



Rise to the
HORIZON

HYUNAH KIM

Rise to the Horizon

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Dedicated to all Animal Lovers on this Earth.

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CHAPTER 1

Poseidon

KREMS, AUSTRIA, JUNE 1992

The pungent odour of smouldering hay alarmed Poseidon. The last stable boy had left, carelessly leaving a cigarette butt on the barn floor, not so far away from a bundle of hay stacked next to the wall.

Föhn, the warm, dry, down-sloping wind, notorious for melting snow and triggering avalanches on the mountain slopes, gusted its way along the leeward side of the Austrian Alps and roared through a small barn window. The cigarette butt started rolling and suddenly flew, landing right in the middle of the haystack, the treacherous wind reviving the dying flame. Little by little, the embers spread across the hay, and in a matter of moments all of the haystacks in the barn had been consumed by its fury.

The horses immediately started shrieking in terror. The entire structure of the barn was built out of wood, and the fire raged on unabated, devouring everything in its path. The scorching heat produced a toxic gas, and soon enough the air in the barn transformed into a gateway to a hellish death.

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Poseidon leapt forward, but he was doomed in his stall, just like all the other stablemates trapped in the flames. He frantically searched for an escape route, but the whole scorching wall around the barn was surrounded by fire, apart from his stall door which was locked. He bucked in a frenzy, gasping for air as the ravenous combustion reached the wooden panel behind him, and the unbelievable heat opened its cavernous mouth to engulf him.

Inferno scatenato (Hell unleashed).

If such a thing existed, this was it.

* * *

MR MORITZ BOLTED OUT of the house in his pyjamas. He and his wife had been jolted awake by the undeniable sounds and smells of burning, as wisps of smoke penetrated the house through the open windows and the shrieking of the horses flooded their senses.

Mr Moritz's wife Martha rubbed her eyes as she inhaled the acrid air. The bedroom was right across from the barn, and the gusty wind was heading towards her, yanking the windows wide open. She started coughing as her eyes burned and watered. She dashed to the bathroom and soaked a hand towel, putting it over her nose and mouth, then she grabbed another towel for her husband before scrambling down the stairs and calling the fire department on her way out.

The flames had broken loose on the eastern part of the wooden building where the horses were, and the gate was at its other end to the west. The blaze was torching its way around the wall towards the roof, the fierce Föhn accelerating its spread. It was only a matter of time before the whole barn would be engulfed... unless the firemen could arrive there first.

Just as Mr Moritz opened the barn gates, Martha tossed him the wet towel to cover his nose and mouth with. Then he started guiding the agitated horses out as best as he could, their panicked state not making it easy for him at all. Martha positioned herself inside the barn near the gate, so she could pull the horses out as soon as Mr Moritz freed them from their stalls.

With the first horse gripped tightly in her hands, Martha flung open the portal to the corral across from the barn and guided her inside. Gradually, the rest of the horses were ushered in, one by one, until there was only one still trapped inside:

Poseidon.

Poseidon was one of the most prominent show jumping colts of the times, who had won the last championship at the tender age of just three years and ten months old. He had taken everyone by surprise when he outperformed King Leopold, a three-time champion stallion who had been snatching all the recent show jumping tournaments in Austria.

Martha had been against the idea of her husband training Poseidon to compete against the other fully-grown horses at such an early age. Generally, horses would only begin training to jump fences at the age of five, not before, since most horses continued to grow until about the age of seven.

Mr Moritz had said, "I just wanted to see his potential. See what he's got."

To which Martha snarled, "Too much too soon will only cause premature injuries. Let my baby grow first!"

"It is perfectly safe to plan and monitor a training program with an appropriate amount of jumping at any age," Moritz had countered.

Then one day, Martha had stormed into the training ground barking orders to immediately halt Poseidon's training, and throwing her husband a paper to sign. She was accompanied by her family lawyer. In simple terms, the legal document stated that Poseidon was only allowed to train for one hour a day from then on, and failing to comply would result in funds being cut for all his training expenses, and all the competition fees for his show jumping tournaments. Not only that, but Martha threatened to file for divorce if he didn't comply.

Mr Moritz was speechless. With smoking fury fuming in the back of his head, he had no choice but to sign. All of their financial decisions depended on his wife. She owned the ranch and all the horses, having inherited them from her father. Mr Moritz was merely a

trainer at her family's vast property that boasted more than a hundred horses.

Martha had been so young when she had fallen in love with their trainer. Her father had not been happy with the union, but he made sure the marriage to his darling daughter wasn't motivated by her wealth. He made them sign a prenuptial agreement, stating that in case of divorce or Martha's death, Mr Moritz agreed to waive his right to claim a share of the estate, including all the horses on the property, the manor house, their savings, and his right to seek alimony or retirement benefits; even his country club membership was waived, and so this obviously included Poseidon.

Poseidon was not just a prize-winning horse, he was Martha's favourite. She had a weak spot in her heart for him, loving him like the son she never had. The fear of losing her precious baby chilled her spine.

* * *

THE GRIM REAPER was approaching Poseidon from behind, threatening to swallow him whole. The heat and the toxic smoke were suffocating him, just ahead of the final arrival of the terrifying flames. Poseidon bucked and kicked the stall door in his frenzied attempt to save himself, but it refused to give in. He was about to be burned alive. Undoubtedly the most atrocious death one could imagine.

No creature on this earth deserved to die in such a terrible way. Poseidon had done everything he was asked to do; the humans around him bid him to train, to run, to jump, and he obliged them. And all that for this? To be left to die an agonising death.

When Mr Moritz materialised from the barn into the thick fog, hoisting the last horse except for Poseidon, Martha rushed into the inferno to look for him.

“Martha, nein!” shouted Mr Moritz, but she ignored her husband’s plea and dashed to the last stall. The flames raged on furiously from the wall next to Poseidon and were heading towards the shingle roof. If the fire reached the ceiling, the precious colt would be beyond saving. Martha couldn’t breathe and she couldn’t see a thing.

Her eyes stung with the toxic smoke as she held her breath and ploughed her way through to Poseidon’s stall. The poor colt was bucking up in panic, trying to jump his way out. His eyes were wide, revealing the white sclera in their upper corners as he screeched his lungs out. In a split second, a burning splinter of cracked wood landed on him. Poseidon reeled as the demon claimed him. A diabolical force bit into his flesh, scorching his tissues and tendons. The unbelievable heat started burning him alive.

As soon as Martha removed the metal latch, Poseidon bolted out, knocking Martha out of the way. The mad colt burst out of the barn, sprinting past Mr

Moritz, and only missing him by an inch. Had his master not swiftly moved out of the way, he would have been off his feet and hitting the ground hard.

Poseidon rampaged through the open door of the corral, bouncing over and over like a rodeo horse as if he could buck the fiend off his hip, but he couldn't. The pain was agonising as the devil planted its venomous fangs firmly into his skin and began consuming him.

Martha coughed violently as her husband carried her out in his arms. The fire department sirens blared as they approached the ranch, then several firefighters spilled out of the truck and headed towards the barn, but Martha had only one thing on her mind as she rasped between her puffs of breath.

"Where is Poseidon? Is he safe?"

"He's in the corral. He's safe."

"He's injured. I saw a piece of burning wood drop on his back. I want to see him."

"Martha, you were knocked out. You have to see a doctor yourself."

"I'm fine. Call Mr Müller. Poseidon needs a vet."

"Martha..."

"Oh, Karl! Will you listen to me for once, for heaven's sake?! Call Mr Müller..."

Martha tried to breathe deeply, but she was still choking from the toxic smoke she had inhaled. Even then she gestured for Karl to call the vet until he obliged, before he called a doctor for her.

* * *

"CAN you do something about that horse? His hip got burned and it looks bad. The wound still seems to be smoking," Karl asked one of the firefighters.

The team leader, Tobias, a middle-aged man with years of experience, observed the horse as it madly hopped around.

"Not when the horse is jumping around like that. Nobody can approach him now without the risk of getting hurt."

"Can you at least spray him with water?"

"Not directly. The water pressure from the hose is too powerful. It will further exacerbate the injury."

Tobias squinted at the corral against the night sky.

"What we can do is to shoot the water above the corral so that it rains down on him. At least it will stop the scorching."

"Then go ahead."

Tobias immediately snatched the hosepipe and jumped into action. The high-speed water gushed out towards the sky and poured down into the corral, transforming into a shower of mercy, blissfully raining down on Poseidon.

However, the first stream landed on Poseidon's head and shoulder as he was galloping around. Tobias circled the hose high above the whizzing horse, following his movement until he hit him on the flank at the point of

the hip, finally reaching the injury. As soon as the fresh stream touched Poseidon and quenched the agonising heat of the wound, the fabulous thoroughbred ceased to buck and slowed down to a canter.

* * *

MR MÜLLER CRINGED at the sight of the deranged animal. What once had been a coveted prize winner, the dream of every horse owner, had now become a simmering ball of hostility. The wounded colt, apparently returned from hell with ghastly burns on his hip, sulked and flattened his ears, showing his teeth, with his eyes wide, ready to charge at anyone who approached.

Poseidon, the animal that had yanked him out of bed in the middle of the night, positioned himself in a corner of the corral away from the other horses, on alert for any potential threats that might approach him. His fierce eyes bearing fire from hell warned not to come any closer.

Mr Müller had dealt with skittish horses many times, but something about this colt made his hair raise as a chill slithered down his spine. The sickening thud of his hooves as he drummed his fore heels was infused with madness, and the uneven gushing of his snorting boiled with rage.

In short, for the first time in his career as a vet, Mr Müller was terrified. He had no choice but to sedate the horse before he treated his wounds, but the question was how? Approaching the animal to inject him was dangerous, if not suicidal. The only option was to shoot him with a tranquilliser from a distance, but he was a lousy shot, especially at night.

Mr Müller frowned as he scrutinised the chaotic scene before him in the middle of the night. Firefighters teamed around the barn, pouring water from the ground and the air above the east wing, with two men perched on a forklift, and the team leader Tobias barking orders. The air was thick and suffocating from the smoke, the frightened horses constantly shrieked, and one particular fiend incarnated from hell was skulking in his corner.

Mr Müller scampered to his jeep, loaded tranquillisers into his rifle, and dashed back to find Tobias toiling with the hosepipe. He hollered at Tobias raising his rifle.

“Do you know how to shoot?”

Tobias paused and gawked at the rifle, then at the vet, then at the black thoroughbred he had just showered, conveniently cornered in the corral. His eyes grew wide with a big question mark on his face. The poor horse didn't deserve to die.

The vet hurried to answer. "No, no, it's a tranquilliser. That horse needs to be sedated before I can treat him. Can you shoot? I'm a terrible shot."

Tobias blinked, his eyes fixed on the weapon, still dumbfounded.

"A little."

Mr Müller handed him the rifle. After a moment of hesitation, Tobias grabbed the firearm, glancing at Poseidon across the haze of smoke in the darkness.

"Tranquilliser, not live ammunition, right?"

"Yes, tranquilliser. It's a prize-winning show jumper. He will never be allowed to be put down."

M Moritz would rather kill his wife than kill this precious colt, the vet thought, holding back the words that lingered on the tip of his tongue.

"All right then."

Tobias aimed at Poseidon. He had learned to use firearms during his military service. He was trained to hit a designated target in a field, but never a live creature, let alone a moving target. The clumsy rascal was wobbling side to side, drumming his hooves and erupting in furious puffing between his uneven breaths. Even at a safe distance, Tobias' hands were slick with sweat. Each breath ravaged his throat, and his arms trembled.

His callused hands and the middle finger wrapped around the trigger were unsteady as he tried to concentrate on his target. He directed the rifle to the area

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over the shoulder and the flank. He appeased his shaking hands by clenching his teeth, and he waited until his stance was still as a stone.

Tobias stopped breathing and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER 2

Poseidon

KREMS, AUSTRIA, JUNE 1992

When Poseidon woke up, he found himself in an unknown place. Birds chirped merrily outside as he sniffed the freshly dried hay filling the stall beneath him. The lavish morning sunlight streamed through the high window, pooling on the rich reddish-brown oak panel in front of him.

It smelled different here. Even the very air he breathed was pure and pleasant. The soft snorting and the sound of munching grass from the other horses nearby drifted through the window. Why was he in an unfamiliar place? Poseidon scanned his environment once again. He didn't have a clue.

As the effect of the heavy sedative started to fade, a sharp pain stung him on his back hip. He screeched... then everything came back. The fire in the barn, the agonising pain as the devil devoured him alive, the simmering fury he unleashed against anyone who attempted to approach him... Humans – the source of his misery. Abhorrent creatures... summoning the red demon with its scorching fangs.

A rustling of movement accompanied by pleasant scents, his favourite apple, rosemary, and citrus alerted him to a human presence. He pricked his ears.

A golden-haired man appeared outside his stall, his crushing turquoise eyes twinkling as he studied Poseidon. He stood there quietly for a long moment, his eyes fixed on the fabulous thoroughbred. Poseidon flattened his ears, showing his teeth, and started drumming his fore heels. His hostility applied equally to everyone. Even this beautiful youth with a delightfully sculpted face like a marble statue.

Poseidon glared at him and blasted a loud huffing towards him. The young man stood his ground without even flinching. He was perfectly calm and immobile like he was a sculpture, his sparkling eyes never leaving Poseidon. He took a step forward. His voice was ever so soothing as he crooned, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to help you. My name is Axel. Nice to meet you, Poseidon."

Poseidon neighed, an angry puff of air swishing the man's shiny golden hair off his gorgeous face, as he bashed the stall wall with his strong hooves. The impact vibrated through the whole wooden structure of the barn.

Axel purred, caressing Poseidon's crest with his eternal blue eyes.

"I know... you're in pain. You're upset. But I'm not here to hurt you. I will never hurt you... You're a brave

boy, aren't you? You can let me ease your pain. I can help you if you will let me."

Another eruption poured from Poseidon's muzzle, as the colt's eyes burned with fury. Axel slowly raised his hands, showing him both of his palms.

"Look at me. I'm not a vet. I don't have a needle in my hand. Do you see? And I'm not a trainer. I don't have a whip. See? I'm here to help you."

Poseidon fixed his eyes on this curious human. He was unusual. He didn't look like anyone he had encountered. All the other people around him until now, the trainers, the grooms, the stable boys, the vets, his master and his wife, all had a purpose when they approached him. This particular one he couldn't figure out. He didn't understand why he was there and what he wanted from him. As Poseidon paused growling, Axel stole a few steps and carefully opened the stall door. He slipped inside like a shadow and stood barely a metre from the hostile colt that everybody else feared.

Poseidon watched every movement Axel made. Without hesitation he bucked, leaping like lightning, and struck the intruder with his powerful hooves. Axel moved swiftly to his left, veering towards the door, barely dodging the fatal blow by an inch on his kneecap. The impact would have shattered his knee bones to pieces.

Before the seething horse launched another attack, Axel dashed out of the door and latched the metal hook.

Poseidon banged the door a split second later, accompanied by a loud cracking that was heard by everyone else in the ranch. He let out a thunderous neigh that stormed the entire place, threatening to crumble it.

Axel leaned against the opposite wall, panting, a sweat breaking out on his forehead.

“Scheiße...”

A soft curse moistened his lips. He admitted he made a mistake in approaching the animal too soon. His misjudgement almost cost him his leg. He could calm most of the agitated horses by giving them a holistic massage on the sensitive T-zone on their foreheads... but not this one. It would take a lot longer than he expected. He sighed and conjured up his plan B.

* * *

Poseidon was left alone for a while. He had bought his peace by chasing off the young man, but he was not happy in the small confined space of the stall. He was an award-winning show jumper after all. Being locked up in broad daylight wasn't something he was used to. Especially when he could hear the other horses grazing outside, enjoying the fresh morning air under the golden disc of the morning sun gilding the corrals.

Poseidon started kicking the wall and the wooden door, but the constant battering and knocking only

frustrated him further. A fresh scent of apple and citrus wafted along, and he raised his muzzle and pricked his ears.

The young man was back. This time he was carrying a portable easel, a bundle of large papers, and a stool. He placed them against the opposite wall across from Poseidon outside his stall, moving slowly as he observed the colt. He had a dark brown bag flung on his shoulder which he dropped on the floor. This time he didn't say a word; instead, flashed a beautiful smile at Poseidon. His magnificent blue eyes beamed, absorbing and reflecting the light around him at the same time. He settled down on the stool, his back against the wall, and unfolded his bag to produce charcoal pencils.

Poseidon snarled, hissing uneven puffing while wobbling from side to side. Axel took a charcoal pencil and studied the fabulous thoroughbred. He marvelled at the sight of the power of nature. Regardless of his ordeal, Poseidon glittered with a shiny black coat, and strong, lean muscles on his shoulder, elbow, forearm, and flank, all the way to his stifle, dock, and gaskin.

Axel imagined how this magnificent creature would move on the show jumping course. How, if he had a chance, Poseidon and he would hurtle across the field, galloping and jumping obstacles as if they were made of one body, amid the billowing wind and roaring crowds...

Axel was a skilled rider. Since the age of thirteen, he had started training for racing and show jumping. He attended his first competition at fourteen regardless of his young age.

By the time he reached sixteen, he had won several racing and show jumping tournaments. He quit horse competition though, after he witnessed a show jumping stallion fall right next to him and get injured so badly that the vet had to euthanise the poor horse in front of him. At seventeen he went to Paris to study at the *École de Beaux-arts*.

When he came back, he didn't participate in any more competitions, because he had seen too many horses suffering and told himself enough was enough. At the same time, he was accepted at the famous art school in Vienna. So he went off to study in Vienna, coming back to his grandparents' horse ranch in Krems every weekend.

During the weekends and holidays, he went around to the horse sanctuaries where they gathered injured horses from various racing competitions, and helped them to recover and get back on their feet again. When people saw that he made significant changes in the horses' behaviour and health, his work and dedication started to become well known over the years.

Some people brought the troubled horses directly to his grandparents' horse ranch, making the stud farm a sort of rehabilitation centre for injured horses. Some of

the horse owners abused his kindness, since he never charged for his services, and never refused a horse in pain.

Axel took a pencil and started a croquis of Poseidon's head down to his neck; the part of his body shown above the stall door. His observant, penetrating eyes scrutinised every single detail, while his hand danced around the large paper in several confident strokes.

In a matter of a few minutes, a rough image of the colt materialised, and half an hour later vivid illustrations of the "fiend-incarnate" appeared. Anyone could recognise the seething horse, with its fiery eyes showing enormous white sclera, flattened ears, and its puffing muzzle. Axel's skilful hands created a mirror image of Poseidon throwing a simmering glare at him from the canvas.

Axel levelled a look of pure curiosity as to the true origin of this wretched creature's predicament and unyielding hope right back at Poseidon, who struck another blow at the door, rattling the wooden panels. Axel drawled in his low, soothing voice, by lengthening vowel sounds long enough as if singing.

"Eeeeasy... Poseidon. Easy..."

Poseidon hissed at the sound, followed by more banging. Axel clicked his tongue and mimicked the sound of a filly pleasure-snorting. He knew exactly how to reproduce that sound; he learned it even before he

spoke human languages. Poseidon pricked his ears at the familiar sound and Axel cooed.

“I will get you out if you trust me. If you promise not to hurt anyone...”

Axel tried to lure the rogue, not moving from his position, as Poseidon blurted out another threatening huff. Axel read Poseidon’s mind: he wanted to get out of the stall.

“Not so fast, my friend... easy. You have to promise me first.”

Axel stopped drawing and faced the rascal, his dreamy blue eyes flashing hope.

“Promise me you will not hurt me... or anyone outside.”

Poseidon kicked the stall door with a loud bang, and Axel clicked his tongue again, slowly shaking his head from side to side.

“That will not do. If you won’t behave, I cannot let you out.”

He turned his attention to the easel, ignoring the blaring colt. He removed the sketch of Poseidon and put it aside next to the brown bag. While the agitated horse continued pounding, he detached the upper part of the easel and placed another fresh paper on it. Then he dropped onto the floor and sat against the wall, bracing the easel on his thighs. He wanted to try a new drawing from a different angle. Horses almost always looked better when they were positioned higher than the

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painter. He took another pencil this time and began working on a new drawing, oblivious to the rampaging animal.

CHAPTER 3

Poseidon

KREMS, JUNE 1992

By mid-morning, Axel had painted another picture; this time an aquarelle of Poseidon. On his palette, he mixed several shades of dark brown, dark grey, and deep navy blue to depict the thoroughbred's black coat; never once using black. He patiently blended all these colours until finally Poseidon emerged, with his shiny black coat, and a fleck of light in his eyes and on the upper corner of his forehead.

Axel managed to capture the play of light on Poseidon's rich dark coat and the fury in his eyes. His effortless brushstrokes landed naturally in a fit of frenzy. A frenzy that poured through his intense blue eyes, with his penetrating observations under perfectly shaped brows, and his shiny golden hair swept into a flamboyant fall over his forehead.

By the time Axel finished the aquarelle, Poseidon stopped bucking, neighing, and pounding on the stall door. He stood, merely glaring at the painter and snorting from time to time.

Axel paused with his drawing, put down the brushes next to the palette, and quietly stared at Poseidon. His crushing eyes twinkled with the light in the barn. The

colt never took his eyes off Axel, as he watched his every movement. Axel purred, his eyes studying Poseidon.

“Do you want to see what I have done?”

Poseidon snorted, puffing hot air.

“I drew a picture of you. I have two now.”

Poseidon started flattening his ears again, showing his teeth.

“No, no. I will not hurt you. I just want to show you.”

Poseidon gawked at Axel as he slowly stood up with a painting in each hand. Axel took a few tentative steps towards him, moving slowly until he was about an arm’s length from the colt.

“Eeeasy... that’s it. Good boy.”

Axel took each painting and lifted it so Poseidon could see it. The sketch in his left hand, and the aquarelle in his right. The horse peeked at the paintings, the hostility in his eyes fading, though he was still wary.

Axel held the pictures a moment longer, his hands perfectly still. Then he breathed the words, “I will take a break now for a few minutes, okay? I will be back soon.”

Axel stepped back, leaving the paintings on the floor against the wall. As he skittered out of the barn, Poseidon followed his every step, madness fading from his eyes and melting into something different... as if whirl-winding waves were stilling down to mirror-like lakeside water.

As time passed, the barn would look empty without the painter, who silently stayed with Poseidon all morning until he would prick his ears and pull his muzzle upward, willing to detect any sign of apple or citrus wafting through the barn again.

* * *

FRESH TENDRILS of morning breeze perfumed the air with bergamot, lemon, and Granny Smith apple. Poseidon lifted his head, eyes wide, and craned his neck out of his stall as far as possible.

The painter was back! Poseidon's eyes glinted as Axel stepped in, sweat coating his forehead and hair. He changed into a new pale pink linen shirt, while beaming in the sunlight that infiltrated the barn through the small window. It seemed to Poseidon he was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. And with the most delightful smell, too.

Axel smiled as he approached Poseidon, immediately detecting the change in the colt's behaviour.

"Did you miss me?"

Axel gave the horse a boyish wink, grinning from ear to ear. Poseidon nickered in answer, puffing joyful air above Axel's forehead.

"Do you want to go out?"

Poseidon allowed Axel to come near him, and Axel murmured in his ear.

“Do you want some fresh air outside? Are you ready to trust me?”

The excited colt snorted as if he understood, pushed his muzzle towards Axel’s neck and hair, and sniffed.

“Then show me you will be kind to me.”

Axel leaned closer, letting the animal smell him further. Poseidon breathed his favourite apple, lemon, and bergamot as if he couldn’t get enough.

“All right then, I will take you out. But you should show me your respect, as I respect you. We will be gentle to each other as friends, right?”

Another snorting.

Axel held the metal latch to open the door, and his eyes sparkled as he whispered, “I’m going to open the door now. Promise me you will not hurt me.”

Poseidon wiggled from side to side at the prospect of a promenade. Axel closed his eyes as if to pray, and he breathed deeply before he pushed the door open, his shoulders tight and his jaw tense as if to brace for another attack.

He slowly pulled the door half way and observed Poseidon. The colt’s tail, ears, and the muscles on his flank seemed wired to a convulsive current. He was fiercely watching Axel. The horse appeared stable, although agitated with excitement, his muzzle blowing off steam and pumping air towards Axel with wide eyes.

Axel stood silently for a moment and tried to listen to his inner voice. His instinct told him to go ahead. With

one false move, he could get his kneecap shattered, or some similar injury.

He took a deep breath, and with his heart in his mouth, slid into the stall for the second time. He stood perfectly still and wary, barely a meter from the deranged animal. Sweat trickled from his gorgeous Renaissance-sculpted face and the back of his new shirt was already drenched. The fabulous thoroughbred stood staring at him; his simmering hostility thawing away into amicable excitement.

Axel lifted a neck-rope carefully and showed it to Poseidon, crooning ever so softly and clicking his tongue until his calming voice became a healing melody.

“I will prepare you to go outside. You will be nice and gentle, all right? Yes... eeeasy... That’s it... good boy...”

The horse advanced towards the door after Axel expertly pulled the rope around his neck in a loose knot and led him across the barn, letting out a long sigh and wiping the sweat off his face with the back of his hand.

* * *

POSEIDON BEAMED UNDER THE SUN. Regardless of his wound, the fabulous thoroughbred trotted and cantered, spinning around the corral as Axel stood in the middle, directing him. Axel had to refrain from pushing

Poseidon further in fear of his wounds breaking open again.

His black coat glowed against the backdrop of the green knolls, his strong muscles moved with grace, and his powerful hooves and heels kicked the soil off the ground, spraying dust that trailed along his path.

Everybody at the ranch gathered around the corral and watched with their eyes wide and jaws dropping. The rumours were that Poseidon was not only the most expensive horse Martha possessed, but also in the whole region of Krems an der Donau too. Everyone in the equestrian society in the area knew his name and dreamed of buying him.

That was... until he got mad. Poseidon attacked two stable boys and one of them was knocked down and brought to the hospital. He bit Mr Müller and kicked one of the trainers who was still limping. His stall door was replaced after it gave way under his hooves.

Whatever Axel did alone with this wretched creature... witnessing the colt rejoicing in the big round pen was beautiful... and this was just a prequel.

After many, many rounds of the field, Axel held his arms high with a sharp whistle and Poseidon slowed down and halted. The colt stood facing him and blurted out, neighing as if to say "now what?"

Everyone observed in absolute silence. Kricja shuddered, her vivid blue eyes scrutinising Poseidon as

if searching for any signs of aggression. The deranged horse could charge Axel at any moment, she thought.

Poseidon and Axel stared at each other for what seemed like a long time to Kricja and the other people around, then Axel simply turned around and walked away. Poseidon glared at him with his eyes glued to his back, while Kricja stopped breathing... as did everyone else.

After two heartbeats, Poseidon traced Axel's steps to the corral gate, shadowing him closely as Axel strode ahead to the barn. The deranged animal was following Axel as a dog hustled after his master. Everybody gawked at the scene. Kricja's hand flew to her chest and Ivan's eyeballs protruded from their sockets. One stable boy blinked with an open mouth and shook his head slowly. No one spoke until Poseidon had disappeared into the barn after Axel.

Tears welled up in Kricja's eyes as she muttered, "To jest cud." (This is a miracle.)