Wild Horses
by Brian Fawcett

My twin sisters were nearly seven years older than I was; and they were the most normal sisters I ever knew. They hit me for no reason, and they kissed me for no reason, and they made me the victim of a hundred childish medical experiments. They also loved horses.

Now, all young girls seem to love horses, and there are at least a hundred theories about why. Most young girls love horses from books like Black Beauty, and some of the young girls in our town had a passionate but unrequited love for real horses that they were too poor to own, and I’d heard that a few daughters of really wealthy people actually owned horses. My sisters weren't like any of those kinds of girls. They loved horses so much they created their own horses, rode them, made up stories about them, cured them when they were injured or sick, and generally made life miserable for them. But I had very little sympathy for those horses. They were dull and brutish animals, and for some reason I had never understood, my sisters thought I was one of them.

Because my sisters were twins, they presented a special problem for me: there were two of them, identical twins who shared the same mind, and they could surround me in a variety of thoroughly malevolent ways. The fact that they seemed to be able to surround nearly anyone didn't make any difference to me. When they surrounded and beat up my older brother's enemies, it didn't seem any different to me than when they surrounded and beat up my older brother, or surrounded me and did something to me I didn't like. There were too many of them and they were too agile for my liking. There was always one in front of me, whichever way I tried to escape. And the more I tried to escape, the more they thought of me as a horse they were trying to train.

They were small for their age, and were probably at least as aggressive as they seemed to me. My mother dressed them alike, and amused herself by correcting people who couldn't tell them apart, which nobody could. My sisters were simply content to know where the other one was, and where the horses were. They didn't much care about what which of them was which.

They decided I was one of their horses when I was about four years old, or at least that was when I became aware of it. In fact, they probably decided I was one of their horses when I was born, and no doubt, right from the beginning, treated me as their own tiny palomino colt. Since this made them good babysitters, my mother didn't object when they put me in a makeshift stall under the piano and tried to teach me to whinny. I may have whinnied before I spoke human language; I can't remember. My earliest memory is one of sitting underneath the piano stool being groomed by my sisters, and I had to recognize that I was not a horse before I could decide, in that formal recognition of the existence of the self
we all experience, that I was a little boy.

Before I got to any of that, though, there were some other things I figured out. I wasn't the only horse in my sisters stable. My older brother was just a year younger than the twins, and he fared much worse than I did. The twins considered him a bronco, and the two of them took turns trying to break him. Maybe they succeeded. My mother always told her friends how docile a child he was compared to the girls, and maybe that was why. I can remember the day he became a human being, too. They were herding him around the house on the end of a rope, pulling and pushing him from room to room, and he lost his temper. My sisters locked themselves in the bathroom and when my parents got home several hours later my brother was still trying to knock down the door to get at them.

They found new ways to herd him around after that, and concentrated on training me. I wasn't going to be able to do what my brother did for the foreseeable future, so I learned to whimper. My instinct was that a sick colt wasn't going to be much good to them, and if I was constantly on the limp they would at least spare me the endless trotting around the house that had driven my older brother to retaliate.

It worked for a little while, but I hadn't calculated my sisters' veterinary interests very well. They began to operate on me whenever I pulled up lame, and that was even less fun. I was tied up while they covered my legs and arms with bandages, and I had to stay in my stable until my mother came home, at which time they would tear off the bandages, stuff them back in the cupboard and tell me what awful things they would do to me if I squealed on them.

I suppose that if I were older, I might just have waited for them to grow bored with their sport. But I wasn't very old, and if I had tried to wait them out, I would have waited for a very long time, because my sisters had twice as much time as I had. I might still be under the piano stool. I couldn't fight back like my brother, nor could I appeal to him for help; he treated my plight with studied indifference. Maybe he thought it was better to leave well enough alone. Horses that escape and go wild can be caught and tamed again.

My only hope was to outsmart them, but I wasn't old enough to outsmart the family dog, let alone twins who had me convinced they were everywhere at once. I began to hate horses, refusing to listen when my sisters generously tried to read Black Beauty to me. If I'd known what the word meant I would have known it was propaganda, but I didn't know anything except that I hated them all: white horses, black horses, Trigger, Silver, Champion; each and every horse in the world. They were too big and they had skinny legs, and every time there was a parade they pooped on the streets.

For a while I tried pretending I was a different animal when my sisters pretended I was a horse. I would meow and bark, cluck like a chicken, or moo like a cow. None of it worked. My sisters merely patted my snout and continued brushing my coat, or inspecting my fetlocks, or whatever they were up to. They outlasted everything
I tried, even my heartbroken weeping. What saved me from them was the most natural of things in the equine universe: the presence of stallions.

My two horse-loving sisters, somewhere around the age of fourteen, discovered a magic place that was filled with beautiful stallions of every size, breed and colour. The place was the town they'd grown up in.

About the same time they discovered the stallions, the stallions discovered them. My sisters began to ignore me, and when they weren't ignoring me they were peering at me as if to say, "You're a human child, aren't you? How boring."

My sisters were never ones to do anything half-heartedly. They galloped into the hills where the stallions were waiting for them, and their long dark manes were intertwined with wild violets and the summer wind, and on the wind even I could hear the nervous whinnies of the stallions as my sisters rounded them up.

Horses are dull and stupid beasts, and these stallions were worse than the rest. They were in the back alley at night, behind the house, running through the hedges to brush their huge and hairy snouts against the windows where my sleepless sisters waited for them, waited to stroke their ears, their manes, their heaving flanks. Eventually my sisters went away with the stallions, leaving me with years and years to think about what they were, and what I was, and how, because of them, no one will ever ride me.