

By. Anya B.

My Sweet William

The morning sun floats in through the open window of the stable. Billie makes a soft whinny as I stroke his face, his head sticking out of the open stall. Blue jays all around us chirp in the quiet of the morning. I bend my head down to meet him. I could feel all the love radiating off of him. This is what I need, not some boyfriend like all my friends want. All I want is my horse.

"Amaya, come on it's time to go," says my mom.

"I'm coming, just one second." I turn back to my boy. "See you tomorrow Billie boy. I love you with everything I have," I whisper.

I turn away and go to where my mom is standing.

"So, did you have a good time?"

"Yeah I had a great time with him, I love just hanging out with my boy. But I noticed a creepy white van near the barn that I've never seen before," I said with a shudder.

"It's probably just some ruffian who lost their way, don't focus on it."

We make our way to the car and start pulling away. I gaze at the barn's overgrown grass and the chipped wood of the arena fence. I see the cats scurrying across the field as the sun starts to set. The scarlet, orange, and pink of the sunset fill the car with colors. I look over towards the very end of the property and see that very same white van. A quiver of fear passes down my spine as my eyes focus on it.

"Whatcha looking at?"

"It's probably nothing, but that van is here again. I don't know what it's doing."

"Let's take a step back for a second and not jump to conclusions. This person probably just needed somewhere to stop for the night. They will most likely be gone by morning, and if they're not, then we'll call the police."

"Alright, we'll wait and see," I say, skeptical.

"Just don't let your mind wander to far off places."

But it was too late for that, my mind had already wandered to that dark place of worry. Man, I hated that place, it consumed all my thoughts and then I couldn't focus on anything else. The main worry that stuck out in my brain was, would they hurt the horses? That thought runs through my head over and over throughout dinner and the rest of the evening. It's the last thought I have when I go to bed that night.

I wake up with a jolt. I knew instantly something was wrong. I don't know how, but I just had a gut feeling. I ran downstairs into my parents' bedroom.

"Mom, Dad, wake up! Something's wrong, I don't know what, but we need to get to the barn."

"Honey, it's probably nothing. You're overreacting," said my dad.

"Can you just drive me out to the barn to settle me?" I ask pleadingly.

"Sure, but when we get back will you please go to bed?"

"Yes I will, if everything's fine," I say. "But everything's not fine," I mumble.

My parents get out of bed and we all get in the car. Worry and fear gnaw at my belly like hunger in an empty stomach. We start getting closer to the barn and the first thing I hear is a whinny. Not a calm, gentle one, but one that sounds distressed. That whinny was not just

coming from any horse, it was coming from mine! We stopped and I opened the car door and started running. I ran as fast as I could and looked for my target. I reached the driveway of the barn and saw what was happening. I saw Billie, I saw the van, and I saw men holding onto ropes that were around Billie's neck and snout. Distressed whinnys were barely escaping his mouth. He was rearing and bucking, trying to get the ropes off. I start screaming at the top of my lungs for them to let go. I run down the driveway and try to rip the rope in two.

"Get off the horse girl or I'll guarantee you, you're dead meat, just like that horse," said the man gruffly.

"I'll give up once I'm dead!" I replied.

He stared me down with hatred in his eyes. I kicked him in the shin to give him a warning. Just then I feel someone grab me from behind and cup their hand around my mouth.

"They told you already girl, leave now while you still have the chance," said another man.

"Like I told them already - I'll leave when I'm dead!" I picked up my leg and kicked him in the thigh. He stumbled backward and I took my chance to sock him in the nose. His blood drips down my hand as I turn back to the other two. I'm about to pounce but someone grabs me from behind and slams me to the ground. I struggle under his grasp but I can't move. All I'm thinking is, I have to get to Billie before they can shoot. But before I can, another man steps out of the car with a gun and points it at me. He fires and the last thing I saw was my parents running towards me shouting. Everything went black. Then I heard it, another shot.

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A golden field surrounds me and light reflects off the blades of grass. The birds are chirping and insects fly around. Then I see something off in the distance. It's the shape of the horse. Its head is bent down nibbling on the grass. I know that horse. I ran to him at full speed, happiness pouring out of me. Tears stream down my face and my smile widens. I embrace him and he curls his neck around me in return. It's really him, my love, my loss, my rock, my Sweet William.