

# Thunderhead

MARY O'HARA

**THE STORY THUS FAR:** Thunderhead is the only white horse ever foaled on the Goose Bar ranch in Wyoming. He is a showback to his great granddaddy, the Albino, a wild stallion. His 14-year-old owner, Ken McLaughlin, hopes that he will become a famous racer. Thunderhead is entered as a fall race meet in Idaho. He is very fast but is hard to handle. Rob McLaughlin, Ken's father, who is most of his horses and goes into sheep raising. Financial worries had created a rift between Rob and his wife, Nell, but they are reconciled. Ken and his brother, Howard, ride into the mountains. Thunderhead breaks loose and joins the herd of wild horses led by the Albino.

CHAPTER XXII

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. Thunderhead and the mares disappeared in the twistings of the passage. Ken began to trot after them and Howard followed. Ken was still calling desperately, "Come, boy! Get your oats! Here Thunderhead! Oats!"

The passage narrowed. They were going through the keyhole, passing directly underneath the great boulder which hung over it, and the next moment there was the wide spread of the valley before them, ghostly with a faint luminescence through which the dark forms of the horses moved like shadows.

Then light flooded the heavens and the shafts of rosy gold poured up from the rising sun to bathe the snow covered peaks of the Never-summer Range.

Not even the disaster of Thunderhead's rebellion could lessen the impact of this sight upon Howard.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed again and stood motionless.

But Ken's agonized eyes found what they were looking for. The Albino, and his instant alert as Thunderhead entered the valley! The two stallions saw each other at the same moment. The Albino rushed forward as if for immediate attack, then turned and began to sound up the far flung band of mares and colts behind him. At a swift twisting gallop he circled them, gathered them all in and bunched them in an invisible corral. All his actions were strained and nervous.

But Thunderhead moved with exuberance and calm. His muscles flowed smoothly under his satin coat as he leisurely circled his little band of stolen mares, bunched and froze them, then trotted out in front.

The two stallions faced each other about a hundred yards apart, motionless as statues. The Albino moved forward a little, then stepped. He did this again. Thunderhead stood without a quiver, his head high, his weight forward, his hind legs stretched back.

Ken suddenly thrust the nose-bag into Howard's hands. "Hold that! They're gonna fight! I've got to get him!"

He ran to Thunderhead, calling his name. Thunderhead did not even twitch an ear in his direction. He was watching the Albino with a minute, comprehensive stare that penetrated the body and timed the nerve fuses.

Ken seized the dangling halter rope and flung his weight on it. "Come away! Come away, Thunderhead!"

He hauled with all his power, trying to break the stallion's fixation, but he might as well have tried to move a rock. The stallion stared over him, immobile.

The boy burst out crying and struck at the stallion's head, jerking it and fro with all his weight. "Oh, stop it, Thunderhead! Please, Thunderhead! Come away!"

Howard dropped the nose-bag, rushed to his brother's side and seized the halter.

Ken's voice reached Thunderhead dimly but he made no response. This was his world, his inheritance. Ken had no part in it. But how to become master of it? Only by the destruction of that which barred his way.

Rearing backward, he shook loose, knocking Howard down and snapping Ken aside with a whip-lash of his head. Then, screaming his challenge, he hurtled forward as from a spring-board.

At the same instant the Albino rushed to meet him and both animals stopped short about thirty feet apart and stood tensely eyeing each other. These were two antagonists who had met before and had not forgotten the event.

Mingled with Thunderhead's desire to annihilate this obstacle before him was the satisfaction of an intense curiosity. Here at last was the great being who had overshadowed his whole life, the image of whom had hung in his blood as persistently and as challengingly as the snow scent hung in the mountain wind.

But the Albino was confused. His feet shifted nervously as if taking firmer hold of the earth. His reaching nostrils expanded and contracted slowly. In his sunken eye-sockets his white-ringed eyes stared and multiplied, seeing there before him, himself! His own superb and invincible youth! He was there! He was here! But the strength was as one. It flowed like a current between them as if it were already creating a third horse that appeared in a misty globe between them, and in which they were both fused.

Power and fire and glory rushed through the old stallion and he trumpeted with ecstasy at this transmis-

tion of himself into the shining magnificence of that vision. He rushed forward. One will seemed to animate them both, for Thunderhead charged too, each flinging bared teeth at the other's back in passing.

The Albino drew first blood. A red stain sprang out on Thunderhead's withers and spread slowly down his shoulder.

As they passed, they whirled and reared to strike at each other with their front hoofs, reaching over the neck to land body blows that resounded like great bass drums. Short snarling grunts were jarred from them.

The Albino reached under and seized Thunderhead's throat, trying to pull back and tear out the jugular vein. But Thunderhead locked his forelegs around the Albino's neck and pressed close into those grinding jaws.

The horses staggered like wrestlers, Thunderhead forcing the Albino backwards. Then he loosed the grip of his forelegs and began to use them for attack, flailing with his hoofs on the back of the Albino, raking the flesh from the bones and striving to land a crippling blow on the kidneys.

For an instant the massive jaws crunched down on Thunderhead's jugular vein relaxed, he tore loose, both horses wheeled, plunged away, then whirled to eye each other again and to get their wind and their balance for the next charge.

There was a jagged bleeding gash in Thunderhead's throat. The Albino was laced with pulsing crim-



The Albino drew first blood.

son streams. The unnatural expansion of his nostrils showed the beginning of exhaustion.

Again, as if animated by a single will, the stallions charged each other with heads high and stiff, lifted tails. Meeting, rising, swerving, sinking with indescribable coiling grace—not one motion lost—they turned their heads sideways with bared reaching teeth and thrust them forward and under to seize the foreleg.

Each blocked this maneuver cleverly; they braced themselves against each other with locked, straining necks, and swung back first one and then the other foreleg out of reach of the yawning, snake-like heads. But Thunderhead was as quick as a rattler. His muzzle thrust in and caught the lower leg of the Albino before he could withdraw it and fractured the bone with a single twisting crunch of the jaws.

The Albino gave no sign. The moment Thunderhead loosed his hold, the older horse rose to his full height. One foreleg dangled useless, but he still had that mighty right hoof with which he had nearly killed the colt two years ago. The same blow would do it now.

Thunderhead too was on his hind legs, feinting as if to strike. But he saw the blow coming. In mid-air he whirled, dropped his head and lashed out with his heels.

As the Albino came down with his killing stroke, his face received the full impact of those terrible hoofs, and both cheeks were ripped up so that the skeleton of his head was bared.

The Albino's one good foreleg hit the earth with a crashing jar. Thrown off balance by failure to land his blow, and the murderous kick, he sank to his knees. Before he could recover Thunderhead had spun around. His right hoof shot out in one pawing stroke which crushed the bony structure of the old stallion's head and sliced off the lower part of his face.

Blood spouted from the fatal wound, mingled with the choking and bubbling breath. The Albino's eyes closed and his body sank into the earth, his head moving slowly from side to side in agony.

Thunderhead stood over him. The Albino's eyes opened once, and

looked up at Thunderhead. There was the vision. The shining phantom horse—oversoul of the line! To this prince of the royal blood he now bequeathed all his wisdom. He gave him knowledge of the voices of the trees and waters and the great snows and winds, so that nothing in the valley would be strange to him, no, not a single mare, nor the smallest colt nor a humming-bird nor eagle nor a blade of grass.

Thunderhead's right hoof rose and fell with lightning speed, cleaving the skull.

The Albino quivered and was still. Then one deep sigh came from him, and on it there ebbed away his life, while his blood and brains pumped slowly out to mingle with the earth of his beloved valley.

Thunderhead lifted his mighty crest and made the mountains ring with his unearthly screech of triumph.

"Stand, Thunderhead!" Hardly had the echoes of Thunderhead's cry of victory ceased than a small familiar figure was beside him, commanding him.

Obediently Thunderhead stood while two hands seized the halter rope and gripped his mane. Ken vaulted onto his back.

The stallion's eyes were on the mares. All through the fight they had stood in two close bunches, watching, fascinated. Now that it was ended they began to disperse. They were confused and nervous.

Howard picked up the nose-bag and oats and started toward Thunderhead. But the stallion suddenly plunged toward the mares. Ken flung his weight back, hauling on the rope, but it was whipped out of his hand as the great white head jerked impatiently, then dropped, snaking along the ground. The stallion was not only beginning the roundup of the mares, he was taking command and making himself known to them as their new master. Ken seized handfuls of the thick, wild mane.

The stallion came abreast of a disobedient mare and closed in. She did not surrender.

The mare's body went over in a complete somersault and she crashed to the earth, rolling over and over.

Ken, clinging to Thunderhead's neck, was, by a miracle, still on.

Thunderhead reached and passed the mares, and took the lead. The black mare forged to the front of the band and the little white colt galloped mightily as if trying to reach the side of the stallion.

Wave after wave of nausea went over Ken. His face was deathly white. His body ached as if it had been beaten. His fingers in Thunderhead's mane clung merely because they were stiffly locked. He had lost all hope of ever getting control of his horse—the hills were sweeping past—he could not stick on any longer—the herd was thundering behind him. Where was Howard? Where was the keyhole, and safety, and Flicks? At this pace, he was leaving them far behind.

There came at last a moment of anguished exhaustion when he cared about nothing—only to be off—

He loosed his grip, flung himself flat back on Thunderhead's broad rump, at the same time swinging one leg over his withers. From this side-saddle position he slid to earth. His feet touched for a second, then he was hurled on his face.

He felt the jarring thud of the ground and lay there. The thunder of the herd roared up and over him. The ground shook. Clods of dirt and stinging gravel pelted him and abrupt blocks of light and darkness alternated over him as the big bodies of the mares lifted in the air to clear him—one after the other.

It receded into the distance—that thunder of hoofs—until at last it was not even so loud as the sound of the wind in the pines, and his own heart-broken sobbing, and the harsh far-away cry of eagles who dropped from the clouds to feast upon royal carrion.

The command not to cause Nell any anxiety had not been disobeyed. For the boys, riding double on Flicks, hardly got home in time to hurry Howard into his clothes and pack his suitcases.

After he had gone, Ken sat down by his father's desk in the study and told the details of all that had happened.

Rob was in a very quiet mood. He sat in his square wooden chair, turned slightly toward Ken and puffed at his pipe.

"Why," said he at last, "did you take Thunderhead to a place where there were mares and another stallion?"

"But dad!" exclaimed Ken woe-fully, "he'd been there often before! And he had his own regular place to watch them from—perfectly safe—up there on top of that rampart! He never went into the valley, not since that first time when he got the awful swat when he was a baby!"

"And so you figured he'd continue to do as he always had done. And that's where you made your mistake. After all, Thunderhead's three years old now, and in some ways, for a horse, that's grown up."

Ken's tired and dirty face turned away and his eyes wandered, then came back to his father. "But he's never done any hell-raising. And he's been trained for running and racing. You said yourself a horse will develop the way he's trained."

"You see the way he's trained," Ken said.

"You see the way he's trained," Ken said.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By HAROLD L. LUNDQUIST, D. D. Of The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Released by Western Newspaper Union.

### Lesson for October 21

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#### MAKING THE HOME CHRISTIAN

LESSON TEXT—Luke 10:36-42; 1 Corinthians 13:4-13. GOLDEN TEXT—Love suffereth long, and is kind.—1 Corinthians 13:4.

Things do not just happen. It takes praying and planning and real effort to accomplish a worthwhile purpose. We are thinking these weeks of the home as a Christian center of influence. We trust that many are asking in their hearts, "What can I do to make my home really Christian?"

The answer is clear. A home will be Christian when those in it are Christian and put their Christianity into daily practice. First, you must be sure of your own salvation and that of the members of your household. Then you can proceed to put the principles of godliness to work.

Our lesson presents the believing home as one that is well-balanced. There is both:

#### I. Work and Worship (Luke 10:38-42)

No home can be a place of comfort and pleasant fellowship without much work. A disorderly, dirty or run-down house is a disgrace and a discouragement to all that is finest in the relations of those who live in it.

Home need not be a mansion. It does not have to be richly furnished, but it does need to be clean and orderly. Meals must be made. Cleaning must be done. So far Martha was right, but she went too far. She let the labor of the household hinder her from what she so deeply needed—fellowship, not only with her family but with the Lord.

Now, notice that Mary had not shirked her duty to share the work. Observe the word "also" in verse 39. She had worked, but she also sat at Jesus' feet. She knew when it was time to call a halt to labor and make the most of god comradeship. Blessed wisdom! Would that many burdened housewives would learn of Mary!

Jesus made it clear that life in the home is to strike a proper balance between work and worship. If you do not know where to make the division in your home, err on the side of worship. Give that more time than it should have rather than less.

Alas, is it not true that in most homes, even in Christian homes, worship is almost, if not entirely, forgotten! Something should be done about that. Will you do it in your home?

#### II. Love and Longsuffering (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

We are apt to think of love as the warm feeling of interest and emotion which suffuses one's nature in moments of special pleasantness or of intimate fellowship. But life is not made up of a succession of pleasant incidents, of sunny afternoons and moonlit evenings.

Life is real; it is earnest, and often it is drab and irritating. What about such times? Can love meet them? Yes, for love knows how to be longsuffering.

But someone may ask, Does love really work, or is this just a fine-sounding but obsolete theory? It works!

Think of the things in life which irritate and depress us. Then put opposite them the qualities of Christian love as given in verses 4 to 7, and you will agree that what this world needs most of all is love.

Remember that talking about love, or reading about it, or studying it in the Sunday school will not make it effective. We must put it into practice. Why not start now? You will be surprised at the results.

#### III. Promise and Perfection (vv. 8-13)

Christianity has a hope, and that is not just a vague wishing that something might come to pass; it is a sure hope. In Christ all the rich promise of prophecy, of faith, of hope will come to pass.

The Christian home is the place to teach boys and girls to believe with assurance that He who has begun a good work in us "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

We who see only dimly shall one day see our Lord face to face, and love shall abide through all eternity.

Many gifts are only temporary in their usefulness; in fact, almost everything that man makes or does (apart from his service for God) is transient.

Even as vital a matter as prophecy shall one day find its end in fulfillment. Hope shall eventually find its longing expectation satisfied. Faith will be justified in seeing what it has believed. Childish things will be put away by the full-grown man; knowledge will increase and darkness disappear.

But love—love is eternal. It never fails, and will never fail. God is love, and God is eternal. From all eternity and unto all eternity love continues. Therefore, we agree with Paul who, in the verse preceding this chapter (1 Cor. 12:31) says that while you may covet the best gift, here is the more excellent way.

Dream Rival  
By RAE RESNICK  
McClure Newspaper Syndicate.  
WNU Features.

DISGUSTED with his own cooking, George angrily pushed his chair back with his foot. If only Anna weren't such a strange little foreigner, he thought impatiently, his meals wouldn't be so tasteless, and the burden of keeping house, in addition to many of the farm chores, would fall on her instead of him.

With the odor of the barn still clinging to his clothes, he walked the short distance to the next farm to see Anna and speak to her cousin. Without knocking, he went into the living room.

The woman looked up from her mending indifferently, as if his visits were too frequent for him to be considered a guest. "Hello, George. You'll find Anna in the kitchen."

"Have you spoken to her yet, Mrs. Laud?" he asked.

"Well," Mrs. Laud said slowly, "I tried to, only she didn't seem to know what I was getting at." She paused thoughtfully. "Seemed more that she pretended not to."

"I see," he said wearily. "I did tell her what a fine, honest man you are. But her only ambition right now is to visit a fortune teller." She laughed indulgently.

"A fortune teller?"

"Yes. Can you imagine? She believes in them. You see, in Europe a gypsy once read her palm. And Anna said that everything came true. Of course, I imagine little Anna helped out a lot by twisting everything that happened to her into the shape of that faker's prediction."

They talked a while longer about Anna, who was only twelve when the



"I want see fortune teller."

Germany invaded her country, and how Mrs. Laud managed to get her to Canada. George had often heard the story before. Soon he went into the kitchen. He leaned against the wall, faded blue overalls sagging on his awkward thin frame; his long neck tipped forward, his blond, sun-dried hair hanging over dull blue eyes.

As Anna washed the dishes George could almost see the dreams in her large eyes—dreams of a modern knight riding in the wind with her, the long thick braids of her hair flying behind her.

Her eyes sparkled. "I want see fortune teller."

"What for?"

"I want find out who my husband be."

Suddenly he had an idea, and he was overwhelmed by his own cleverness. What had Mrs. Laud said a little while ago? "She believes in them . . . little Anna helped out a lot . . . she sure does swear by them now." His red face brightened with enthusiasm. After all, he thought, they would probably be married some day, anyway. No harm in hurrying things up a bit. "There's an amusement park fifteen miles from here," he told her.

On the bus Anna sat quietly in anticipation. George saw her lower her wide eyes modestly when she noticed the men staring at her shy loveliness. Failing to escape their glances, she took a white handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped away the lipstick with which her cousin had touched her mouth. "Maybe they don't look now," she whispered to George. Naive. Thank heaven she was, he thought. For his plans were all the likelier to succeed.

At the park she walked close to him, asking every few minutes where the fortune teller was located. They came to a row of booths under a huge awning and he bought a ticket. "Wait here a minute," he said. "I'll be back soon."

He told the fortune teller to describe him to Anna when she asked about her future husband. He handed her some money. "Don't forget. Tall man, blond hair, blue eyes." Then he went out. "You can go in now," he told Anna.

While waiting for her, he laughed. Anna wouldn't doubt the oracle for a minute, he thought, amused. When she came out, she looked as if she were in a trance. Her large shining eyes were focused straight ahead.

He fell into step beside her. "Well, what did she say?"

"Oh, she say wonderful things. She say I marry tall man. He have blue eyes with blond hair. And he be very good to me. I know he be the handsomest man in the world. And I wait for him," she said softly. "I wait for him forever."

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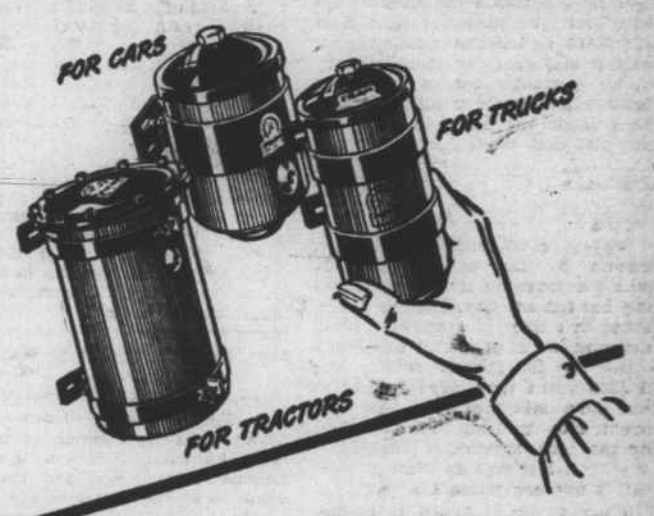
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