



WAR HORSE

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 SCHOLASTIC

CHAPTER 1

MY EARLIEST MEMORIES ARE A CONFUSION OF HILLY fields and dark, damp stables, and rats that scampered along the beams above my head. But I remember well enough the day of the horse sale. The terror of it stayed with me all my life.

I was not yet six months old, a gangling, leggy colt who had never been farther than a few feet from his mother. We were parted that day in the terrible hubbub of the auction ring and I was never to see her again. She was a fine, working farm horse, getting on in years but with all the strength and stamina of an Irish draft horse quite evident in her fore and hindquarters. She was sold within minutes, and before I could follow her through the gates, she was whisked out of the ring. But somehow I was more difficult to dispose of. Perhaps it was the wild look in my eye as I circled the ring in a desperate search for my mother, or

perhaps it was that none of the farmers and gypsies there were looking for a spindly-looking half-Thoroughbred colt. But whatever the reason, they were a long time haggling over how little I was worth before I heard the hammer go down, and I was driven out through the gates and into a pen outside.

"Not bad for three guineas, is he? Are you, my little fire-brand? Not bad at all." The voice was harsh and thick with drink, and it belonged quite evidently to my owner. I shall not call him my master, for only one man was ever my master. My owner had a rope in his hand and was clambering into the pen followed by three or four of his red-faced friends. Each one carried a rope. They had taken off their hats and jackets and rolled up their sleeves, and they were all laughing as they came toward me. I had as yet been touched by no man and backed away from them until I felt the bars of the pen behind me and could go no farther. They seemed to lunge at me all at once, but they were slow and I managed to slip past them and into the middle of the pen where I turned to face them again. They had stopped laughing now. I screamed for my mother and heard her reply echoing in the far distance. It was toward that cry that I bolted, half charging, half jumping the rails so that I caught my foreleg as I tried to clamber over and

was stranded there. I was grabbed roughly by the mane and tail and felt a rope tighten around my neck before I was thrown to the ground and held there with a man sitting, it seemed, on every part of me. I struggled until I was weak, kicking out violently every time I felt them relax, but they were too many and too strong for me. I felt the halter slip over my head and tighten around my neck and face. "So you're quite a fighter, are you?" said my owner, tightening the rope and smiling through gritted teeth. "I like a fighter. But I'll break you one way or the other. Quite the little fighting cock you are, but you'll be eating out of my hand quick as a twick."

I was dragged along the roads while tied on a short rope to the tailboard of a farm cart so that every twist and turn wrenched at my neck. By the time we reached the farm road and rumbled over the bridge into the stable yard that was to become my home, I was soaked with sweat, and the halter had rubbed my face raw. My one consolation as I was hauled into the stables that first evening was the knowledge that I was not alone. The old horse that had been pulling the cart all the way back from the market was led into the stable next to mine. As she went in, she stopped to look over my door and nickered gently. I was about to venture away from the back of my stable when

IT IS 1914, and Joey, a farm horse, is sold to the army and thrust into the midst of World War I on the Western Front. When Joey is dragged away, his heart aches for Albert, the farmer's son he is forced to leave behind. In the army the beautiful red-bay horse is trained to charge the enemy, drag heavy artillery, and carry wounded soldiers not much older than Albert off the battlefields. Amongst the clamoring of guns, and while plodding through the cold mud, Joey wonders if the war will ever end. And if it does, will he ever find Albert again?

Praise for *War Horse*

"Superb." — *The New York Times Book Review*

"... the novel [has an] antiwar message, and the terse details speak eloquently about peace." — *Booklist*