

SAVING WINSLOW

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WHAT IS IT?

In the laundry basket on the kitchen floor was a lump.


‘Another dead thing?’ Louie asked.

‘Not yet,’ his father said.

It was the midst of winter, when night, like an unwelcome guest, came too early and stayed too long, and when each day seemed smaller than the one before.


Louie’s mother stared down at the basket that her husband had brought into the house. ‘Another one of Uncle Pete’s, I presume?’

Uncle Pete had a small farm on the outskirts of



town. Anything to do with Uncle Pete usually involved Louie's father wasting time or money, or doing something dangerous like chopping down trees or racing tractors through mud fields, or disposing of dead animals. Louie's father had already brought home and buried two piglets that had not survived their birth.

Louie knelt beside the basket. A small grey head with black eyes and feathery eyelashes and sticking-up ears emerged. Attached to the head was a trembling thin body and four long spindly legs, all of it covered in splotchy grey fur scattered with brown freckles.



It was not a dog or a cat. It was a pitiful-looking thing and it was gazing at Louie. He felt a sudden rush, as if the roof had peeled off the house and the sun had dived into every corner of the kitchen.

'A goat?' he asked, kneeling beside the basket.

'No, a donkey,' his father said. 'A mini donkey, born last night.'

'A mini donkey?' Louie's hand cupped the donkey's head, patting it gently. The donkey seemed too weak to move. 'Something wrong with it?'

‘The mother is sick, can’t take care of it.’
‘Poor mama,’ Louie said. ‘Poor baby. What will happen to it?’

‘Probably go downhill fast. Might last a day or two.’

‘No!’

‘So,’ his mother said, ‘why do *you* have the donkey? Why did you bring it home if it might just die in a day or two?’

‘I don’t know,’ his father said. ‘I felt sorry for it. I thought maybe we could at least watch it until it – you know – until it dies.’ He whispered that last word.

The donkey made a small noise that sounded like *please*.

Louie lifted the donkey from the basket and held it close. It smelled of wet hay. It put its face against Louie’s neck and made that noise again. *Please*.

‘Okay,’ Louie said. ‘I accept the mission.’

‘What mission?’


‘To save this pitiful motherless donkey.’



SOMETHING DIFFERENT APPROACHING

Louie's house was old and cold and drafty and leaky, rising up out of its stone cellar with good intention but weakening as it reached the bowed roof topping the musty attic. The house was like many others on the narrow roads this side of town. Beyond the town stretched farmland and empty fields.

In summers past, the house had felt light and airy, with cooling breezes puffing the curtains in and out of the windows and always his older brother, Gus, there, so full of energy and purpose. 'C'mon, Louie, let's paint the porch,' and 'C'mon, Louie, let's clean



out that vegetable patch,' and 'C'mon, Louie, let's go to the creek,' always with something new to do. But now Gus was in the army, gone already a year.

And now it was winter.

And each day short and dark and cold . . .

Until this snowy Saturday morning in January, with the wind plastering the windows with wet flakes, when Louie had awakened feeling *floaty*, suspended in the air, with something different approaching.

