



the horse

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The horse's earliest memories were of the wide plains of Hungary, covered with rich tall grasses blown in the winds that swept the land. Even now his nostrils quivered at the remembrance.

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He loved to roam the wide empty spaces where the only sounds were his hooves and the cry of birds. Shaking his thick mane and dilating his nostrils, he answered the unknown calls of the wild. Day after day he roamed, avoiding the marshy places where instinct told him there was danger.

One day without warning, he heard a faint whistling sound in the air, and something tight and hard caught his neck. He was caught in a vicious rope halter and a man leapt on to his back. He bucked and shied but the weight remained firm.

He tried to escape by bolting as fast as he could run. But the halter grew tight, and, choking, he stopped.



Miserably, he hung his head and allowed himself to be led away.

The days ahead were unhappy for the horse. Gone was his freedom and instead he knew long and weary rides, rough treatment and different food. His captors took him to far away lands.

He then joined the army and gradually came to know the meaning of the bugle calls in the barracks. Every morning he would march out from his stable in front of the waiting soldiers and his master would mount up and lead his men.

The years passed and the horse was proud of his work with the army. Daily he would ride out with his master and the men.



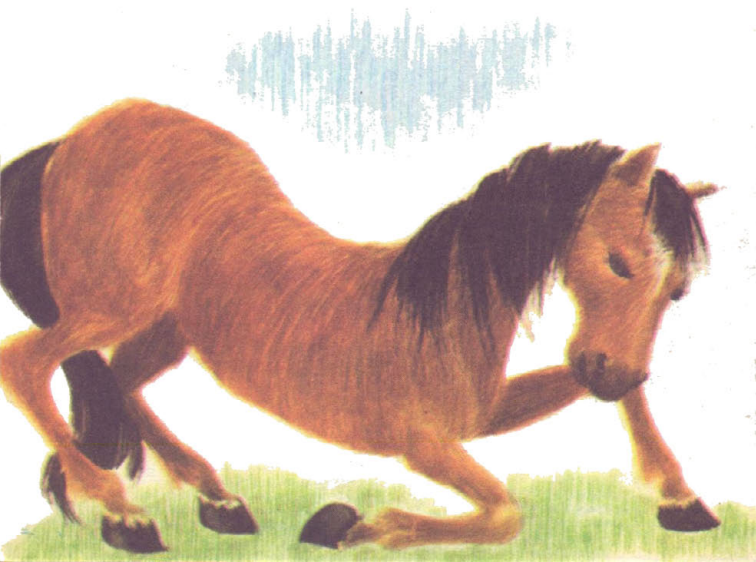
One day, while riding at the head of the regiment, his master drew his sword and the horse was caught up in a cavalry charge. All round him was noise and confusion. Cannons roared, horses and men screamed. Though he was secretly afraid, he gathered his strength, jumped over the bodies of men and horses and carried his master far in front of everyone. He found himself surrounded by a wall of pikes and swords and stopped. In panic, he reared, turned round and blindly ran back as fast as he could run.

When the war was over, the horse returned home to his stable. It was good to be back, enjoying the sweet hay, and the sounds of the barracks



around him. It made him feel happy, for every morning he would ride, and rest in the evenings.

Time passed by. The horse felt his strength lessening, no longer did he leap over fences, and his legs ached after a long ride. His eye no longer scanned the far horizon and he felt his age. One day he stumbled,



throwing his rider and from then on the general rode him only at a walking pace in the fields.

One day, his stable door opened and his master came in with some soldiers leading a young horse, sweating and foaming at the mouth. The new horse was to be placed under the window and the old horse moved into a corner. The old horse

raised his sad eyes and looked at his master. So this was the horse that would replace him!

Then the two horses were left alone. The newcomer made a dash for the hay, wrenching it from the stall and then, as if offended, the old horse made a dash and bit the other's neck.

Every day the general would order the new horse to be saddled and would ride him far away over the fields. The old horse watched in silence.

The two horses were not friends. The old horse would strain against the rope as if to attack the younger one, then decided he wanted the hay instead, and quietly ate his fill.

This went on for a long time. One night the younger horse brought his head close to that of



the old horse, staring at him. The old horse stood still for a moment, as if trying to make up his mind.

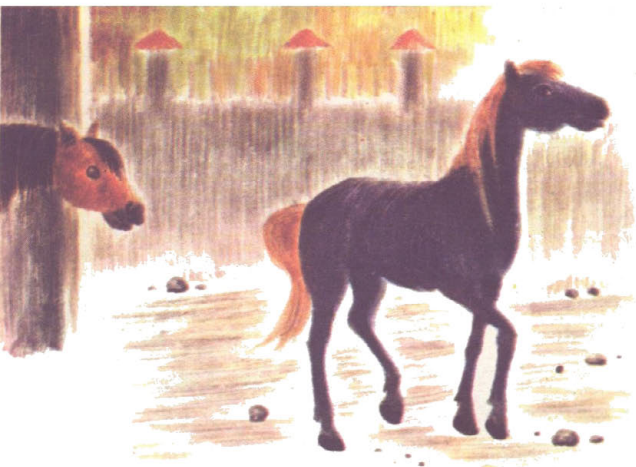
Then, he stretched his neck, and their noses touched. They stood for a while. The old horse gathered up his strength, and tore off the metal ring. He pressed against the young horse and they stood side by side eating their hay. He was never tied again.

The two horses became great friends. When the young one went out to be ridden, the old horse would slowly follow behind the other's hoof marks, until the soldiers led him back to the stables.

He would wait for his friend to return and they would eat together,



until, tired of chewing, the old horse would quietly doze and dream of far-off days when he roamed free in the plains of Hungary.



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