

Phoebe's Story

Life Through the Eyes of a Nurse Mare Foal

By Terri Stemper, with Karsen Price - Photography by Equestrian Images

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FIRST LIGHT

The first thing I ever knew was darkness. But it was a warm darkness, punctuated by the thump-thump of what I now know was my mother's heart. And then, I was in a strange, bright place. My mother was there, she nickered at me as she cleaned me. I turned to her, hungry, and there was milk - milk made just for me.



A new day dawned. Different creatures filled my stall, creatures with two legs, and ropes, and loud voices. Before I knew it, my mother was gone, and I found myself in a rumbling metal box. That was the first time I felt it: thirsty. I called to my mother, over and over, until I couldn't call anymore.

MOTHERLESS DAYS



I drink from buckets now, and they are hard and cold. There is no mother here, there are only foals like me, and the two-legged others, and I do not like them, I don't! The milk is different, but it takes away the hurt in my stomach, and so I drink it. I listen to the people talking outside. They call me a nurse mare foal.

Unwanted, they say. (But I know this is not true. My mother wanted me.) Unregistered, they say. Slowly I learn that my mother was taken to a racehorse farm in Kentucky, where her milk will be fed to another foal who is worth lots of money.

My mother - I can barely remember my mother. The days are long now, and I don't care so much about the milk in the bucket.



A NEW KIND OF MOTHER

Her hair is yellow and she is not much bigger than me. She is different than the others; gentle, but strong. She runs her hands over my body, and tells me, "You are wanted, little filly. You're going with me, little filly." I think I like this woman.



Again, I am in a rumbling metal box. But this time, there are others like me - day old baby horses, whose mothers were stolen from them too. Beside me is a colt with funny splotches of brown and white. We don't know each other, and yet, we are friends. Because we are nurse mare foals. And we are on our way to our new home with the woman with yellow hair.

HOME SWEET HOME... FOR A WHILE

I now live in a different place with my friend, the Paint, but to me, he is my brother. The good woman is there - her name is Terri. Soon, she begins to call me Phoebe.



My name is Phoebe.
I am Phoebe.



There are lots of orphans like me, more than I can count. We play in our paddock, and we learn to like the people who visit us. Slowly, once again, I learn that this is not home. One day, the Paint is chosen for adoption. My friend, my brother, is leaving me forever, to go to his fourth home. He is three months old.

My stall feels so empty without him. I worry about the day when I will be adopted, and I can't bear to think of leaving. Later that day, Terri comes to me. She scratches my neck and says, the others will leave to find new homes. But I, she says, will not leave. "Phoebe", she says, "you are home."