



THE MORGAN HORSE SHOW

Heather was now riding every day after school, and everything was coming together except for the cantering.

Chauncy thought that the young girl and her horse looked beautiful, confident, and elegant. And the ride would always go well ... until it was time to canter on the right lead. Sometimes Blackjack would pick up the canter without backing, but usually Chauncy had to grab the reins and move the pair forward before the horse would cooperate. And without fail, Blackjack would pin his ears and swish his tail in annoyance—something Chauncy had told Heather the judges did not like. But still, Chauncy was very pleased with their progress. It was a huge improvement over the bucking and outright refusals the horse had given the trainer, and Chauncy felt that with any luck, they would be okay in the show ring.

The show was a weeklong extravaganza. It began on Monday with a “Welcome to the Show” party and ended on Saturday with a “Hope to See You Next Year” party. In between, there were all

sorts of classes that made use of the Morgan's versatility. These classes included in-hand, pleasure saddle, pleasure driving, park horse, jumping, trotting races, dressage, hunter pleasure, trail, carriage, and even a costume class for the youngsters, as well as the Futurity classes. Blackjack's first class would be the Futurity in-hand class on Wednesday morning, followed by his pleasure driving class on Friday and then the saddle class on Saturday afternoon. Saturday night, which was when all the final championship classes were held, was also the night that the Futurity grand champion would be pinned—amid much fanfare.

When the week of the show finally arrived, Chauncy took Blackjack to the fairgrounds on Monday to give him a chance to settle in before his first class. He had decided to stable the horse with a good friend of his, Tom MacDonald. Tom was a well-known and well-respected trainer who would be busy all week showing his clients' horses, as well as showing Blackjack in the in-hand class. The outside of Mr. MacDonald's stalls were decorated with dark blue curtains with gray trim, and on each curtain the words "Tom MacDonald Training Stable" were embroidered in the same shade of gray as the trim.



The morning of the in-hand class, Heather arrived and approached the first young woman she

saw, looking for Blackjack's stall. "Excuse me," she said.

The young woman, in her early twenties, was dressed in very grungy looking jeans and had hair that probably had not seen a brush in a long time. But she looked like she knew her way around.

"I'm looking for Mr. Campbell, who is supposed to be stabled with you guys. He has a horse that is showing—"

"Oh yeah" came the response in a very gruff but friendly voice. "You mean Chauncy. He's in the prep stall with his horse right now. It's that middle stall right there," the groom said, pointing to a stall off to the left.

"Thanks," Heather responded. She and her mom walked toward the prep stall.

"Chauncy?" Heather asked as she peered into the stall.

"Heather! I'm glad you could make it. Come on in and tell me what you think of our boy. Looks pretty good, huh?" exclaimed a very excited Chauncy.

Heather cautiously stepped into the stall. What she saw amazed her. Blackjack was standing patiently on the cross ties while two people were busy putting the finishing touches on him. Heather knew that Blackjack was a beautiful horse, but she had never seen him sparkle so. His hooves were painted jet black and had such a shiny gloss that Heather could actually see her reflection in them, while his coat positively glistened.

"There, how's that?" asked the groom who had been working on Blackjack's hooves as she stood up. She held a small jar that contained hoof polish, some of which dripped down the sides of the jar. The hands of the groom also sported numerous black patches, obviously from an overzealous application of the polish.

"Looks great," answered the man who was standing in the back corner of the stall next to Chauncy. "Why don't you just put a little baby oil around his eyes and nostrils? We've got to go in another five minutes."

"Did they announce our class already?" the other groom asked, a bit worried. "I didn't hear anything."

"Yeah," answered the first groom. "They just gave the ten-minute call."

"Heather," Chauncy said, pulling the girl's attention away from the grooms, "this is Tom MacDonald. He will be showing Blackjack for us today."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. MacDonald," Heather said, holding out her hand.

"Nice to meet you too, Heather," Mr. MacDonald replied as he shook Heather's hand. "I've heard a lot of nice things about you."

Mr. MacDonald was a handsome man—tall, thin, and probably about 45 years old, she guessed. His hair was beginning to gray around the edges and his face was starting to show the wear that years of hard work out in the sun had caused. Still, she thought, there was a very gentle look to him.

"Uh oh." Heather smiled, a bit uncomfortable at the thought of somebody talking about her horse skills.

"Don't worry, it was all good," Mr. MacDonald assured her. "Chauncy told me how you were able to get this guy to finally canter. I also happen to know that Chauncy thinks very highly of you, because he wouldn't change this horse's barn name for just anybody!"

"Five-minute call for class 52, Futurity Three-Year-Old In-Hand," interrupted a loud voice, coming from the speakers outside.

"Tammy, grab the bridle," Mr. MacDonald instructed.

"Here it is," came the reply as one of the grooms handed the trainer a handsome leather bridle. Unlike the bridle that Heather used for riding, the in-hand bridle only had one bit and one set of reins. The noseband and browband were red patent leather, with a thin black line in the center. The tack looked really striking on Blackjack's beautiful head. As soon as the bridle was on, Mr. MacDonald asked everyone to leave the stall. Once they'd vacated the area, he and Blackjack came out. Instantly, Heather's beloved horse came to life. He walked forward majestically, head held high upon a gorgeous, upright neck. He gave out a loud whinny and everyone laughed.

"Where's Jill?" Mr. MacDonald asked no one in particular.

"Here I am," came the reply as yet another young woman in her early twenties came running up. She was dressed in off-white chinos and a red polo shirt, which matched Mr. MacDonald's outfit.

"You're tailing, right?" the trainer asked.

"Yeah."

"Chauncy, what's that mean?" Heather asked.

"She's going in the ring with Mr. MacDonald to help him show the horse. When they lead the horse down the rail at a trot, she'll be behind and off to the side, hence the name 'tailer.' It helps to keep the horse on the rail."

Everyone quietly followed the trainer and his charge to the grandstand ring. When they arrived, Heather saw a number of horses standing around, quietly waiting for their turn to enter the ring. Mr. MacDonald picked a place to wait for the class away from the other horses. As soon as he stopped, the grooms set to work cleaning the horse one last time. Heather couldn't believe the attention paid to grooming, and watched as every part of the horse's body was checked for specks of dirt. The previous class had already been pinned, and the competitors were now leaving the ring through the out-gate at the other end of the ring. A burly looking man standing by the in-gate then opened it, and the announcer's voice blasted through the loud speakers.

"Class 52, Futurity Three-Year-Old In-Hand, please enter the ring."

Suddenly, 15 horses came to life. Trainers' voices rose above the whinnies and snorts with commands of "Come on," "Hut, hut," "Up now," "Let's go," "Get up" and all sorts of other instructions, given to get the horses' attention. Just like the others, Blackjack seemed to grow several inches as he puffed himself up and trotted next to Mr. MacDonald into the ring.

Heather had never seen a ring full of more beautiful horses. Most of them were bay, but there were also three chestnuts. Blackjack was the only black horse, and he really stood out. Mr. MacDonald and Blackjack were the fifth team in line as they followed the leaders around the ring. There was a photographer in the center as well as a ringmaster—a man in a bright red riding coat telling the exhibitors where to line up their horses.

Once all of the horses were positioned, the judge motioned to the first trainer to bring his horse to the center of the ring. Once there, the trainer posed the horse in what Chauncy explained to Mrs. Richardson as a "stretched position," his hind legs slightly back and front legs perpendicular to the ground. Heather nodded in agreement as Chauncy spoke; it was the same show pose that Blackjack had taken on that cold winter day when they first met. Turning her attention back to the ring, she saw that the horse was a beautiful bay stallion, with the most amazing tail. It was so long that it actually touched the ground. The judge walked over to the horse and then quickly made his way around the animal, scrutinizing every single part of him. He stepped back

and nodded at the trainer. Apparently the trainer knew what the judge wanted, since he immediately led the horse to the far wall and trotted him down the rail. As the horse began to trot, several people in the audience started hooting and hollering as loudly as they could.

The judge carefully watched the horse trot down the rail, glanced at his clipboard, and wrote something on it. Then he turned his attention to the next horse. The class went at a brisk pace, and before Heather knew it, it was Blackjack's turn. Heather was so proud of her horse. He held his head high upon his upright neck, and it appeared as though he had puffed his chest out about three times its normal size. He pranced toward the judge, and at Mr. MacDonald's cue, put himself into the show stretch about which Chauncy had spoken. Immediately, Chauncy, the grooms, and Heather began to cheer.

Once the judge was finished looking over Blackjack, he motioned to Mr. MacDonald, who led the horse to the rail and trotted to the far end, much to the satisfaction of the audience. Quite a few onlookers had started to cheer for Blackjack, whom they apparently felt was a top contender in the class.

When all of the horses had had a chance to preen, the judge stepped back so that he could see them as a group. Then he motioned to the first horse in line. Immediately several fans of this horse began to applaud as the trainer led the horse to the center of the ring.

"What's the judge doing, Chauncy?" Heather asked.

"He's picking out his final eight horses, the ones that will get ribbons. He'll pick eight horses to come to the center and then pin his class from that group."

As they talked, more cheers arose from the spectators. Heather turned to look at the horses and saw Blackjack strutting out toward the center of the ring.

"He's going to get a ribbon!" Heather exclaimed.

The judge pulled six other horses out of the original lineup. As soon as the eight finalists were lined up, the audience became rather boisterous. People were yelling and screaming and banging on the rail. The louder the noise got, the more the horses seemed to enjoy themselves. They knew they were showing off to the crowd and that they were indeed special. The judge again looked over the horses, quickly glancing at each one. He went down the lineup and then walked back up. He stopped at Blackjack, looked him over, and then went around him to look at the other side. Then he looked at the horse in front of Blackjack, the one who was first in line. This horse too, was looked at from both sides.

Finally, the judge motioned to Mr. MacDonald to bring Blackjack to the front of the line. The crowd went wild. The judge took one last look at the whole group, scribbled something on his clipboard and then handed it to the ringmaster. The crowd stopped cheering and the horses seemed to sense that the judging was over. They lowered their heads

and stopped stretching, while the trainers started talking to one another. After a couple of minutes, the announcer's voice blasted through the speakers.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have the results for class number 52. First place goes to—" There was a slight pause, as if to build suspense. "—Number 142, Gallant Image, owned by Mr. Chauncy Campbell and shown by Mr. Tom MacDonald."

As soon as the winner was called out, the spectators once again began to cheer. Mr. MacDonald led Blackjack over to the side of the arena where the ringmaster was waiting for him. A blue ribbon was placed on Blackjack's headstall and then the photographer took their picture. As the photo was taken, the ringmaster handed out the remainder of the ribbons.

"Let's have one last look at our champions," boomed the voice of the announcer. The ring was now empty except for two horses. "Reserve is High Tree Go For It, owned by Mary Steele and shown by Fred Gilbert."

The Reserve Champion trotted out of the arena to the cheers of the crowd.

"And let's have a big round of applause for our Champion Futurity Three-Year-Old In-Hand winner, Gallant Image, owned by Chauncy Campbell and shown by Tom MacDonald."

Mr. MacDonald led the horse down the middle of the ring toward the out-gate at the far end of the arena. Everyone cheered enthusiastically, and

Heather couldn't believe how proud she was of the magnificent stallion. The photographer took one last picture of the horse as he strutted toward the gate.



The Futurity Driving Class was scheduled to go first during the Friday afternoon session, promptly at 1 p.m. When Heather and her mom arrived at the show grounds, the class had already started. Heather jumped out of the car before it came to a complete stop.

"I'll meet you at the arena, Mom!" she yelled as she hurried off.

By the time Heather got to the arena, the horses had gone the first way around the ring and were reversing direction. She quickly found Mr. MacDonald and asked him how Blackjack was doing.

"Chauncy is having a good drive today. Blackjack looks real nice. See, there he is."

Mr. MacDonald pointed to a horse at the far end of the arena. Heather looked at Blackjack, who once again looked absolutely gorgeous. But she didn't recognize Chauncy at first. He was all dressed up in a suit and was even wearing a hat. She'd never seen him in anything but old, beat-up blue jeans.

"Wow," she whispered to Mr. MacDonald. "They look great!"

Heather counted just eight horses in the class. "What happened to all the other horses, the ones

that were in the in-hand class?" she asked Mr. MacDonald.

"Well, not all of them drive, and some of them are probably going in the park harness class instead. That's a class for horses that are more animated. They pick their feet up higher."

"I don't see how a horse could pick its feet up any higher than those out there!"

The class quickly came to an end, and all the horses lined up side by side down the center of the ring.

"Grooms in!" instructed the announcer.

Instantly eight people, including Mr. MacDonald, climbed through the rails and into the ring. Each one ran to a different horse and stood by it, waiting for the judge. When the judge approached Blackjack, Heather cheered. As she did so, she heard a familiar voice cheering beside her. She turned to see her mom smiling at her.

Once the judge had looked at every entry, he walked over to the corner of the ring, just to the left of Heather's group, opened a small gate, and disappeared into the judge's booth. Everyone relaxed while they waited for the results and, after a minute or so, the announcer's voice once again came over the speakers.

"We have the results for the Futurity Three-Year-Old Pleasure Driving class. The winner is number 86, High Tree Go For It, owned by Mary Steele and shown by Fred Gilbert."

Several people around Heather began to cheer, while Heather and her mom just looked at each other.

"It's okay," one of Mr. MacDonald's grooms reassured them. "You can't win them all, as long as—"

The announcer interrupted. "Second place goes to number 142, Gallant Image, owned and shown by Mr. Chauncy Campbell."

Everyone around Heather instantly started hollering their approval. Heather smiled and joined in.

Chauncy drove Blackjack to the center to collect their ribbon. The ringmaster pinned the long, flowing red ribbon to the headstall of Blackjack's bridle and gave the horse a friendly pat on the neck. Then Chauncy drove off and made his way to the out-gate.

"Come on, guys, let's meet them back at the barn!" one of the grooms suggested.

"I bet we can get there before they do!" another groom added, and they hurried off. Heather and her mom followed the girls back to the stalls.

"Where are they?" Heather asked once they had all returned to the stabling area.

"Here they come!" one of the grooms exclaimed, pointing off to the left.

Blackjack was approaching quickly, trotting high and proud, the red ribbon still attached to his bridle. As he got closer, Heather could see Chauncy and Mr. MacDonald riding together in the buggy, laughing and congratulating each other.

"Heather!" Chauncy said excitedly. "Good to see you. Did you see the whole class?"

"I missed the first few minutes, but I saw most of it. You two looked fantastic!"

"Thanks, it was a good drive. And it looks like we've got a shot at the championship. Just one more class to go!"



The high temperature for Saturday was expected to be 90 degrees; far too warm, thought Heather, to wear a wool saddle suit. To top it off, her class was scheduled for early afternoon, when the heat would be the worst.

When the Richardsons arrived at the fairgrounds, they immediately headed toward Mr. MacDonald's stalls. They found Chauncy and the trainer's grooms busily getting Blackjack ready.

"Heather!" Chauncy greeted her. "I'm glad you made it! I always get nervous that something is going to happen before one of our classes."

"Heather, darling, it's so nice to see you!" Heather and her parents turned around to see Mrs. Campbell approaching, carrying several cans of soda. "Okay, now who wanted what?" she asked as she started handing out soda. "I've got extras in case I missed somebody. Heather, would you like some soda?"

"No thanks, Mrs. Campbell. I don't think I could drink anything right now."

"Well if you're not going to have a soda dear, why don't you and your mom just follow me into the dressing room so that we can get started on your hair and makeup?"

Mrs. Campbell put down the drinks and motioned for Heather and her mom to follow her. They entered the dressing room, which was actually just another stall with curtains in front of it to provide some privacy. Inside the stall were a couple of chairs, a cot, and several hooks, upon which hung all sorts of shirts, pants, and ties. There was also a small table covered with several brushes, combs, hairnets, a hand mirror, and makeup.

"Sit here, dear," Mrs. Campbell said as she pointed to one of the chairs.

Heather sat down and forced a slight smile. "What are you going to do?" she asked sheepishly.

"Oh, not too much. Just make you look ten years older!" Mrs. Campbell joked. "Relax, honey, I've had lots of practice. You want to look professional."

Mrs. Richardson sat down in the other chair and quietly watched Chauncy's wife work. Within 15 minutes, Heather had been transformed into an older, more sophisticated-looking young woman. Mrs. Campbell handed Heather the hand mirror so that she could see the results.

"You look great, Heather," Mrs. Richardson encouraged her. "Although I don't think that's my daughter sitting next to me!"

"You guys almost done in there?" came Chauncy's voice. "They just called our class!"

The three women looked at each other in panic. "Here, Heather, put your suit on," Mrs. Campbell instructed as she handed Heather the saddle suit. "I've already attached your number to the back."

Heather hurriedly got dressed, and then made her grand entrance.

"Well, well," her dad said as he got his first look. "What do you think, Helen? That's not our little girl, is it?"

"Come on, Dad, stop teasing. Where's Blackjack?" Heather asked, suddenly realizing that she hadn't even had a chance to say hi to her beloved stallion.

"Here he is," Mr. MacDonald announced as he brought Blackjack out of the grooming stall.

Blackjack looked even more beautiful than before. His coat glistened, his polished feet shined, and his bright red patent leather headstall really made his head look gorgeous. The horse immediately saw Heather and nickered softly to her.

"Hi, Blackjack," Heather said quietly as she approached him and stroked his neck.

"Class 235, Futurity Three-Year-Old Pleasure, is about ten minutes away now. You should be making your way to the ring," came the loud voice over the speaker.

"Hop on, Heather," Chauncy instructed as he pulled the stirrups down on the saddle.

Once she was on the horse, Mrs. Campbell handed Heather her derby and gloves. Heather put them on, feeling the heat as soon as she did so. "Gosh it's hot up here," she mumbled.

As they walked to the ring, Heather felt like a princess with her entourage of friends. Once there, Mr. MacDonald's grooms set about cleaning the horse one last time, brushing here, cleaning there. One of them wiped a little trace of drool off the bit while another cleaned Heather's fancy boots with a towel.

"Remember to go easy on that right lead, now. Don't push him, and if he gives you any trouble—"

"Let's have one last look at Birchlane's Get a Life, the winner of class 234, Western Pleasure, Stallions and Geldings," blasted the speaker, drowning out Chauncy's instructions.

"Just relax and have fun." Chauncy smiled as he gave Blackjack one last pat. "And don't forget to breathe!"

"Good luck, honey!" cheered Heather's dad.

Heather gathered up her reins and looked around her. There were probably ten other horses, all quite beautiful and with far more experienced riders, she thought. At that, she started to panic. "Get a grip," she told herself. "You've got the most beautiful horse here, and we're going to show everybody how great he is!"

Feeling better, she urged Blackjack into a trot as the announcer called her class. The gate opened,

and in stormed eleven horses, each one vying for the blue ribbon. As they entered the ring, the organist began playing a little medley whose beat matched the cadence of the horses' trots perfectly.

Blackjack felt good, thought Heather. His ears were forward, he was eager, and he was listening to his rider. Remembering one of Chauncy's instructions, she took a deep breath.

"Class is in order, all trot please. All trot," the announcer instructed. As Heather trotted down the rail, the show photographer took her picture. They continued to trot around the ring several times until the announcer asked everyone to walk. Heather brought Blackjack easily back to a walk and managed to catch a glance of the judge, who was looking right at her.

"All canter, please. All canter."

Blackjack picked up the canter effortlessly, but just as he took his first stride, a chestnut horse came running by him and pushed him toward the rail slightly. Caught off guard, Heather lost her balance and had to use her legs to keep herself on the horse. Somehow, Blackjack was able to overcome this sudden shift in his rider's weight, and continued to canter uninterrupted. Heather regained her balance and shot a nasty look at the chestnut horse, which was now in front of her, swishing its tail from side to side—a sure sign of irritation. As she passed the gate where her cheering section was, she heard Chauncy say, "You're doing great! Keep him going at that speed. That's perfect!"

The riders continued to canter their horses until they were instructed to walk. Within moments, they were asked to reverse and then, after just a short walk, the announcer asked for a trot. Blackjack once again broke into a trot, ears forward, happy to go. His trot seemed so airy and easy to ride that Heather felt she could go on forever. But then she had to bring her horse back to a walk, in anticipation of cantering. This time it would be on the right lead and she didn't know what Blackjack would do. He felt really good, but she had ridden him many times before when he had felt great and still given her trouble. As they walked around the ring, Heather began to get uptight, fearing for the worst.

"Canter, all canter," came the order.

Heather gave the signal to Blackjack, but instead of cantering, he pinned his ears and started to back up. "No, Blackjack, not now, not now," quietly pleaded his rider.

But Blackjack didn't listen to her, and took another step back. Heather tried to urge him on by using her legs, but she could feel her whole body tense up—and knew that Blackjack could feel it too.

Suddenly, the same horse who had run into them before came careening by them, so close that he almost ran into Blackjack again. Distracted by this sudden intrusion, Blackjack forgot about backing up. He pinned his ears back even further and his teeth flashed as he tried to bite the offender. He was unable to reach the other horse, but his forward

momentum carried him into a canter in an effort to catch up to him.

Everything happened so quickly that Heather didn't have time to think, only to react.

"Good boy, keep going," she said, more to herself than her horse.

Within a few strides, the other horse was too far ahead of Blackjack to be any trouble. The chestnut's canter was more like an uncontrolled gallop, and as Heather watched, the horse passed almost everyone else, still swishing its tail. Meanwhile, Blackjack quickly settled down into his rocking horse canter. Knowing that the worst was behind her, Heather began to relax and actually managed to smile slightly.

After they'd cantered around the ring three times, the announcer told everyone to walk and then line up in the center of the ring. Heather brought her mount to the middle where the ringmaster was standing, both arms held out to show everyone where to stand. She tried to get to the end of the line so that she could be close to Chauncy and the others, but after she had stopped Blackjack and set him up in his show stretch, two other riders brought their horses between her and the gate. She glanced over toward her fans and could see them all smiling. Her mom, seeing that Heather was looking in her direction, started clapping while her dad gave her a thumbs-up. Chauncy and Mr. MacDonald were both wearing very big smiles. Heather smiled again



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before came careening by them.*

and patted Blackjack as he shook his head up and down several times, anxious to get going again.

Meanwhile, the judge was making his way down the line, getting his last look at everyone. After walking around each horse, he wrote down a few final numbers on his clipboard.

"You may retire your horses," the announcer instructed.

Heather looked around her and saw all of the horses walking to the far end of the arena, and followed them. The competitors clustered around the out-gate, many of them talking to friends or trainers standing at the rail. Heather sat there quietly, trying to relax.

"We have the results now for class 235, Futurity Three-Year-Old Pleasure."

Heather took a deep breath as the announcer paused. *Please, please, please*, she thought to herself.

"The winner of the class is number 89, Here's Looking at You, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bill Cower and ridden by Mr. James Lockster."

Loud cheers of approval drowned out the announcer. A bay horse with a long, flowing tail who had been standing next to Heather turned around and trotted to the ringmaster. Heather watched the horse collect its ribbon.

"Hey, kiddo, you did great!"

Heather turned to see her dad leaning up against the rail. The whole group had made their way

around the ring so that they could talk to her. She looked at Chauncy, who was still smiling.

"I'm sorry Chauncy, I didn't win," she said apologetically.

"Don't worry, you did great. Remember, I didn't say you had to win, just place. And even if you don't, who cares? You were able to get my horse into the ring and show him, and show him well. You should be really proud of yourself!"

"Second place goes to—"

Heather closed her eyes, trying to influence what the announcer would say next.

"—Number 41, Highlands Anchor, owned and ridden by Ms. Kathy Peters."

More cheers, this time from another section of onlookers. Heather opened her eyes and looked at the second place horse. The rider, a young woman, perhaps in her mid-twenties, hollered out, "Yes!" as she turned her horse toward the center of the ring.

"Hey Tom, the judge didn't see that little bobble at the canter, did he?" asked one of the grooms.

"I don't think so, he turned just as Blackjack started to break into a canter. At most, he could have marked the horse down for not getting into the canter soon enough. What do you think, Chauncy?"

"It didn't look like he saw—"

"Third place goes to 142, Gallant Image, owned by Mr. Chauncy Campbell and ridden by Ms. Heather Richardson."

Heather's mom screamed.

"You did it honey, you did it!" her dad congratulated her.

"What?" Heather asked, completely taken off guard by hearing her name called.

"Go get your ribbon," laughed Mr. MacDonald.

Snapping out of her fog, Heather turned Blackjack toward the ringmaster, and like those before her, collected a lovely ribbon. The ringmaster put the long yellow ribbon on Blackjack's bridle as he congratulated Heather.

"Thanks," she said shyly.

Then she turned her horse and proudly trotted out of the ring and over to where her parents and friends were waiting.

"We did it, we did it!" she exclaimed as she almost ran into Chauncy.

Everyone crowded around Blackjack, patting him and complimenting Heather.

"Do you think the judge saw it?" Heather asked.

"Saw what, honey?" her mom asked.

"Our screw up? When he wouldn't canter?"

"I don't think so, he was too busy watching another horse who started bucking," Mr. MacDonald explained.

"Really? I didn't see that."

"Well you were a little busy with your own horse," Chauncy laughed.

"Hey, Chauncy, who was the idiot riding the horse that kept running into me?"

"Oh, that was Jim Spencer, a trainer from up north. I use the term 'trainer' very lightly, since I wouldn't let him near any of my horses. He's very rough with his animals."

"What a jerk," Heather observed.

"Well, I think it's time to celebrate!" Mr. Richardson announced. "How about we all go out to dinner, my treat."

"All right!" cheered one of the grooms.

"Sounds good," Mrs. Campbell agreed. "Let's all get cleaned up, and then we can go out for an early dinner. That way we'll get back in plenty of time for the awards tonight."

Everyone returned to the stalls, got changed, and cleaned up quickly—except for Heather. She was too busy taking care of Blackjack. She cooled him off, brushed him, fed and watered him, and then just kept him company.

"Come on, honey, it's time to go," her dad said as he peered into the stall.

"I'll be ready in a minute," Heather replied. She gave the stallion one last kiss and then hurried off to change her clothes. Within five minutes, she was changed and headed off to the bathroom to wash up.



After dinner, the group made their way back to the show grounds to get Blackjack ready for the final presentation. There would be no judging, just all the futurity horses in the ring at the same time to see who would be champion.

"What do you think our chances are, Chauncy?" Mr. MacDonald asked.

"It's hard to tell. The Futurity has run for three years and I've lost track of who won what and when. But I think we've got a good shot at it. We're probably in the top three."

After half an hour of getting him ready, Mr. MacDonald led the black stallion to the arena, where they waited for the presentation.

Finally, the announcer started the evening session. "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to our final night of competition here at the Morgan Championship Show. Before we start our evening session, we'll be awarding the championship for the three-year-old futurity horses. Would all of the futurity horses please enter the ring?"

Twenty-one gorgeous horses trotted into the ring, led by their handlers in the same bridles that were used when they were shown in-hand.

"Please line up in the center of the ring," the announcer instructed.

The ringmaster made his way into the ring, carrying an enormous silver trophy and blanket, and patiently waited for the winner to be announced.

Heather clenched her fists and once again mumbled, "Please, please, please."

"This year's winner is number 142, Gallant Image, owned and bred by Mr. Chauncy Campbell!"

This time it was Heather who screamed. Chauncy jumped up in the air, cheering, and then quickly slipped through the gate. He ran over to his horse, who, by this time, had been led to the ringmaster to receive his award. The ringmaster put a blue sash around Blackjack's neck, an enormous blue, red, and yellow championship ribbon on his bridle, and held out the blanket, which was embroidered with the words "All Morgan Futurity Champion." Chauncy gave Tom MacDonald a big pat on the back as the photographer came over to take their picture.

"Wait a minute," Chauncy told the photographer.

He motioned to Heather, who looked at him, unsure of what he wanted.

"Get in here!" he yelled.

Heather, a puzzled look on her face, didn't move.

"Come on, Heather, get in here!" Chauncy repeated.

Most of the onlookers laughed, and Heather realized that Chauncy wanted her to join him in the winner's circle. A bit embarrassed, she cautiously climbed through the rails and ran to the center of the ring.

“Making the presentation this year is one of our Gold Ribbon Sponsors, Mr. James Hatcher.”

Mr. Hatcher, a short, chunky man in a blue business suit, made his way into the ring. He took the trophy from the ringmaster and, with a big smile, posed next to the horse. Chauncy put his arm around Heather and told her to smile for the camera.

“A little closer to the horse, please,” the photographer instructed. “There, that’s good.”

Heather looked at Blackjack with love and admiration, as the photographer took their picture.