

Miguel's Wild Horses

by Fatima Shaik



Every time Miguel stepped into the old barn at his family's small farm, he felt as if horses were nearby. He picked up the faint sound of a whinny or neigh. Sometimes he heard the soft clip-clop of hooves. And he definitely smelled horses.

"You have quite an imagination," Miguel's father told him. "We have never had any horses in our barn. We only use it for storage."

But Miguel couldn't shake that strange, strong feeling. He asked his dad if horses had ever lived on their property.

"Nope, there were never any horses for riding or working here, as far as I know," his father replied. "The only connection might be that wild horses roamed these lands long ago... before the dust storms came."

Wild horses? Hmmmmm, Miguel thought. Could they still be around, just hiding? Or might they have come back to visit the barn now and then? That would certainly explain the smell.

Miguel searched for evidence of those long-ago wild horses. He looked for tracks, like marks in the dry riverbeds. He looked for places where horses may have slept, like caves. He didn't find anything. *But, he thought, that smell and those sounds-they can't just be my imagination!*

One day, Miguel decided that he had to track down that horse smell in the barn. He looked

everywhere. He rummaged behind old pieces of wood. He dug through piles of hay. And he eventually found something: an old saddle buried under tools! The leather was cracked. The buckles were missing. But that saddle *did* smell of horses.

No wonder! he thought. *That settles the mystery.* Still, he felt a little disappointed. *I should've known it was something like this.*

Miguel took a closer look at the saddle. He wondered what it would be like to sit on it, atop a horse. He swung his leg over the saddle and plopped down.

But as soon as he sat down on the saddle, he was startled: A vivid scene suddenly appeared on the barn wall, like a movie! The wall showed a big blue sky with a green prairie below. In the next moment, a herd of wild horses ran across the wall-painted ponies, black stallions, dark auburn mares, and cement-gray mustangs. They raced in and out of the barn's wooden boards like straw weaving horizontally through a basket. One moment they disappeared as if they had gone outside the barn. The next moment, they reappeared as if trapped between the planks.

When Miguel jumped up to see the image up close, it disappeared. But when he sat down on the saddle again, the wild horses returned, shaking their heads and snorting.

"Papa, you must see this!" Miguel called as he ran out of the barn, leaving the door wide open behind him. "It's magic!"

When he got outside, however, he saw his father running toward him. "Miguel, come into the house NOW! A dust storm is heading here, and *fast*."

He grabbed Miguel's hand and pulled him inside. They ran down to the basement.

The dust storm arrived like a thunderbolt. Wind threw dirt and rocks against the windows of the house. Debris hit the roof. The storm swept through the open door of the barn.

"There are wild horses in our barn!" Miguel exclaimed as they sat inside.

"That's just the wind fooling you," his father retorted.

Miguel didn't reply. He just decided he would show his father, as soon as the storm was over.

When the storm ended, Miguel ran to the barn. His father followed. Everything inside was

scattered. Miguel didn't smell horses anymore. The saddle was gone, too.

"Look-most of the barn wall is gone!" his father lamented. "The storm blew it down."

Miguel came to a different conclusion: The wild horses had summoned the storm and smashed their enclosure. They needed to roam the prairie again.

"I think the horses did it, Papa," Miguel responded. "They did it because they had to be free."