

The Secret of the Silver Horse



Jennifer paused at the door of the shed and turned to her two friends. "Ssshhh," she commanded. "We don't want anyone to hear us. This is a secret."

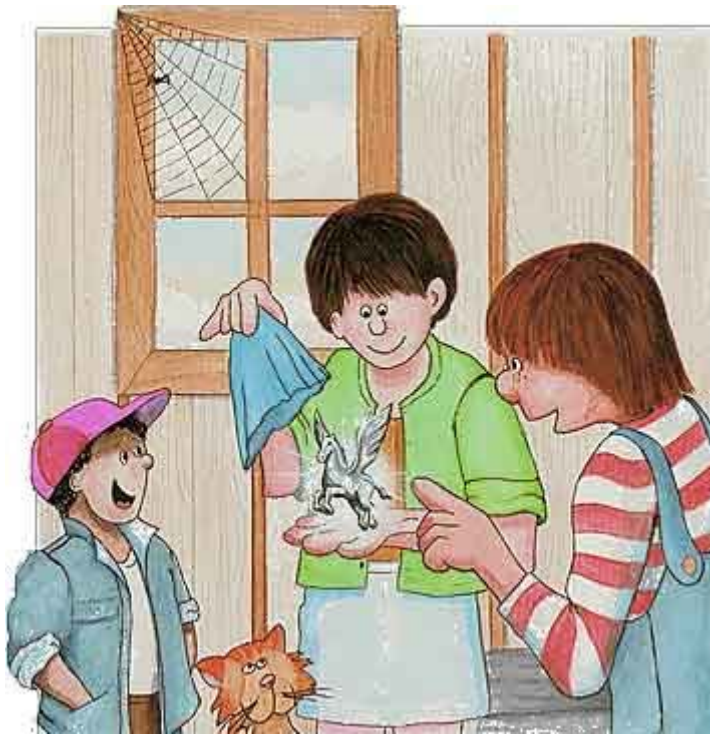
The shed door creaked open on its rusty hinges and Jennifer stepped inside. Manuel and Terry followed, pulling the door shut behind them.

Soft sunbeams came through the dusty window.

Jennifer's parents kept lots of things in the shed. There were gardening tools, old car tires and wooden boxes.

Manuel climbed onto a box and peered at the things on the shelves. "I don't believe you," he sniffed. "There's no flying horse in here." Terry turned to Jennifer and said, "Let's see it."

Without a word, Jennifer picked up a flower pot hidden under a sack and tipped something out. It was wrapped in blue cloth.



Manuel and Terry leaned forward for a closer look. Jennifer removed the cloth and held the object up to the sunbeams. There was a gasp from the others as the light touched the silver horse's magnificent wings.

"There!" Jennifer said proudly. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Wow," said Manuel.

Terry said nothing.

"But you'd better not tell anyone," Jennifer said sternly. "You promised, remember. It's our secret."

The silver horse was no bigger than Jennifer's hand. Its wings were swept back, as if it were going to fly away.

"Where did you get it?" Manuel asked.

"It was in a box of stuff my mother was going to throw out," Jennifer said. "She told me that it flew for years and years on the hood of a big car, until the car wore out and went to the junk yard."

Manuel said it was the neatest thing he had ever seen, neater even than the old coins he once buried in a cookie jar in the pumpkin patch.



Jennifer looked over at Terry, seated on the tires. Terry looked sad and

was scuffing the dusty floor with one foot.

"What's wrong? Don't you like my secret?" she asked.

Terry said without looking up, "I have a secret, too. You're not the only one, you know."

"I told you mine," said Jennifer. "You have to tell us yours."

"Can't."

"Terry doesn't have a secret," snorted Manuel.

"Do too," muttered Terry.

Jennifer began to wrap the horse in the cloth, then stopped.

"Here. I'll let you hold it, if you'll tell us your secret."

Terry looked at the horse, at the swept-back wings, at the flying hoofs and flowing mane, and wanted very much to hold it.

"Can't," said Terry at last. "I'm not allowed to tell."

"Who says?" demanded Manuel.

"Big Person," replied Terry, in a low voice.

"Don't be silly," said Jennifer. "Why can't you tell us?"

Terry frowned. "Big Person said I'd be in real trouble and bad things would happen to me if I told anyone."

"You can tell us," said Jennifer, polishing the horse gently.

"We're your friends. That is, if you really do have a secret."



There was a long silence before Terry spoke again. "Big Person did things to me. Hugged me and stuff."

Manuel and Jennifer looked at each other. "So what?" asked Manuel, with a shrug. "My aunt always hugs me when she comes to visit."

Jennifer said, "I knew you didn't really have a secret."

Terry stood up with a red face: "No, non, no it's not like that. It's... well, it's different."

"What do you mean?" asked Jennifer.

Suddenly, Terry began to cry, and the words tumbled out. "Big Person put a hand inside my pants and kept touching me down there. I didn't know what to do. Big Person kept saying I wasn't to tell anyone about it, that it was a secret."

Manuel and Jennifer said nothing. They believed Terry and knew Big Person had made their friend very unhappy.

"You should tell a grownup," Jennifer said at last. "My father said no one is allowed to do things like that to me. He said to always tell him if something happened."

"But it's a secret," Terry sobbed.

"No it isn't," said Jennifer. "It's not a nice secret, not like the horse."

Terry wiped at the tears with a sleeve. "What if I tell a grownup and the grownup doesn't believe me. What if Big Person finds out?"

Jennifer gave Terry a hug. Manuel put his arm around Terry's shoulders.



"I know!" said Manuel. "Tell a grownup, and if that one doesn't believe you, tell another one."

"That's right," said Jennifer. "My father said if he or my mother were not there I was to tell someone I really liked, like my teacher or someone."

Manuel sat beside Terry on the tires. "Grownups can help you if you tell them."

"But I won't be keeping a secret," said Terry miserably. "You said we had to keep secrets."

"I told you," said Jennifer. "You should tell a grownup about secrets that make you feel unhappy or upset."

Jennifer handed the horse to Terry. "here, you can hold the horse."

The horse was smooth and shiny and Terry imagined the great distances it must have travelled and the exciting places it must have seen, riding proudly up there on the front of the car.

After a while, Jennifer gently wrapped the horse in the blue cloth and put it back in its hiding place in the flower pot. Manuel rubbed some of the dust off the windowpane to let more sunbeams in.



The three left the shed, closing the door behind them, and walked towards home. "Don't forget to tell a grownup," said Jennifer to Terry. "A grownup will know what to do. What Big Person did to you was very wrong. It was not your fault."

That very day, Terry told a grownup what Big Person had done. Terry knew that the grownup would do something to help.

But Terry said nothing about the secret of the silver horse.

It was a wonderful secret, a secret that Terry wanted to keep.