



NICHOLAS EVANS

The Horse
Whisperer



The Number One International Bestseller

Nicholas Evans worked for ten years as a writer and producer of films. *The Horse Whisperer* is his first novel. He lives in London.

International acclaim for *The Horse Whisperer*.

'A BOOK OF RARE POWER AND BEAUTY: A STORY TOLD SIMPLY BUT ELEGANTLY . . . EXPECT THIS OUTSTANDING NOVEL TO BE THE TALK OF THE SEASON . . . THE MOST REMARKABLE THING ABOUT THIS BOOK IS THAT IT ~~WILL BE THE TALK OF THE SEASON~~ IT SEEMS DESTINED TO ENJOY' *Booklist*

'You won't be able to put it down' *Cosmopolitan* (USA)

'SO EXCITINGLY WRITTEN IT WILL HAVE YOU HOLDING YOUR BREATH. IT'S AN EXCELLENT READ, ESPECIALLY FOR A FIRST NOVEL - VIVIDLY WRITTEN, CONSTANTLY MOVING AND WITH A BELIEVABLE LOVE STORY THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE. AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE MAD ABOUT HORSES TO ENJOY IT' *She* (Australia)

'Cross *The Bridges of Madison County* with *Black Beauty*, intensify the elements of *True Grit* and romance, and you have *The Horse Whisperer*' *She*

'THE PUBLISHING PHENOMENON OF THE CENTURY'
The Scotsman

'A gripping read. The theme is original, the visual descriptions striking . . . and the handling of technical expertise as good as that in *The Day of the Jackal* and *The Bonfire of the Vanities*' *Ludovic Kennedy*

A GREAT BOOK' *Options*

'This fascinating story and its tender love affair make it a compelling read' *Family Circle*

'AN OUTSTANDING ENTERTAINMENT' *Midweek*

'The novel of the year' *Daily Telegraph*

'THIS SPLENDID NOVEL DESERVES TO BE A HUGE INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS' *Edwina Currie*

'A book you are consumed by, dissecting emotions and passions with precision and clarity . . . effortless in its storytelling' *Trevor Eve*

'SPELLBINDING AND DEEPLY MOVING - UNFORGETTABLE. IT IS HARD TO FIND WORDS FOR THIS MIRACULOUS FIRST NOVEL' *Christabel Bielenberg*

'A wonderfully moving story, beautifully told - an Easterner's Western for our times' *Lisa Appignanesi*

'BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN WITH A COMPELLING NARRATIVE, SUPERB CHARACTERISATION AND A VISUAL IMPACT WHICH IS BREATHTAKING . . . THE HORSE WHISPERER COMES HIGHLY RECOMMENDED - AN EPIC ADVENTURE FOR THE 90'S WHICH SHOULDN'T BE MISSED' *Dillons Review*

'Sensational . . . Part love story, part adventure, the book is above all a story of self-knowledge, healing and redemption'
Telegraph Magazine

'ONE OF THE MOST THRILLING, HEART-STOPPING OPENINGS TO A NOVEL THAT I CAN REMEMBER . . . ONE OF THE BEST READS I'VE HAD SINCE GONE WITH THE WIND'
The Sunday Age (Melbourne)

'This is simply brilliant' *The Cork Examiner*

'A BIG, ENGROSSING BOOK WITH MUCH TO RECOMMEND IT'
Los Angeles Times

'Romantic, gripping tale'
Daily Express

'EVANS WANTS MORE OF HIS READER THAN WONDER OR HORROR OR COMPASSION. HE WANTS TO WRENCH THE HEART' *West Australian*

The Horse Whisperer

Nicholas Evans



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Pursue not the outer entanglements,
Dwell not in the inner void;
Be serene in the oneness of things,
And dualism vanishes by itself.

From 'On Trust in the Heart'
by Seng-t'san (d.606)

Part One

1

There was death at its beginning as there would be death again at its end. Though whether it was some fleeting shadow of this that passed across the girl's dreams and woke her on that least likely of mornings she would never know. All she knew, when she opened her eyes, was that the world was somehow altered.

The red glow of her alarm showed it was yet a half-hour till the time she had set it to wake her and she lay quite still, not lifting her head, trying to configure the change. It was dark but not as dark as it should be. Across the bedroom, she could clearly make out the dull glint of her riding trophies on cluttered shelves and above them the looming faces of rock stars she had once thought she should care about. She listened. The silence that filled the house was different too, expectant, like the pause between the intake of breath and the uttering of words. Soon there would be the muted roar of the furnace coming alive in the basement and the old farmhouse floorboards would start their ritual creaking complaint. She slipped out from the bedclothes and went to the window.

There was snow. The first fall of winter. And from the laterals of the fence up by the pond she could tell there must be almost a foot of it. With no deflecting wind, it was perfect and driftless, heaped in comical

proportion on the branches of the six small cherry trees her father had planted last year. A single star shone in a wedge of deep blue above the woods. The girl looked down and saw a lace of frost had formed on the lower part of the window and she placed a finger on it, melting a small hole. She shivered, not from the cold, but from the thrill that this transformed world was for the moment entirely hers. And she turned and hurried to get dressed.

Grace Maclean had come up from New York City the night before with her father, just the two of them. She always enjoyed the trip, two and a half hours on the Taconic State Parkway, cocooned together in the long Mercedes, listening to tapes and chatting easily about school or some new case he was working on. She liked to hear him talk as he drove, liked having him to herself, seeing him slowly unwind in his studiously weekend clothes. Her mother, as usual, had some dinner or function or something and would be catching the train to Hudson this morning, which she preferred to do anyway. The Friday-night crawl of traffic invariably made her crabby and impatient and she would compensate by taking charge, telling Robert, Grace's father, to slow down or speed up or take some devious route to avoid delays. He never bothered to argue, just did as he was told, though sometimes he would sigh or give Grace, relegated to the backseat, a wry glance in the mirror. Her parents' relationship had long been a mystery to her, a complicated world where dominance and compliance were never quite what they seemed. Rather than get involved, Grace would simply retreat into the sanctuary of her Walkman.

On the train her mother would work for the entire

journey, undistracted and undistractable. Accompanying her once recently, Grace had watched her and marveled that she never even looked out of the window except perhaps in a glazed, unseeing scan when some big-shot writer or one of her more eager assistant editors called on the cellular phone.

The light on the landing outside Grace's room was still on. She tiptoed in her socks past the half-open door of her parents' bedroom and paused. She could hear the ticking of the wall clock in the hall below and now the reassuring, soft snoring of her father. She came down the stairs into the hall, its azure walls and ceiling already aglow from the reflection of snow through undraped windows. In the kitchen, she drank a glass of milk in one long tilt and ate a chocolate-chip cookie as she scribbled a note for her father on the pad by the phone. *Gone riding. Back around 10. Luv, G.*

She took another cookie and ate it on the move as she went through to the passageway by the back door where they left coats and muddy boots. She put on her fleece jacket and hopped elegantly, holding the cookie in her mouth, as she pulled on her riding boots. She zipped her jacket to the neck, put on her gloves and took her riding hat down off the shelf, wondering briefly if she should phone Judith to check if she still wanted to ride now that it had snowed. But there was no need. Judith would be just as excited as she was. As Grace opened the door to step out into the freezing air, she heard the furnace come to life down in the basement.

Wayne P. Tanner looked gloomily over the rim of his coffee cup at the rows of snowcrusted trucks parked

outside the diner. He hated the snow but, more than that, he hated being caught out. And in the space of just a few hours it had happened twice.

Those New York state troopers had enjoyed every minute of it, smug Yankee bastards. He had seen them slide up behind him and hang there on his tail for a couple of miles, knowing damn well he'd seen them and enjoying it. Then the lights coming on, telling him to pull over and the smartass, no more than a kid, swaggering up alongside in his stetson like some goddamn movie cop. He'd asked for the daily logbook and Wayne found it, handed it down and watched as the kid read it.

'Atlanta huh?' he said, flipping the pages.

'Yes sir,' Wayne replied. 'And it's one helluva lot warmer down there, I can tell you.' The tone usually worked with cops, respectful but fraternal, implying some working kinship of the road. But the kid didn't look up.

'Uh-huh. You know that radar detector you've got there is illegal, don't you?'

Wayne glanced at the little black box bolted to the dash and wondered for a moment whether to play all innocent. In New York fuzz-busters were only illegal for trucks over eighteen thousand pounds. He was packing about three or four times that. Pleading ignorance, he reckoned, might just make the little bastard meaner still. He turned back with a mock-guilty grin but it was wasted because the kid still didn't look at him. 'Don't you?' he said again.

'Yeah, well. I guess.'

The kid shut the logbook and handed it back up to him, at last meeting his eyes. 'Okay,' he said. 'Now let's see the other one.'