softly, holding out the bread. "Come and get it!"

I carefully stepped forward and took the bread. It was dry and hard, but when you're hungry, even stale bread tastes wonderful! The man quickly pulled out another piece, and even though my instincts told me to be careful, my empty stomach made me move closer.

That's when everything went wrong. As I reached for the second piece of bread, the man grabbed my reins with both hands! I reared up and neighed in protest, but I was too weak from hunger to fight back properly. The stranger tied me to the cart, right next to the mule who kept turning to stare at me with its big eyes.

When the man cracked his whip to make the mule move, I tried my best to stand still - all four hooves planted firmly in the dusty road. But the mule was stronger than I expected, and the reins hurt my head when I tried to resist. Finally, I had no choice but to walk alongside the cart.

As we moved slowly down the road, I wondered what would happen next. I missed Lance more than ever and wished I had listened to my instincts instead of my hungry stomach. But I was clever and brave - surely I would find a way out of this tricky situation!

### # Chapter 13: The Clever Escape

I learned that the man with the cart was named Eliah Cooper, a traveling peddler who loved to sing silly songs to his mule, Dolly. As we traveled, I wasn't feeling my best. Without being able to run free and exercise, my strong muscles were getting weaker. I missed galloping across open fields and carrying Lance on exciting adventures.

Dolly the mule seemed used to this way of life, pulling the cart day after day. I watched as she accepted the old hay and stale bread that Eliah gave her, but I couldn't bring myself to eat such things. I was used to fresh grass and proper horse feed. My stomach growled constantly, and I felt myself getting thinner each day.

Finally, we arrived at a marketplace. Eliah tied me to a post and unhitched Dolly, letting her graze freely on the grass near the square. I watched as Eliah set up his rickety table and began selling his goods to the townspeople.

"Step right up, good people!" Eliah called out cheerfully. "I have everything you need - clothes, special lotions, and useful things for your homes. All at amazing prices!"

People gathered around, drawn in by Eliah's friendly manner and funny way of talking. He held up pairs of gloves, claiming they were made from the finest leather.

"Five pairs of gloves for five dollars!" he announced, holding them high. "No, wait - I'll add one more pair because I'm feeling generous today!"

While everyone was busy watching Eliah's show, I noticed something interesting. Dolly kept looking back at the crowd instead of eating grass. Then she began moving away from the marketplace, little by little. I watched carefully as Dolly walked further and further away, until suddenly - she disappeared completely!

My quick mind put the pieces together. Without Dolly to pull his cart, Eliah would need another animal to help him travel. I realized with a start that I might become the new cart-puller! That was no life for a proud riding horse like me.

Determined not to become a cart horse, I pulled at my reins. The post they were tied to shook, but held firm. It hurt my head to pull so hard, but I knew I had to find a way to break free. I was meant for greater adventures than pulling a peddler's cart!

As the crowd haggled over gloves and Eliah showed off his wares, my mind raced. There had to be a way out of this situation. After all, hadn't Lance always said that I was the cleverest horse he'd ever known? Now was the time to prove it!

The sun beat down on the marketplace as I watched and waited, hoping for my chance to escape. I may have been hungry and tired, but my spirit was as strong as ever. Whatever happened next, I knew one thing for certain - I wouldn't give up!

#### # Chapter 14: A Daring Escape

I knew I had to act fast when I saw Eliah coming toward me with new reins. The peddler wanted to make me pull his heavy cart now that Dolly was gone. But I was a proud riding horse, born to carry brave riders like Lance - not to drag carts full of peddler's goods!

"Easy now, easy," Eliah said in a sing-song voice, trying to put the metal bit in my mouth.

But I wasn't about to let that happen! I rose up tall on my back legs, pawing at the air with my front hooves. Eliah stumbled backward and fell with a surprised "Oof!" dropping the reins. I didn't waste a second - I turned and galloped away as fast as my legs could carry me, following the path where Dolly had disappeared.

Just as I had guessed, I found Dolly not far from the marketplace. She had stopped to munch on some plants by the roadside. I had to admit that Dolly was smarter than I'd first thought - she knew exactly how to escape when she wanted to! But we weren't safe yet.

"We can't stay here," I thought to myself. "This is the first place Eliah will look for us!"

I noticed Dolly's big ears twitching back and forth, listening for any sign of the peddler coming after us. The wind whispered through the leaves of the scrubby trees, but there was no sound of pursuit... yet.

While Dolly seemed happy to keep eating the dusty roadside plants (which I wouldn't touch - I had much finer taste!), I knew we needed to find a better hiding place. I jumped off the road and started weaving through the trees and bushes, heading toward the rising sun.

But what happened next surprised me completely! After traveling for a while through the brush, I suddenly found Dolly standing right in front of me. Somehow, she had taken a shortcut I didn't know about and beaten me there! I realized that Dolly knew these paths very well - she understood which plants were good to eat and where all the best hiding spots were.

Looking at the clever mule with new respect, I wondered if maybe I should trust her, at least a little bit. After all, sometimes the best friends come in unexpected packages. And right now, we both needed to work together to stay free!

As the sun climbed higher in the sky, Dolly and I, unlikely new companions, needed to decide what to do next. Would we keep running, or had we finally found a safe place to rest?

#### # Chapter 15: The Brave Mule

I was surprised to discover just how clever Dolly the mule really was. She knew exactly where to find fresh water, the tastiest plants to eat, and the safest places to rest. I had grown up with humans bringing me hay and taking care of my every need, but Dolly knew how to survive in the wild.

As the days grew cooler and autumn winds began to blow, Dolly and I became true friends. We would sleep close together at night to stay warm, and during the day, Dolly would show me all her secret spots for finding food. I had to admit that having a mule for a friend wasn't so bad after all!

One chilly morning, just before sunrise, I woke up with an uneasy feeling. Something was watching us from the bushes! I gently nudged Dolly awake. She stood up, her big ears turning this way and that as she listened, but then lay back down as if everything was fine.

Then I saw them - two eyes glowing in the early dawn like stars. A big mountain cat was crouching in the bushes! I let out a warning neigh: "Ee-ha-ha-haa!"

This time Dolly jumped up quickly, just as the big cat sprang from its hiding place. My heart pounded as I watched the mountain cat grab onto Dolly with its sharp claws. But what happened next was amazing! Instead of trying to run or kick, Dolly did something completely unexpected. She lowered her head to the ground, arched her back, and then - using her powerful legs - she did a complete somersault! The surprised cat found itself trapped under Dolly's weight.

When Dolly rolled back to her feet, the mountain cat scrambled away as fast as it could, limping and looking much less fierce than before. I couldn't believe what I had just seen! I let out a happy "Hee-haw-haw-haw!" to show how impressed I was with Dolly's bravery and clever thinking.

But a few nights later, I spotted not one but two sets of glowing eyes in the darkness. This time, I knew we couldn't stay to fight. I nudged Dolly, and together we ran as fast as we could through the night.

I thought I would never see my brave friend again after that night. I hoped that Dolly had used her clever tricks to escape and find a safe new home. After all, she was the smartest mule I had ever known, and I would never forget how she had taught me to survive in the wild.

As I galloped on alone under the stars, I carried with me an important lesson: true friendship can be found in the most unexpected places, and even those who seem different from us can turn out to be the bravest heroes of all.

But a few nights later, Light spotted not one but two sets of glowing eyes in the darkness. This time, he knew they couldn't stay to fight. He nudged Dolly, and together they ran as fast as they could through the night.

## # Chapter 16: The Garden Ghost

Living in the forest wasn't easy for a horse like me. Sure, there was grass to eat and water to drink, but I missed the tasty oats and hay that Lance used to give me. Most of all, I missed Lance himself. Every time I thought about him lying hurt on the battlefield, my heart felt heavy.

One evening, as I wandered near the edge of the forest, the most wonderful smell drifted toward my nose. It was coming from people's gardens! There were rows and rows of vegetables - crunchy carrots, leafy lettuce, and the most delicious-looking cabbages I'd ever seen. My stomach rumbled just looking at them.

"Just one little bite won't hurt," I thought to myself. So that night, I crept into my first garden. The cabbage was even better than I imagined! It was so crispy and sweet that before I knew it, I'd eaten three whole heads.

Being clever (and having learned from Lance's battle planning), I made a special map in my head. I gave fun names to all the gardens: Carrot Palace had the juiciest orange carrots, Cabbage Kingdom grew the biggest, crunchiest cabbages, and Lettuce Harbor had rows of fresh green lettuce. Each night, I'd visit a different garden so nobody would catch me.

The other horses I met by the water holes didn't understand. "You're becoming a vegetable addict!" they nickered at me. But they just didn't appreciate good food like I did. After all, I wasn't just any horse - I was Lance's horse, and he had taught me to appreciate the finer things in life.

Of course, my midnight snacking didn't go unnoticed. Soon, the whole town was talking about the mysterious "Garden Ghost" who visited their vegetables at night. The local newspaper even wrote a story about me: "Beware the Ghost Horse! A large Arabian stallion has been seen sneaking through gardens after dark!"

I had some close calls too. One night at the place I called Potato Bar, a man with a rake nearly caught me! I had to use all my cavalry training to make a quick escape. As I galloped away, I could hear him shouting and see lights turning on in all the houses. I never went back to that garden again!

Sometimes I had funny dreams about my garden adventures. In one dream, Lance and I were flying through the air to Carrot Palace, where soldiers were having a battle using vegetables instead of swords! They were throwing carrots and cucumbers and even giant pumpkins at each other. When I woke up, I couldn't help but laugh at how silly it was.

I knew I probably shouldn't be sneaking into gardens and eating people's vegetables. But being alone was hard, and these nighttime adventures made me feel a little better. They reminded me of planning battles with Lance, even if now I was planning something quite different!

The townspeople never did figure out who the Garden Ghost really was. But every time I heard children telling spooky stories about the mysterious horse who loved vegetables, I couldn't help feeling a little proud. After all, being a Garden Ghost was much better than being just another lonely horse in the forest.

Still, deep down, I knew this wasn't the life Lance would have wanted for me. He had trained me to be brave and noble, not a vegetable thief! But until I could figure out what to do next, at least I wasn't going hungry. And maybe, just maybe, these garden adventures were helping me stay clever and quick - just like Lance had taught me to be.

## # Chapter 17: The Trap

Sometimes I wondered what Lance would say about my garden adventures. He always taught me about respecting other people's things, but my hungry tummy often spoke louder than my conscience. "A hungry horse has to eat," I would tell myself, though deep down I knew Lance wouldn't approve.

One day, while sneaking around the gardens, I accidentally stepped into a little flower garden. It looked like a child had planted it with great care, with wobbly rows and colorful flowers all mixed together. My big hooves left marks in the soil, and I felt terrible about ruining someone's hard work. I hung my head in shame, wishing I could fix what I'd done.

But the biggest garden of all was what I called the Horn of Plenty. It was a special place where lots of people from town grew their vegetables together. There were beans climbing up poles, tomatoes ripening in the sun, and oh, those wonderful cabbages! Even better, hardly anyone lived nearby except for a kind old man who didn't have a home of his own.

One night, I got myself into big trouble at the Horn of Plenty. Someone had set up a trap with nets, and I got tangled up like a fish! I kicked and struggled, but the more I moved, the more stuck I became. Just when I thought I'd be trapped forever, the kind old man came and helped me get free. He didn't want anything in return - just patted my back and sent me on my way. I gave him my most thankful "neigh-ha!" before galloping off. But my garden-raiding days were about to end. Remember that sneaky peddler, Eliah Cooper, and his friend Matt Hudson? Well, they had been following my trail, clever as foxes. They found some of my mane hair in the trap and knew exactly where to find me.

One night, I trotted to the Horn of Plenty and couldn't believe my eyes. There was the biggest pile of cabbages I'd ever seen! They were stacked up like a mountain, fresh and crispy and oh-so-tempting. A little voice in my head warned me it might be a trap, but those cabbages looked too good to resist.

I tried to be careful. I circled around the pile, looking for anything suspicious. But my craving for those delicious vegetables was too strong. Finally, I couldn't help myself - I dove right in, munching and crunching those wonderful cabbage heads.

I was so busy eating that I didn't notice Matt sneaking up behind me. Before I knew what was happening, I felt his lasso around my neck. In that moment, I realized how far I'd fallen from the proud war horse I used to be. Instead of carrying Lance bravely into battle, here I was, caught like a common garden thief!

As Matt held the rope tight, I thought about Lance and all he had taught me. He hadn't just been my rider - he'd been my guide, helping me be the best horse I could be. Now I was in real trouble, and for the first time since losing Lance, I truly understood how much I needed his wisdom and friendship.

What was worse: I knew I might end up having to pull Eliah Cooper's heavy cart around town. It wasn't the future Lance would have wanted for his brave war horse. But I had nobody to blame but myself and my unstoppable craving for vegetables.

Standing there in the moonlight with a rope around my neck, I wished I could start over and make better choices. But sometimes we have to learn our lessons the hard way - even clever horses like me.

#### # Chapter 18: A Surprising Day in Town

I wasn't happy at all. For weeks now, I'd been tied to Mr. Cooper's traveling cart, forced to follow along behind a stubborn old mule. Sure, I got plenty of hay to eat instead of those endless vegetables from before, but I missed being a proper riding horse. Mr. Cooper, the merchant who owned the cart, didn't even know how to ride! To him,

I was just another thing to sell, like the leather gloves in his cart.

But on this ordinary market day, something extraordinary happened.

My ears perked up at a commotion in the street. A young man on horseback was shouting angrily about revenge, his long coat flapping in the wind. Across from him stood a tall, quiet man leaning on a wooden stick. There was something familiar about him that made my nose twitch with interest.

Then it hit me - that smell! We horses have amazing noses, you see, even better than dogs sometimes. We can recognize people by their scent alone, and this scent... I could hardly believe it. It was Lance! My Lance, whom I hadn't seen since that terrible day of the battle!

My heart started racing. The angry young man was reaching for his gun, and Lance was in danger! I pulled against my rope, trying desperately to break free. My struggling spooked the mule, who dragged the cart right into the middle of the street. BANG! The gun went off, and the poor mule let out a terrible cry as it was hit in the backside.

The second shot hit Lance, and my heart nearly stopped as I watched my beloved master fall. A young woman with dark skin - a nurse named Emma - rushed to help Lance. I strained to see through the crowd gathering around them. Was Lance okay? Had I found him only to lose him again?

Then the crowd parted, and I saw something amazing. Lance was standing up! He was hurt in the arm where the bullet had grazed him, but he was alive. I noticed something else too - Lance had a wooden leg now. That explained why he'd been leaning on the stick. But wooden leg or not, it was really him! I wanted to neigh with joy. Emma quickly bandaged Lance's arm, and Mr. Cooper agreed to let them use his cart to take Lance somewhere safe. Finally, after all this time, I got my wish. I gently pressed my nose against Lance's good arm, just like I used to do when I was a young horse. Lance leaned against me, patting my neck and running his fingers through my mane, just like old times.

Emma watched us with tears in her eyes. She could see how special this moment was - a brave horse and his rider, finally together again after so long apart. Our adventures might be different now, but I didn't care. I had found my best friend again, and that's what mattered most.

As for the angry young man? He had galloped away on his mare, thinking he'd won. I thought there was something familiar about that mare too, but I couldn't quite remember why. Maybe she was one of the young horses I'd known long ago. But that didn't matter now. What mattered was that Lance and I were reunited, ready to face whatever adventures came next - together.

#### # Chapter 19 A Different Kind of Job

I had never pulled a cart in my life. We warhorses are meant for riding, not pulling things like common work horses! But when I saw Lance needed to get to the doctor, I knew what I had to do. Even if it meant wearing the mule's harness.

"Neigh-ha!" I said, which in horse language meant something like, "Well, I guess I'm doing this for Lance!" Emma helped put the harness on me while Troy helped Lance into the cart. I walked as smoothly as I could to Dr. Cleaver's office, making sure not to bump or jostle the cart. Lance was hurt, after all, and I wanted to take good care of him.

But then the trouble started.

When Troy brought the cart back, Mr. Cooper - the peddler who'd been keeping me tied to his cart - had some ideas I didn't like at all.

"This horse pulls quite nicely," he said, looking at me with his merchant's eyes. "I'll keep it pulling my cart until my mule gets better."

I saw Troy's face turn red with anger. He came over and patted my neck. "I think you're mistaken," he said firmly. "This horse belongs to Lieutenant Lance Jacobs. I know because I served with them both in the war."

But Mr. Cooper wouldn't give up. "I caught this runaway horse myself! That makes it mine!" "Oh really?" Troy said with a smile that wasn't really a smile. "Then you must know about his brand mark. If you can tell me what letters are branded on this horse, you can keep him."

Mr. Cooper's face fell. "Brand? There isn't any brand!" "Oh, but there is," Troy said. He pointed to my left shoulder where, sure enough, the letters SCHJ were still visible - even if they were a bit faded. "South Carolina, Hubert Jacobs. This is Lieutenant Jacobs' horse, plain as day."

Mr. Cooper tried to argue some more, but one of the townspeople laughed and said, "Look at these two arguing! Must both be Texans - neither one wants to back down!"

That made everyone laugh, even Mr. Cooper. And just like that, the argument was over. I was officially back with Lance, right where I belonged.

Still, I had to admit - for my first time pulling a cart, I hadn't done too badly. But don't tell any of the farm horses I said that. A warhorse has to maintain his dignity, after all!

#### # Chapter 20 What the Newspaper Said

I was dozing in the warm afternoon sun when Emma came running out to the stable, waving a newspaper in her hand. Lance was right behind her, moving a bit slower with his wooden leg, but I could tell by his face that something exciting had happened.

"Light, you won't believe this!" Emma said, patting my neck. I know humans don't think horses understand newspapers, but I'm special, remember? I stretched my neck to look at the paper she was holding.

The newspaper told quite a story about what had happened in town that day. There was even a drawing of the street where Lance and that angry young man had their showdown! I read along as Emma held it up:

**\*DRAMATIC CONFRONTATION ON MAIN STREET\* \*By Thomas Webb\***

\*Yesterday's peace was shattered when Jefferson Davis Jr., son of the infamous raider, confronted Lieutenant Lance Harper in front of Cooper's General Store. Young Davis blamed Lt. Harper for his father's defeat during the war...\*

I had to snort at that part. If only they knew the whole story! I remembered Jefferson Davis Sr. very well from my war days. His son had looked just like him, right down to the way he sat on his horse.

The article went on about how brave Lance had been, standing there with just his walking stick, even though he knew Davis Jr. was armed. I felt proud reading that part. That was my Lance - always brave, even without a weapon.

But what made me happiest was seeing Lance's name in print: Lieutenant Lance Harper. It felt good to know everyone would remember how he'd handled things that day, staying calm even when that angry young man was shouting about revenge.

"Well, Light," Lance said, scratching behind my ears just the way I like, "looks like we're famous now." I nudged his good arm gently. Famous or not, I was just glad we were together again.

Emma folded up the newspaper and tucked it into her apron pocket. "I think this calls for an extra apple," she said with a smile, pulling one from her other pocket. I couldn't agree more! After all, it's not every day you and your best friend end up in the newspaper.



## # Chapter 21 Light and Lance: Together Again

My heart felt like it might burst with joy! After so many adventures apart, I was finally back with Lance, my beloved human friend. Troy had brought us together again, and I couldn't have been happier.

Lance's hands were shaking as he gently stroked my neck. I could tell he was just as excited and emotional as I was about our reunion. Being a steady horse with four strong legs, I stood still and calm, even though my heart was dancing inside. Lance now walked differently - he had something called a prosthetic leg to help him move around. I wondered for a moment what it would be like if I ever lost one of my legs, but quickly pushed that thought away. What mattered was that Lance could still walk and ride!

There was someone new in Lance's life - a kind-hearted nurse named Emma. She moved around Lance like a gentle whirlwind, always making sure he had everything he needed. I noticed the special way they looked at each other and how they seemed to dance around each other without even touching. It reminded me of how I felt about my friend Tiara from the wild horse herd.

Lance smelled different now too. Gone was the sharp scent of gunpowder from his soldier days. Even the familiar stable smell from when he was younger had changed. Now there was something soft and flowery about him - probably from being around Emma so much. It was nice, like the smell of a warm spring morning.

Though Lance couldn't ride me right away (that would take some practice), we found other ways to have fun together. Everyone in Brownsville still knew me as "the lieutenant's horse," even though Lance preferred to just be called Lance. My new job was pulling his special carriage around town, and oh, how Lance's face lit up when we went for rides! It reminded me of when he was just a boy, and we'd race across the fields together.

Oh! I almost forgot to tell you about the funny thing that happened with the mule! The animal doctor had to remove a bullet that got stuck in the poor mule's behind. But don't worry - the mule was just fine! Its thick skin had protected it, and the bullet wasn't deep at all. That mule ended up being quite proud of its "war wound" and would tell the story to anyone who would listen.

To that, I can only say "neigh-ha!" (That's horse language for "how silly!")

As I munched my apple, I thought about how strange life could be. One minute you're just a horse tied to a peddler's cart, and the next minute you're reunited with your long-lost friend AND in the newspaper! I wondered what adventure would come next for Lance and me. Whatever it was, we'd face it together.

That night, as the stars came out over the stable, I could hear Lance and Emma talking softly nearby. They were making plans for tomorrow, and this time, I knew I'd be part of those plans. No more following behind a cart for me - I was back where I belonged, with my family.

The End

Postscript: Horse Ranger - A new Comet was born on the Sky of Western books!

If you enjoyed Light's story, there are more adventures to discover in "Horse Ranger," a novel for older readers like and adults. **My hint for grandparents - read together with your grandchildren!** Light's tale continues with even more thrilling adventures!

You can find much more about Light, the Western horse, and its human friends at <https://ilpohalo.com>.

Otsikko