

A Life So Short

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Spirit, Rain, Esperanza, the works, you know. But with a little twist.

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A Life So Short

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Chapter One

News

Soft silvery clouds blanketed the evening sky. Raindrops beat the earth in a hushed cadence, softly singing the world its maternal lullabye. There was a peaceful quiet over the lush mountain meadows. It was that same sort of calm reassurance one gets when it is still quite early in the morning, before the sun rises. But this was not in the morning.

The meadows, high in the hills on the Cimmaron, were a stunning jade color in the damp evening. Roving these emerald fields was a large group of equestrian descent. Their legs were long and their crests were high, while their bodies were finely tuned. The pelts of these magnificent beasts shone with all the glossy radiance of good health. Their manes of varying hues hung limp against their powerful necks, dripping with rain. But though their admirable bodies stood drenched, their eyes leapt with merriment and frivolity.

This was a happy and content group.

Among them was a grand stag - handsome and proud. His buckskin pelt had a metallic sheen to it in the wet weather. His frame was impressive. By instant appearance he looked to be made of wind, not earth. So finely tuned were his tendons and chords that he seemed liquid gold sliding in and among the other horses. His chocolate eyes danced and a smile tipped his dark-stained maw.

Spirit. It was a soft and hushed thought from a mare standing near the flank of the herd. Her golden hide was graying, and no longer had the luster of youth. Her blue eyes, though, were soft and gentle and very much alive. She watched the being who seemed no horse, but hawk, as he patrolled his harem. There was pride in her, and she smiled also. She remembered very much the day he'd been born. His father Gladiator had been absent that afternoon, fighting the nearby rival herd for a filly they were abusing. This beautiful seraph of faded glory had to give life to her son alone.

And the pain of his absence! Her heart was rent in twain when her son had grown and disappeared, caught by those awful bipeds. Her strength was needed to keep the herd together, for she was the lead mare, but the hurt ran deep.

A soft snort escaped her maw and she shook her sun-kissed pelt, dewdrops of water fleeing her and taking flight in the air. She not only shook off water, but she shook off the sorrowful memories she was recognizing. Now there were happier times. She had a lovely and kind daughter-in-law now, the perfect match for her willful son.

"Esperanza?" A soft call broke the stillness of the rain and brought the attention of the golden mare around.

It was a lithe little paint mare of mahogany and ivory hues. Her slender, angled muzzle met the gold mare's in an affectionate gesture. Her stunning sapphire eyes held some strange light in them.

"Hello Rain," was the reply from the mare called Esperanza.

Rain. Small and petite, but strong and good. The young mare herself was not aware of how much the other herd members looked up to her. She was humbled and a little nervous in her new role as lead mare over the cimarron herd. She often went to her mate's mother for guidance. Now was no different.

Her saphron gaze followed the buckskin stallion's movements and a smile graced her maw. "He was born for this role, wasn't he?"

Esperanza laughed melodiously. "Yes, he certainly was. He is everything his father wished him to be and more."

Rain looked at the herd with tenderness in her eyes. "Above all his other foals, Gladiator chose Spirit to be his heir?"

"My mate showed wisdom beyond his mortal state when he did so," Esperanza agreed. "No other colt born that year could have done for our herd what Spirit has done. Besides," and here an uncharacteristically sly grin appeared, "I was his queen, who was he supposed to have picked?"

Rain laughed. It was a silver sound, lovely and sweet, and it brought around the head of the buckskin stallion. He saw the two mares together and grinned, rising up on his haunches and whinnying in greeting across the herd. The two mares called in reply. Rain glanced sideways at her mate's mother. "Is the firstborn of the queen always heir?"

Esperanza dipped her muzzle once in confirmation. "Yes, mostly."

The old mare began to walk a little, swinging her tail to signal the other should follow.

Rain hesitated, then picked up her heavy hooves and trotted after the matriarch. "Even if the foal is female?"

Now it was Esperanza's turn to hesitate. "Well, in the past only one queen has ever had a female as her firstborn. It is common in other herdmares, but it seems mostly queens have males. Kinsaii, one of the first lead mares, had a female. The stallion picked a colt of his to be his heir instead. But I am sure in this modern time, if you had a female, she could be heir just as easily."

Rain cast a sideways glance at her mother-in-law, hiding her worry. "But a mare cannot lead a herd, Esperanza. She needs a mate."

Esperanza looked puzzled. "Rain, why this interest in inheritance?"

Now the small paint mare fell keenly quiet. She dipped her head low and stepped forward, bringing it right next to Esperanza's. Her voice was hushed. "Because I am with foal."

Tears instantly sprang to the old matriarch's eyes. She began to tremble. Spirit and Rain hadn't been back long. Spirit hadn't fathered any foals yet...or until now it seemed. She nuzzled Rain with the affection only a mother can have. "Oh, Rain!" She could hardly speak for the emotion which choked her

voice. "Have you told Spirit yet?"

Rain backed away again, looking almost shy. She shook her head. "No, I would've, except I am afraid..."

"Of what?" Esperanza asked, perplexed. What could be frightening about telling Spirit he would be a father? The stag would be overjoyed!

Rain closed her eyes, concern spreading her brow. "I'm afraid he might get his hopes too high. I cannot know if this foal will be a male or female. If it is female...I am afraid he will be disappointed."

Esperanza frowned, flicking her white tail free of the water that collected there during their talk. "If I know my son, I know he will be thrilled enough to have a foal, regardless of the gender. Your child will be, first and foremost, his son or daughter. An heir second, but a child first."

"I know I am being foolish," sighed Rain, glancing at Spirit, watching an eagle soar over the rise. "I will tell him."

Now there was a kindly light in the old mare's eyes. "The sooner you tell him, the better. The other mares won't rest until you have divulged every secret, and what will be better? For him to find out from one of them, or to find out from you?"

Thunder rumbled restlessly over the valley, and the rain increased. Three lightning sheets illuminated the clouds for a brief moment. The young and handsome creature who led this band of equines would soon receive the greatest news of his existence, and mother nature could do naught but send ominous warnings.

[btw: hmm...I've decided from your standart a/n, i'm gonna do btw. If you don't know what that stands for...go stick your head in a toilet. Just kidding. Just ask someone who has the time of day to answer such a question. Anyway, I hate cheesy beginnings like this, but I couldn't think of anything else. And I'll try to get the second chapter done soon. We'll see though.
Oh! also, these chapters are unbearably short compared to my usual work, but there simply isn't room or muse enough to write decent chapters on something so...overplayed. Meh, anyway...onto chapter 2!]