

## The Beauty After The Storm

The winter had been a long and hard one. Josie stood inside the barn and stared out her stall window wondering when they would be able to go outside again. The winter months always seemed to stretch forever for Josie. She was not one to stand around inside and munch on hay like most of the other horses in the barn. She longed for adventure and excitement. To keep her mind happy she would think of the warm spring and summer days that she and her owner, Alice, would spend riding and exploring. While winter always held on longer than Josie would like, this year had been especially cold and bitter in Ohio. Josie knew she wasn't alone in feeling the boredom and dullness that this year had brought. But things were beginning to change. Josie could feel and smell the changes that told her that soon...spring would come.

Josie was a 6-year old liver chestnut Quarter Horse mare. She had a broken stripe on her face, a sock on her front right leg and two stockings on her hind legs. She loved feeling warm breezes blowing through her mane and tail as she would gallop through the pastures. She longed to run through the fields and let go of all her pent up energy and emotions. She wanted warm sunlight to warm her back and make her hairs glow with the rich colors that bounced off of them. As she stood daydreaming and relaxed in her stall with one back leg cocked, she heard the barn door creak open and saw Alice enter the barn. Josie let out a soft nicker to let Alice know how happy she was to have the company she had longed for. The three other horses in the barn swung their heads over the stalls as well to investigate the source of the noise. Two of the horses went right back to munching their hay but Josie never let her gaze drift from Alice. Alice loved all the horses in the barn but Josie and Alice were a special team. They would spend their time going on trail rides and learning whatever new routines Alice was practicing that year

for the small local horse shows. Josie enjoyed her alone time in the pasture where she could be free and roam about but she also loved the daily rides and one-on-one time with Alice.

Alice went to each horse in the barn and handed out small treats and gave scratches and pats to everyone. She reached Josie last and stood there with a big smile as she reached in her pocket for a carrot. "Hey there, girl. How about some fresh air today? We're finally easing out of winter and it's a gorgeous spring-like day out."

Josie bobbed her head with excitement. She couldn't wait to open up and stretch her legs as she would run the length of the back pasture. Alice pulled a halter off a hook outside of Josie's stall. She clipped a lead on and Josie practically danced down the aisle with Alice as they headed toward the door and the back paddocks.

As Josie stepped outside with Alice, she could feel the warm breeze and the fresh smells that had been gone for what seemed like years. The birds were chirping and seemed to share the same excitement that Josie felt. Alice walked Josie over toward the paddock and led her inside. "Now, I know you're excited. Just go have fun and enjoy yourself!" Alice unclipped the lead and gave Josie a pat on the shoulder as she headed back toward the barn to turn the other horses out also. Josie wasted no time waiting for her friends. She took another big sniff of the fragrant fresh air and took off across the field. Everything felt fresh, clean, damp, and exciting. The trees had new buds popping up and flowers were starting to bloom in the pastures and up by Alice's house. As Josie opened up and let her legs stretch to a full gallop, she could feel the tension, anxiety, and stress slipping away. This.... this is what she had waited all winter for.

As Alice walked back up toward the barn, she glanced back to check on Josie. She chuckled to herself as she watched the horse throwing her head and tail and simply enjoying

the beautiful weather. Deep down she was just as excited to be able to breathe some fresh air and enjoy the beauty of the world after going through the long waiting months of winter. Alice turned her focus back to the barn to make sure she would get the other 3 horses out of the barn so they could enjoy the weather as well. In addition to Josie, she and her mom boarded two neighbors' horses and her mom's Appaloosa, Bell.

Josie watched as Alice let the three other horses out of the barn and they went off to explore the pasture they hadn't spent much time in over the past few months. The sunshine was doing amazing things for everyone's moods. As the horses settled down to graze on the new grass, Josie tossed her head and encouraged the other horses to follow her deeper into the paddock and explore the far end of the fence that was along the creek. You could just barely see the barn from this place but it was one of Josie's favorite spots.

The horses grazed at the far end of the pasture mostly out of sight of the barn. The breeze was picking up a bit more down here by the creek but it was bringing even more smells and freshness to the somewhat drab, late-winter landscape that was Ohio this time of year. As Josie finally settled down to munch on some grass, she felt a sudden rush of wind and heard a deep rumble of thunder. Glancing up, she noticed the sky had darkened quite a bit since they'd made their way down to the area. This was typically for spring time and she just hoped it wouldn't put a damper on their fun day.

A jagged bolt of intense light came crackling down from the sky and licked at the ground on the other side of the pasture. Josie and the others jumped back and realized this was no longer the fun in the sun that they'd been enjoying. The horses took off toward the barn hoping to find some shelter and relief from the electricity that threatened them. As they thundered

across the field, raindrops fell from the sky, urging them on faster and faster. Another bolt of lightning flashed in the sky and the thunder boomed once more to remind the herd that the weather can change in an instant. As the horses reached the gate by the barn, Alice came running out with lead ropes and grabbed the two neighbor's horses and rushed back to the barn. Josie and Bell stood at the gate and waited anxiously to get back inside the warm barn. Alice returned quickly and led the two back to their stalls.

Once safely inside again, Josie enjoyed hearing the pitter patter of rain on the roof and the low rumbles of thunder as the storm slowly crawled farther east. Josie munched on her hay and took in the new smells that came with the storm. The air smelled clean and wet which brought a cozy and comforting feel to the warm stall. Josie cocked a back leg and relaxed in her stall as she thought of all the fun things to come this summer. She couldn't wait to get out there and do trail rides and train for the county fair that would be here mid-summer. And of course, she couldn't wait for lots more pasture time where she could stretch out and run until her heart was content. It had been an incredibly long and hard winter. But there was so much good to look forward to!