

Jonah's Jewel

A Wilma Story

By Ashara Morris

For the real boy who loves the real horse:

Jonathan and his Emerald.

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Wilma watched the little girl and her pony fondly. They were a nice addition to the barn; Amanda, the pony, Dixie Belle, and the rest of the family, mom Sally, dad Daniel, and Jonah, Amanda's older brother.

Wilma had heard from Dixie Belle that the family had gotten her for both children. However, she had been at the barn for less than a week, and Wilma could tell Dixie Belle had a definite preference for Amanda. When Jonah would play with her, Dixie was kind but not really interested. With Amanda, Dixie was fascinated, and made every effort to be obedient, and understand what Amanda was asking of her.

Horses tend to pick the people they want to be with. That's the way it had worked for Wilma and Annie, and it was definitely working that way with Dixie and Amanda. Wilma had also seen the opposite happen, where the horse knew what person it wanted, but the person either wasn't paying attention, or there was some other situation where it just didn't work out. During those times, there was always a little sadness at the barn because the two beings who were meant for one another ended up going their separate ways.

As time went on, Wilma noticed that Jonah spent less and less time with Dixie Belle; he could sense this was not the pony for him. One day, he didn't even go pet her, and after that he would just go into the barn and play among the hay bales, or take a walk through the pasture, down to the creek.

One day Jonah was standing on the creek bank, tossing twigs into the water and watching them drift away. Wilma meandered over to him, and nudged him gently in the back.

Jonah jumped and spun around. "Oh! Hi, Wilma, you surprised me!" He rubbed her shoulder. "How're you doing, girl?"

Wilma leaned into the rub and put a blissful expression on her face. "You like this, huh?" Jonah asked, rubbing a little harder. Wilma moved herself around a little bit, so different parts of her shoulder were under Jonah's small hands. Then she whuffled into his hair, to show him she appreciated the attention.

Jonah gave her one last rub and a small pat. "Glad to be of service," he chuckled, "and thanks for rearranging my hair!"

Then Jonah looked over to where his sister, Amanda, was grooming Dixie Belle. He sighed.

"I don't think Dixie likes me very much," he confided to Wilma. "Look at how happy she is with Amanda. She's never like that with me."

Wilma stood a little closer, to show she understood, and lowered her nose to Jonah's level. He rubbed her nose absentmindedly. "Well, you like me."

Wilma nodded.

“But you’re Annie’s horse.”

Wilma nodded again.

“It sure would be nice to have a horse of my very own.” Jonah signed again, and Wilma signed with him. She also smiled, because she knew there was a horse in the pasture who only had eyes for Jonah.

Jonah was so busy trying to figure out what he could do to get Dixie to like him that he was blind to the other horses. What he didn’t see was a young Friesian filly who had been watching from the moment she saw him. Her real name was Concertina, but everyone called her Jewel because that’s what she was - her attitude and willingness were exceptional, plus she was flawlessly beautiful - an absolute jewel.

Jewel was three, and like most 3-year old fillies, she liked to run and play. But she also had a calm, gentle nature, and more than anything wanted to belong to someone. When she saw Jonah, she knew right away that he was the one for her. He was a nice little boy, and even when he teased and bickered with his sister, Jewel could see it was because he was her big brother, and that’s what big brothers were supposed to do. Jewel had no doubt that he would protect those he loved. She felt safe just looking at him.

As soon as Jewel saw Jonah, she wanted to go up and say hello, but she didn’t know if Jonah’s family would appreciate her butting in while they were getting to know Dixie. So she stayed away, and watched Jonah, and waited.

Being boss mare of the herd, Wilma noticed right away that Jewel had an interest in Jonah. Wilma saw that jewel displayed a maturity beyond her years in keeping out of the family’s way. But as Dixie and Amanda got closer, she also knew it was time to have a talk with Jewel.

One day as Amanda was riding Dixie and Jonah was once again down by the creek, Wilma joined Emerald in the pasture. She cropped a little grass, and as she chewed she watched Jewel watching Jonah.

Jewel was unaccustomed to a lot of attention from Wilma, as she was a good filly and seldom needed lesson in manners or herd protocol. To have Wilma peacefully grazing beside her made her a little nervous, but more than that, she was curious. What could Wilma want?

Finally, she could stand it no longer. “Um, Wilma? Is there something wrong?” Jewel looked away quickly so Wilma would know she mean no offense by her question.

Wilma took another small bite of grass, chewed and swallowed, then looked Jewel straight in the eye.

“Well, yes, Jewel, there is something wrong.”

Jewel's eyes widened in alarm and she braced herself for a lecture. She had seen Wilma 'teaching' some of the other horses in the pasture! But Wilma didn't seem angry. That was the confusing part!

In her kindest tone, Wilma continued. "You are standing over here, and that lonely little boy is standing over there. I think perhaps it's time you introduced yourself."

"Wha...er...introduce...?" Jewel could hardly believe her ears. Wilma wasn't upset! she was suggesting that Jewel do exactly what she had longed to so since she first set eyes on Jonah! Jewel cleared her throat, pulled herself together, and whispered, "Really?"

Wilma chuckled softly. "Yes, dear one. It's a perfect time. Go on over there and say hello. Remember he's young and respect his space. Always keep track of where your head is and where your feet are. You'll do fine."

Wilma gave Jewel a playful push in Jonah's direction, and watched as the filly took step by careful step toward her destiny. Wilma thought it looked as though Jewel could barely feel her feet, and Wilma smiled inside. It had been exactly like that when she met Annie.

Jewel slowly walked toward Jonah, planning how to say 'hello.' "Should I touch him," she wondered, "or just stand nearby? If I stand nearby, it has to be someplace where he'll see me. Maybe I should take a drink from the stream. He'll see me that way. How close should I get? Should I play 'splash'? No, that might scare him. Oh my, oh my, how do I do this?" Her mind was racing, trying to decide on a plan of action.

In the end, though, it was easy. Jonah turned around.

This surprised Jewel so much that she halted in her tracks. Realizing her quick stop might have confused the boy, she stepped forward a little and tilted her head to one side. She made her eyes as soft as she could, and looked friendly. Slowly she came closer as Jonah watched her. When she was a foot away she stopped, and waited.

There was a long silence as they looked one another over. Jewel continued to be friendly; she lowered her head slightly and kept her ears forward, in the 'I think you're interesting' position.

Jonah was fascinated, and excited. He had never had a horse actively seek him out! He has wished for a horse of his own; could this be the one? He wondered what to do, to let her know he liked her. He thought she was the prettiest filly he had ever seen. Jonah smiled suddenly, and it was like the sun coming out.

Jewel saw Jonah's smile and put her ears a little further forward, to show she was listening.

Jonah stepped forward with one arm outstretched, fingers of his hands pointing down, so the back of his hand was visible. He remembered that was how you did a horsey handshake.

Jewel took one last step to close the gap and touched Jonah's hand with her muzzle. Then she blew softly down her nostrils and sighed with contentment. He liked her! she could feel it with every fiber of her body.

Jonah sighed, too. She like him! He wanted to jump around and leap in excitement, but he knew that might scare the filly. So he held himself quiet, and put his other hand on her neck instead. Slowly he stroked her silky coat, and as he petted her and got to know her, he kept up a steady stream of conversation.

"Well, hi, girl. You're Jewel, right? I'm Jonah. You sure are pretty. Hey, have you looked at the creek lately? It's really fun to put twigs in the water and watch them float away. They're like little boats. Oh, wait, you don't know what a boat is, do you? Well, come on, I'll show you what the twigs do, and I'll explain about boats. I guess a horse wouldn't be all that interested in boats, huh? Unless you had to take a trip over water, then you'd want one. Have you ever done that, Jewel? C'mon, let's go." Jonah tugged on Jewel's mane, just a little, and together they walked off toward the creek, Jonah continuing his story about boats.

The next few weeks were filled with wonder and excitement for Jonah and Jewel. Jonah came to the barn every day with his mom and sister, and as soon as the car came to a stop, he would leap out and run for the pasture. He and Jewel would greet one another and they would spend the afternoon together, exploring the pasture, playing in the creek (it turned out Jonah though 'splash' was a great game), and going for long walks. Jewel followed Jonah all over the pasture without a lead rope or halter. Jonah started teaching Jewel some of the games he had learned in his natural horsemanship classes. He taught her to move over, go forward, back up, turn, go in circles around him, and come.

Jewel loved the games. Jonah made them interesting and fun, and he always gave her lots of time to think things over. He rewarded every try with a rub and "good girl", even when she didn't quite understand the game. He made it easy for her to be successful, and all of the little successes turned into big ones. It wasn't long before Jewel would run in circles around Jonah, stop and turn toward him and then come to him, all with Jonah just using small gestures to ask for what he wanted. They were really tuned in to each other.

None of this went unnoticed by Jonah's mom, or by Jewel's owner. Jewel's owner appreciated Jonah's interest in the filly, and didn't mind that he played with Jewel. She had several horses and Jewel hadn't been getting a lot of attention, since she was the youngest and still growing. Jonah was perfect for her. Every now and then the owner would give Jonah a couple of tips, or give him and Jewel a new game to play. She could see how much they cared for each other.

Wilma also watched the growing relationship between the boy and filly. She observed in satisfaction as Jonah and Jewel learned from one another. She reveled in how much they enjoyed being together, and she watched them both blossom and grow. It was a wonderful match, and she had great hopes for it.

Wilma also noticed that Jonah's mom, while happy that Jonah had found a horse to play with, occasionally reminded Jonah that Jewel was not his horse to keep. Wilma knew it was because Jonah's mom wanted to protect him that she said those things. She wanted Jonah to maintain a good perspective on the situation. Jewel was not his horse. But Wilma also believed that Jewel could become Jonah's horse, and hoped his mom would feel the same way.

One day Wilma overheard a conversation between Jonah and his mom.

"Isn't she just the best, mom?" Jonah asked after he had shown his mother Jewel's latest trick. "She's so smart! I bet it wouldn't be anything to teach her to carry me, and then we could go all over the pasture, and even on trail rides with Amanda and Dixie!"

Jonah's mom smiled, and then looked sad. "That would be so nice, Jonah, but you have to remember Jewel isn't your horse. There's only so much you can do with her."

"Well, couldn't we buy her? You and dad said we'd look for a horse for me. What about Jewel?"

"Oh, I don't know, Jonah. She's young, and not trained to ride..."

"But I can teach her!" Jonah interrupted. "Look how much she's learned!"

"...and she's very expensive," Jonah's mom finished. She paused, as if it pained her to continue, and then said the hardest part. "Jonah, I know how much you love her, but I'm not sure we can afford this horse."

Jonah's face fell, and Wilma's heart broke. These two needed to be together! There was always a way. Wilma sent all of her hopes to Jonah, telling him in her horse way that yes, he could figure out a way to have his Jewel.

Jonah felt it, too, because he suddenly stood up a little straighter and said with firm resolve, "I'll figure out a way to buy her. I'll work to earn money for her, mom. This is the horse I want."

Jonah's mom smiled. "You'll need to earn a lot of money to buy this horse, Jonah, and it may take you several years to earn enough. Are you sure?"

Jonah looked fiercely determined. "Yep."

"Okay, then," his mom replied. And with that, Jonah set out to make his dream come true.

The first thing Jonah did was find out from Jewel's owner how much she wanted for the filly. When he heard the price, he gulped. It might take him more than just a few years! But he was determined. He was going to do this.

Then he came up with a plan. He decided what sort of odd jobs he could do. He created a flyer, and pasted it all over his neighborhood. He talked to his neighbors, telling them what he wanted to do, and asking if they had any jobs he could do. Soon he had a number of jobs lined up, and more on the way.

Jonah's mom and dad made sure he balanced all of the work he was doing in the neighborhood with getting enough rest, keeping up with his schoolwork, and spending time with Jewel. They weren't sure how long this would last, but they were willing to support Jonah in his efforts.

Months went by. Jonah worked his odd jobs and slowly built up his savings. It was very slow going. Jonah didn't know how long it would take him to earn all the money he needed, but he was determined to make it happen.

He went to the barn at least three days a week to be with Jewel. He told her what he was doing, and what it would be like when he bought her.

"You'll be part of our family, Jewel. We'll go on rides together, and do things with Amanda and Dixie, and it will be great. No one will ever be able to take you away from me. You're my best friend!"

Before he knew it, Jonah had been doing odd jobs for almost a year. He had saved over \$2,000 and felt really good about it. He still had a long way to go, but he knew, if Jewel's owner would wait for him, that he would be able to earn enough money to buy Jewel.

And today was Jonah's birthday! He had asked for nothing for himself except a few extra dollars to put into his savings account for Jewel, so he was surprised when there was a package waiting for him by his place at the breakfast table.

"Go on, open it!" Amanda commanded. She could barely sit still, she was so excited.

Jonah ripped open the wrapping, and inside was a beautiful green halter, and a lead rope. Attached to the halter by a string was a small envelope. Jonah opened the envelope, and his jaw dropped open. It was check, made out to him, for \$2000. He looked at his parents in amazement.

"This is the amount of money we had decided we could spend on a horse for you," explained his mom. "You've worked so hard this past year, Jonah, and we are so proud of you. We talked with Jewel's owner, and she is willing to accept a down payment on Jewel. Since Jewel is a mare, and a purebred, her owner said we could complete pay-

ing for her with a foal. So in another year, we'll have her bred to a good Friesian stallion of the owner's choice, and when the foal is born it will belong to Jewel's owner as final payment. But you need to talk with the owner and finalize the deal. What do you think?"

Jonah couldn't speak for a moment. Jewel was going to be his! Then he leaped up from the table and shouted "Let's go!"

Wilma saw Jonah and his family arrive at the barn. She watched Jonah jump out of the car and run into the barn, then run out again and around to the front, then back to the pasture. She saw him peering into the distance, where Jewel and her owner were playing in the round pen. Then Jonah slipped through the fence and sprinted over to the round pen.

Wilma smiled as Jewel saw Jonah and stopped what she was doing to turn and face him. Jewel's owner was smiling, too. Wilma saw Jonah approach the owner, and start gesturing, toward himself, then toward Jewel, and then hand something to the owner. It was a small piece of paper. The owner looked at it. Jonah kept talking. Wilma couldn't stand it. She trotted closer so she could hear.

"....and I have another \$2000 in the bank that we can use for the down payment, too," Jonah was saying. Mom said you would be willing to have Jewel's first foal as the final payment. Is that right?" Jonah looked anxious and expectant at the same time.

"Yes, Jonah, that's right. There are some details that will need to be worked out with your mom and dad, but I think this is a fair offer, and I accept." The owner smiled again. "So, you want to sit on your horse?"

Wilma knew Jewel and Jonah had been waiting for this moment. She watched Jewel, without being asked, move right over to the side of the fence and wait. Jewel's owner laughed in surprise, but Jonah clambered up the fence onto Jewel's back in flash. It was hard to say who was happier, Jonah or Jewel.

Wilma whuffed in contentment. Another happy ending at the barn!