



## Lady's Big Surprise

**JoAnn S. Dawson**

**Michelle Keenan, Illustrator**

F. T. Richards Publishing (August 2004)

Softcover \$8.95 (288pp)

978-0-9746561-6-8

In a world where horses are better than the mall, movies, or instant messaging, this story brings to life all the dreams that girls have about ponies. Young horse lovers will enjoy these adventures, which reinforce the magical connection between girls and horses.

Mary and Jody are crazy about horses, and they aren't "just good friends, or even best friends. They [are], as Mary put it, 'epic friends.'" Aside from their love of horses, the two couldn't be more different. Mary, who has to put her own hand over her mouth to quiet herself sometimes, is a very confident, with a bossy, know-it-all attitude. Jody, meanwhile, is shy, cautious, and rather unsure of herself. But their ponies, Gypsy and Lady, brought them together and will keep them together as their friendship grows.

Willie, the wise, gruff, but loving cowhand who knows horses, figures out how to use a truck bed to transport Lady, the horse who always comes to the girls' rescue. Willie teaches them about their beloved animals, and throws in a few life lessons on the side.

This book, the first in "The Lucky Foot Stable Series", isn't driven by a single plot but rather is a collection of episodes; it takes its readers to a horse show, to the girls' Secret Place, and on an old-fashioned sleigh ride, and it ends with a star born on Christmas morning.

The author, a lifelong horse lover and owner who enjoys competing her American Paint horse, Painted Warrior, is an educator and director of the Equine Institute at a Maryland college. She has appeared as an actor in *The Sixth Sense* and *12 Monkeys*, and has as a horse wrangler on Oprah Winfrey's *Beloved* and *America's Most Wanted*. In this book, she shares her horse know-how by using horsey terminology throughout the story and providing a glossary at the back of the volume.

Dawson knows her audience of young girls (ages eight to twelve) well, nicely blending suspense and adventure to keep them interested. At times she uses language that will be challenging to her younger readers, although that isn't likely to discourage them.

The story moves quickly and, while predictable, will keep any girl with a passion for horses eagerly reading along. Dawson has purposely chosen not to depict any part of the girls' lives that doesn't include their horses, so readers know nothing of their families or school life. Some readers may want to know more about the characters, but for those who love horses as much as Mary and Jody, it shouldn't matter one bit.

LYNN GEIGER (August 18, 2009)

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