

Joey

Joey was the best kind of horse. The kind that carried stories in his bones and kindness in his heart.

Long before he ever met her, Joey had been wild. He had run across wide, sunlit deserts where the wind whispered through his mane and the ground thundered beneath his hooves. He had friends then, other wild horses who raced him at dawn and rested beside him under starlit skies. Life had been hard, but it had also been free, and Joey had loved every inch of it.

But the years carried him forward.

He had many homes after that. Some kind, some not so much. There were people who didn't quite understand him, and a few scars that stayed with him longer than he would have liked. Still, Joey kept going, because that's what strong horses do.

And then one day he met her. She was small, so small he lowered his head just to look at her properly. She smelled like sunshine and hope, and when she reached out her hand, Joey felt something he had never quite known before. Home.

From that moment on, they belonged to each other.

She would talk to him about everything. Her dreams, her worries, the little things that felt big and the big things that felt scary. Joey listened to it all, his soft eyes steady, his ears flicking gently as if to say, I'm right here, and he always was.

Together, she learned how to ride. At first, she was unsure, her hands a little shaky, her confidence still growing. Joey took care of her, he moved gently when she needed it, bravely when she asked for it, and patiently, always patiently, when she doubted herself. "Try again," his quiet strength seemed to say. So she did, and one day, they learned to jump.

Joey thought it was the most wonderful trick in the world. The wind rushing past, his girl laughing, the feeling of flying. Oh, how he loved it. He would run as fast as he could, ears forward, heart full, knowing she was right there with him.

They smiled together in those moments. A horse and his girl, both knowing something special without needing to say it.

They would always be best friends. Years passed, as they always do.

Every day, Joey watched for her. He knew the sound of her footsteps, the way her voice lifted when she called his name. He still searched for peppermints and licorice, still loved a full tummy and a soft bed, still felt grateful for a life where he was never too cold or too hot.

Slowly, gently, the memories of being wild faded. Not because they weren't important, but because something even more important had taken their place. It was her. He still carried a few old scars, but they didn't hurt anymore. All he really remembered was how much he loved his girl.

She started to grow up. She rode him a little less, and Joey snacked a little more. They didn't need to do as much to feel close, they just were. Time softened things. Joey had to learn to eat softer food. His legs didn't always feel as strong, and sometimes it took him a little longer to stand. His eyes grew cloudy, and occasionally, he forgot small things, but never, not ever, did he forget her.

He still listened for her and still looked for her. Still felt that same warmth when she came near.

Because horses are smart, and Joey was the smartest of them all, he knew what was coming. He knew his body was growing tired, even if his heart was still full. He didn't want her to worry and so he carried on the best he could, offering her the same steady love he always had.

He wasn't sad, not even a little. Because Joey had been given the greatest gift a horse could ever have, he had her.

She had loved him right back, and that was enough.

Still, he worried about one thing. He worried that when the time came, she would be sad.

He wished he could tell her not to be. Because he could already feel it, that pull, that quiet call back to open spaces and running winds. He knew he would run again. Fast. Free. Just a little bit wild, like he used to be.

He also knew something else.

Horses never really leave their person.

Not the ones who love with their whole heart. Joey would still be there.

In the rustle of the breeze. In the rhythm of hooves in memory.

In the quiet moments when she needed him most.

He wished he could tell her: All you have to do is look up.

Because when she did, when she lifted her eyes to the night sky and thought of him, Joey would find her.

He would nicker softly, just like he always had. And the stars?

Oh, the stars would hear him.

They would shine just a little brighter for her and she would know her best friend was still there.

Watching.

Waiting.

Loving her always.

Then one day, Joey knew his time had come.

He layed down gently, remembering his best friend, and closed his eyes, thinking of all the happiest moments they had ever shared.

He felt a deep, quiet peace settle over him.

That peace was his little girl who was his sunshine and his hope.