

HORSESHOE NECKLACE EXCERPTS

He thought of the herd he'd grown up with in Mongolia and the majestic horses he rode now, how they were broken in, trained, used, and sold, torn from their friends and loved ones. As he had been. Though it had been his own choice. He left his family. He left Mongolia. He left his aging parents behind. A foolish, thoughtless act. It pained him to think about it.

"You love animals?" Emmy asked.

"I love them very much. With animals there's no pretense. They are authentic. We humans watch, criticize, judge. Animals are simpler."

The ocean was the most magnificent sight I've ever seen," Baatar said. "I fell in love at first sight. We don't have an ocean in Mongolia. It's breathtaking, vast, incomprehensible. It openly rages when it wants to, and you can feel its pulsating rhythm when it's content. It's so alive. It contains a whole world of its own, with its own landscapes, its own rhythms, its own creatures. We know so little about it. Maybe that's why it's so fascinating."

Emmy reached out her hand for Bruno to sniff, and he obliged. He sniffed her legs and feet, her hands and arms, and then threw himself onto the ground, on his back, ready for a tummy rub, his tongue hanging out of his slightly open mouth, the same smile she'd seen in the photo.

He considered himself lucky. And he was grateful. Horses, he'd come to learn, weren't just part of his past. They were part of his soul.

"You're a visionary," Baatar said.

"What do you mean?"

"You can see into the future. You're gifted. Not many people are."

"Is that good or bad?" Emmy asked.

"I guess it's good. Perhaps you can see a danger, and you can warn people if you see something harmful happening to them, and perhaps it can be prevented."

He thought of the Mongolian steppe, the silence city people had never ever heard; the remoteness where one learned to listen to the wind and its messages, the breathing of the horses, the beating of one's heart. Sometimes he missed it; sometimes it felt dreadful. He had changed.

He had a fluttery sensation in his stomach like a teenager going on his first date. He'd gotten a haircut and bought a new pair of jeans and a black shirt, matching his black leather jacket. She liked him in black.

Her eyes drifted onto her notebook, which served as her personal billboard, his name appearing a few times now, scribbled in block letters, capital letters, and cursive.

Just as Baatar walked up to Jack's stable, Jack returned from exercising a handsome two-year-old gelding named *A Thousand Wishes*, usually exercised by Baatar so Jack could observe and take notes. Jack gave Baatar a long questioning look.

"You had an accident?" Jack asked as he dismounted.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Right up the street."

"Are you OK?"

"I'm fine," Baatar said, "but I hit a young woman. She's in the hospital."

How he missed the liveliness, the happiness, the affection, the delight and wonder of being alive. But more than anything, he missed her.

"When I was a boy, we rode because we were horsemen, and it was our tradition. We didn't ride for money. I rode for respect of my father, to honor my family and our ancestors."

He longed for that sort of relationship, someone close, someone who liked him not just for his physical shape but for who he was. The woman who understood, who loved him in spite of his flaws and his history.

"Life teaches us lessons," he said, "some we ask for and some we don't. I believe we're here to learn and experience life from different angles, to understand its many options, its many faces."