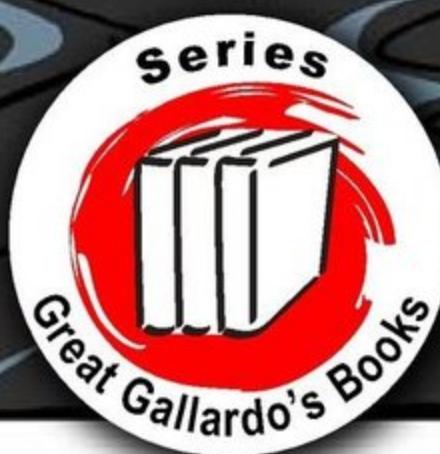
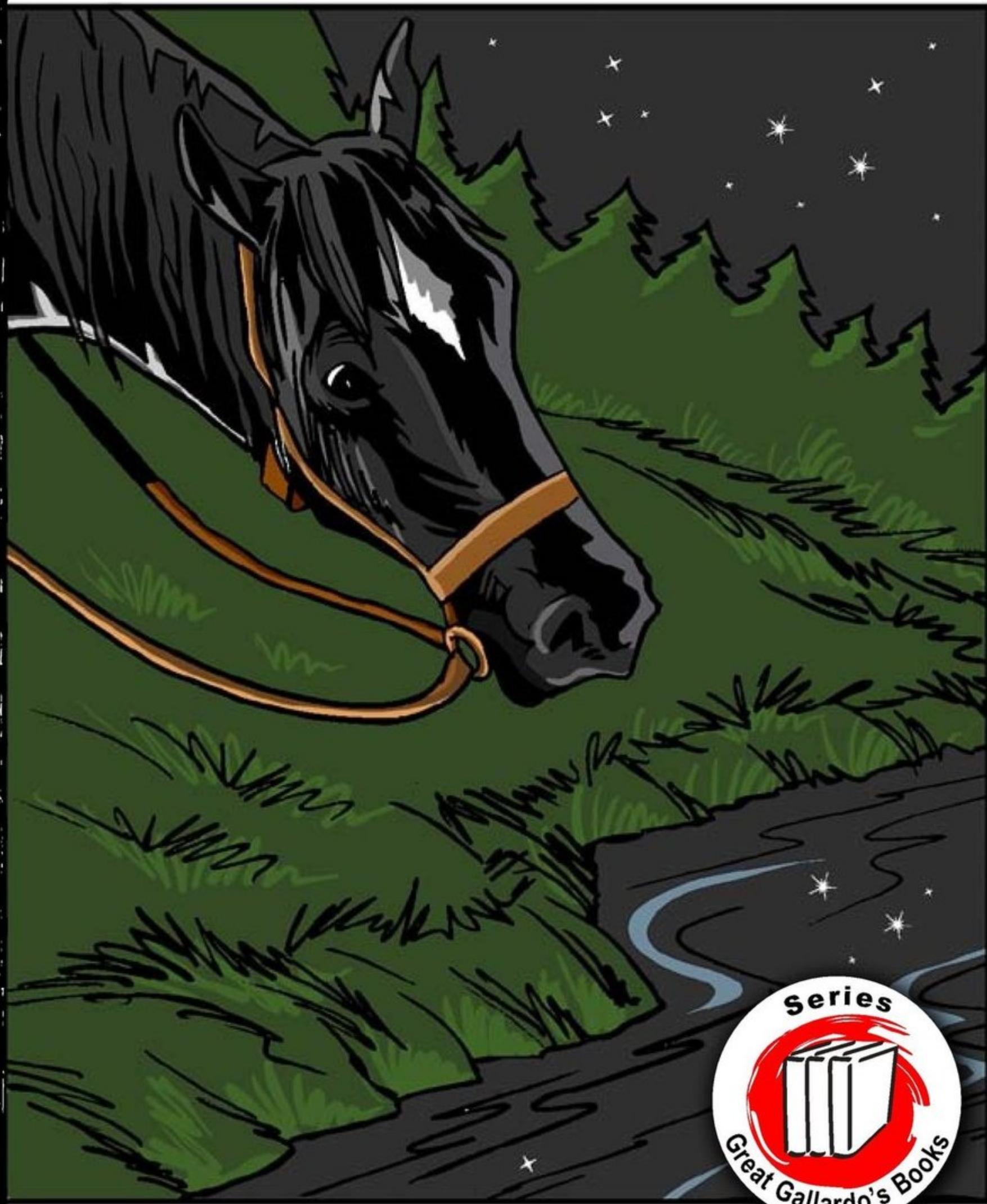


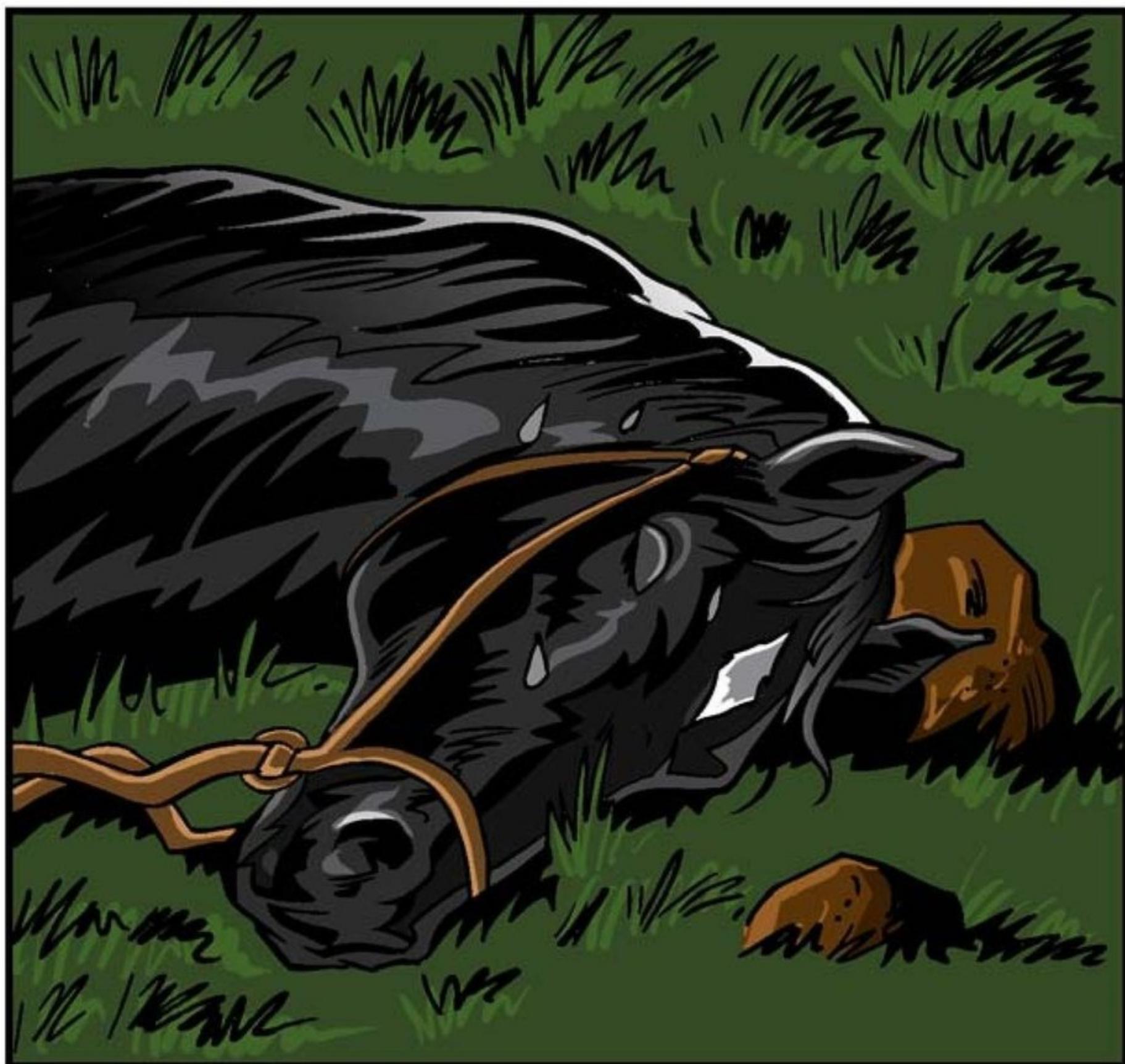
LEVELED BOOK • X

Saved by the Stars



Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

Saved by the Stars



A Great Gallardo Book
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Lost

"Go left!" Trevon shouted.

"No, go right!" Leo yelled.

Miguel Ventura pedaled hard, glancing down at a map drawn on the palm of his hand. He'd been sweating, and as the sun set, Miguel could barely make out the lines and street names. "We'd better pull over."

The three boys hopped their bikes up a curb and skidded into a driveway.



"I think this line is San Martin Avenue." Miguel pointed to a **crease** on his palm.

"No, dude, that's your **lifeline**," said Leo. "And it's looking pretty short unless you find the baseball field."

"The Black Cobras finally challenged us to a game," said Trevon as he smacked his ball into his glove, "and thanks to you, they'll think we chickened out."

"I thought it . . . I mean, it should be right here."

"You got us lost," Leo said.

Miguel swallowed and glanced down at his sweaty hand. The moisture had erased almost all the ink-drawn lines. The sky grew dim and Miguel glanced up, scanning for stars. Sailors from long ago used them to **navigate**. But the heavens, a mucky gray, had not darkened enough to show even the first star. Oh, how he longed to make a wish.



"Let's go." Miguel pumped his pedals down another street, but what he thought was a shortcut quickly led to a **dead end**. The boys swerved down a side alley. Something *creaked* behind them. Miguel's heart raced. Trevon and Leo breathed hard as they sped away.

Bang! Crash! Trashcans fell. Rats skittered down the gutter.



The boys slid out to a stop under a darkened streetlamp, crashing into one another like dominoes.

"Where's the field?" Trevon yelled, unwrapping himself from Leo, who looked just as angry as Trevon.

Miguel stood up, sweat pouring from under his bike helmet. "It should be right here."

"You need a GPS, man," Leo said.

The sun had completely vanished along with Miguel's hope of finding the field. The pressure jumbled Miguel's brain. Street names. Intersections. Buildings. They all ran together like one big mass of information. The map was useless. The game was totally lost. And so were they.

"C'mon, Leo," Trevon said. "We're out of here."



Horsing Around

“Great sense of direction,” Leo said the next day at school. Both he and Trevon blamed Miguel for not finding the field. To make things worse, one of the boys from the Black Cobras left a rubber chicken in Trevon’s backpack. Miguel felt horrible for letting his friends down, but he didn’t know what to do to make it up to them.



After school, Miguel found himself all alone, so he sulked up to the loft in the back of his family’s sandwich shop. It was here that he had found his great-grandpa Gallardo’s magic books. These books made the best medicine. By some magic, he could escape into one of the stories, which always helped him forget his problems.

A new book, *Black Beauty*, lay atop the chest. Miguel studied the small golden star inlaid on the book's cover. He'd read the story about the life and treatment of this amazing horse to his sister Teresa last year. Teresa loved horses. On page 107, Miguel began to read, "Wake up, Beauty! You will have to run as fast as you can!" This must have been the part where Black Beauty had to race all night to the doctor. *The horse didn't get lost*, Miguel thought to himself.

The words danced around on the page.
*"happening had Before my the I was saddle knew back.
what he the on..."*



Pressure spread across my ribs. Then all went dark. I awoke to the smell of hay in a stable and found myself standing in a stall . . . on four legs! My long black tail swished behind me. Metal horseshoes were tacked to each one of my hooves—I have hooves! A metal bar ran across my teeth. Every time I bit down, it felt cold and hard, and almost made me gag. Before I could think about being a horse, two men came up from behind me.

A younger man in riding gear hopped on my back.

“Ride as fast as you can, John,” said a guy wearing a black tuxedo. “Our mistress’s life depends upon it.”



He gave John a note. “Give this to Dr. White and be sure to rest the horse. Return as soon as you can!”

With that, John dug his heels into my sides and off I ran, down the path and into the hills. “Do your best. We must save our mistress’s life!”

As Black Beauty, it was up to me to save the life of my owner’s wife! A rush of **adrenaline** surged through me. But as I ran ahead, my legs almost froze. What if I couldn’t make it like Black Beauty had in the original story? It would be my fault if the mistress died. The weight of that idea was heavier than the rider on my back, but I **galloped** as hard as I could, knowing the owner had never let Beauty down.

The sun faded as we followed trails that wound through thick pine forest. But I barely noticed my surroundings as John skillfully steered me with the reins.

My eyelids drooped. My legs ached. We had been riding all night, and I wasn’t sure I could go any farther. Luckily for me, it wasn’t long before we reached Dr. White’s house. John pounded at the door, but the doctor did not come out. I whinnied as loud as I could, but there was no Dr. White to be found.

Finally, after much hollering and banging, a man in his nightshirt threw open the window. John explained our situation.

"My horse is sick," said the doctor, adjusting his glasses. "I must ride back on yours."

My heart dropped. I looked at John. He grimaced, knowing full well how **exhausted** I was.

"My horse needs rest," John said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "I don't know whether Black Beauty will make it."

"It's the only way to save the mistress," the doctor said as he picked up his black case.

John was like Beauty's owner in that he would never have allowed the doctor to ride me back without rest if not for such dire circumstances.

After a long drink, my muscles tightened as the old man climbed upon me. He didn't feel as sure of himself on my back as John had. I whinnied and neighed—swished my head and tail. Then I stomped my feet.

"Settle down, Beauty," John said, "this is life or death. Your mistress needs you now more than ever."



A Slippery Setback

"Hee-yah!" The doctor snapped the reins together as I traversed a field. He tapped my sides with his heels, and I ran forward through the trails and into a meadow. I passed into the pine forest and the doctor dug his heels into my sides further. As I galloped, a pain shot up my rear leg, as if the tendons were about to snap like rubber bands. My heart thumped, and I breathed out hard through my nostrils. The chill transformed my breath into steam, and I shuddered.

"This way!" the doctor shouted, pulling me to the right.

I ran ahead, every step sending a burst of pain throughout my body. Even this slight man equaled the weight of fifty sandbags.

We passed what felt like a thousand trees.
A weird, white froth foamed from my mouth.
I felt the doctor's hands loosen on my **reins**.
He must have been getting tired, too. Once out
of the forest, we approached a ridge. A fierce
wind howled against my face as if I were moving
forward against a wall. As we neared a steeply
sloping, rocky trail, the doctor stopped me.
“Steady,” he whispered as he gently nudged me
into the descent.

I tried to place my hooves down solidly, but
each step was a chore. My legs tingled with
numbness. Left. Right. Left . . . My right hind leg
slipped on a piece of **shale**, and down I went.





My fall stretched out for what felt like minutes. Gravity tore the doctor to the ground. My body seemed to drop, inch by inch, until my side slammed against rocks at the hill's bottom.

I lay there, my neck and shoulders wet with sweat, wrenching in pain. Somewhere behind me I heard the doctor moan. All I could think about was the mistress and how she would not make it. And it would be my fault. Soon cold blackness overtook my body, but the white-hot pain remained.

Sightless

Crickets chirped in my ears, and strangely enough I heard each of them sing in a different key, like a chorus. My eyelids fluttered, welcoming in the darkness of night. For the first time I realized that as a horse my **night vision** had improved.

I turned my head at movement in the trees; but the pain stopped me. Every square inch of my body hurt. Gently pushing from my side, I sat upright and stretched my neck. I flexed my legs. The muscles were stiff like drying cement, but they moved and were not broken.

“Beauty?” a hoarse voice muttered from behind me.

The doctor! He was alive! His voice shook my jumbled thoughts back to reality.

I scrambled to my feet, wobbly at first, but stable. After I gained my **balance**, I searched the trees for the doctor. He lay spread across a bed of pine needles, his hands still clutching the black bag. I nudged him with my muzzle. He didn’t move. I licked him on the face and he stirred.

"Ah, you are a beauty." The doctor arose slowly and came to a stance. He squinted, then dropped to the ground, feeling around for something. "I lost my glasses in the fall; I can't see a thing!"

His glasses! I swiveled my head around and tried to paw the ground, but it was useless without fingers.

"I got 'em!" the doctor shouted. But before he could slip his glasses on, his face dropped. And I knew exactly why. The lenses had fallen out in the crash.

He glanced around, then walked over and stroked my neck. "It's up to you now, Beauty. Get us home. Take us to the mistress." Doctor White placed his feet in the stirrups and climbed onto my back.





Look to the Sky

Fear spread across me like an icy blanket. Lost. We were lost. And now I would let the doctor and my mistress down just like I had Trevon and Leo. A long neigh reverberated from my throat and ended as I blew a big burst of air out my nostrils. I had the urge to rear up and run away.

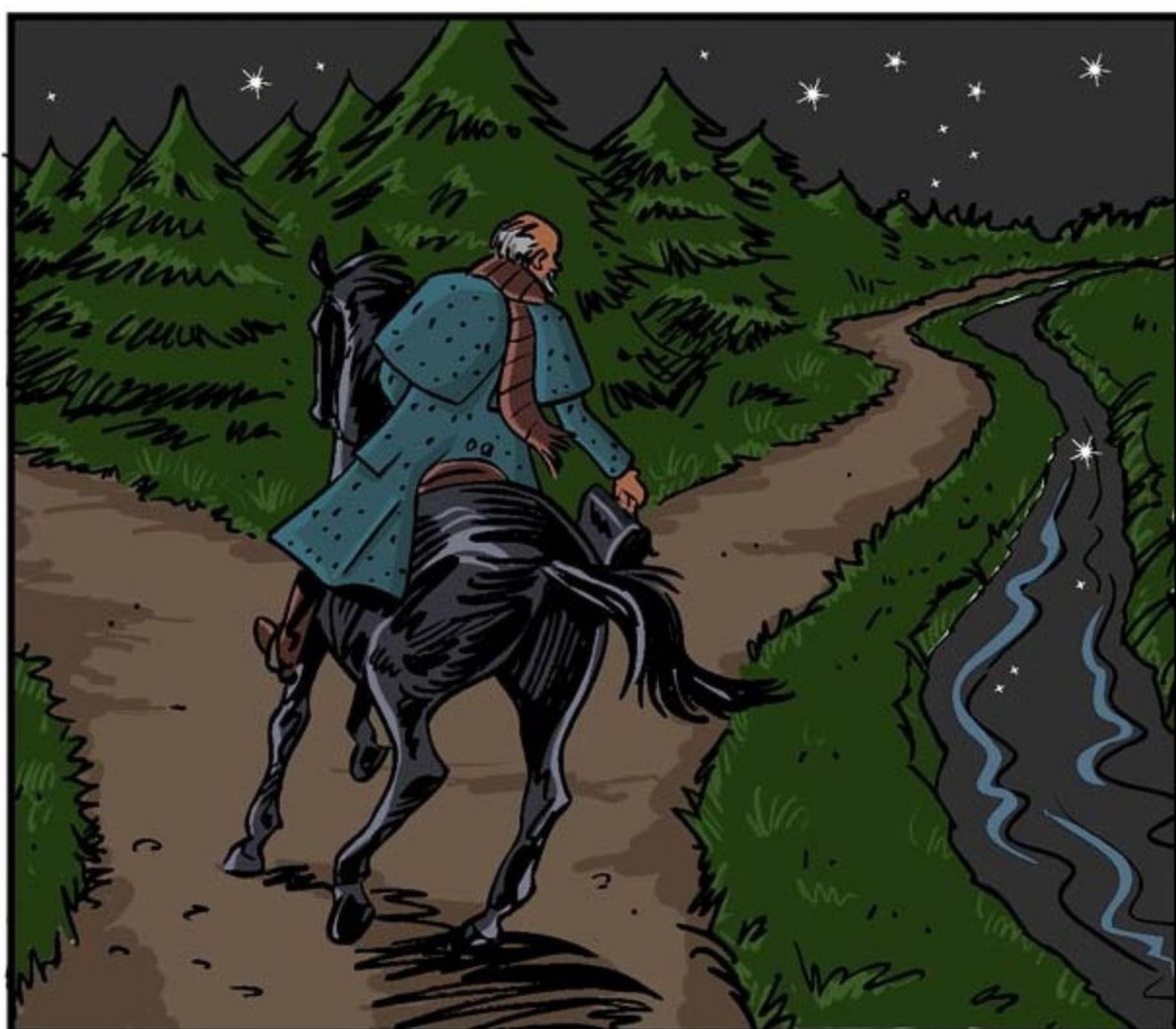
“Whoa, Beauty,” the doctor said. “You can do this.”

His words calmed me, seeping down into my body like medicine.

I took one step forward. Then another. The doctor squeezed my sides just enough to get me into a full gallop. The pine needles brushed against my face. *Think.* I told myself. *Stay calm, and think!* But a fork in the road brought me to an abrupt halt.

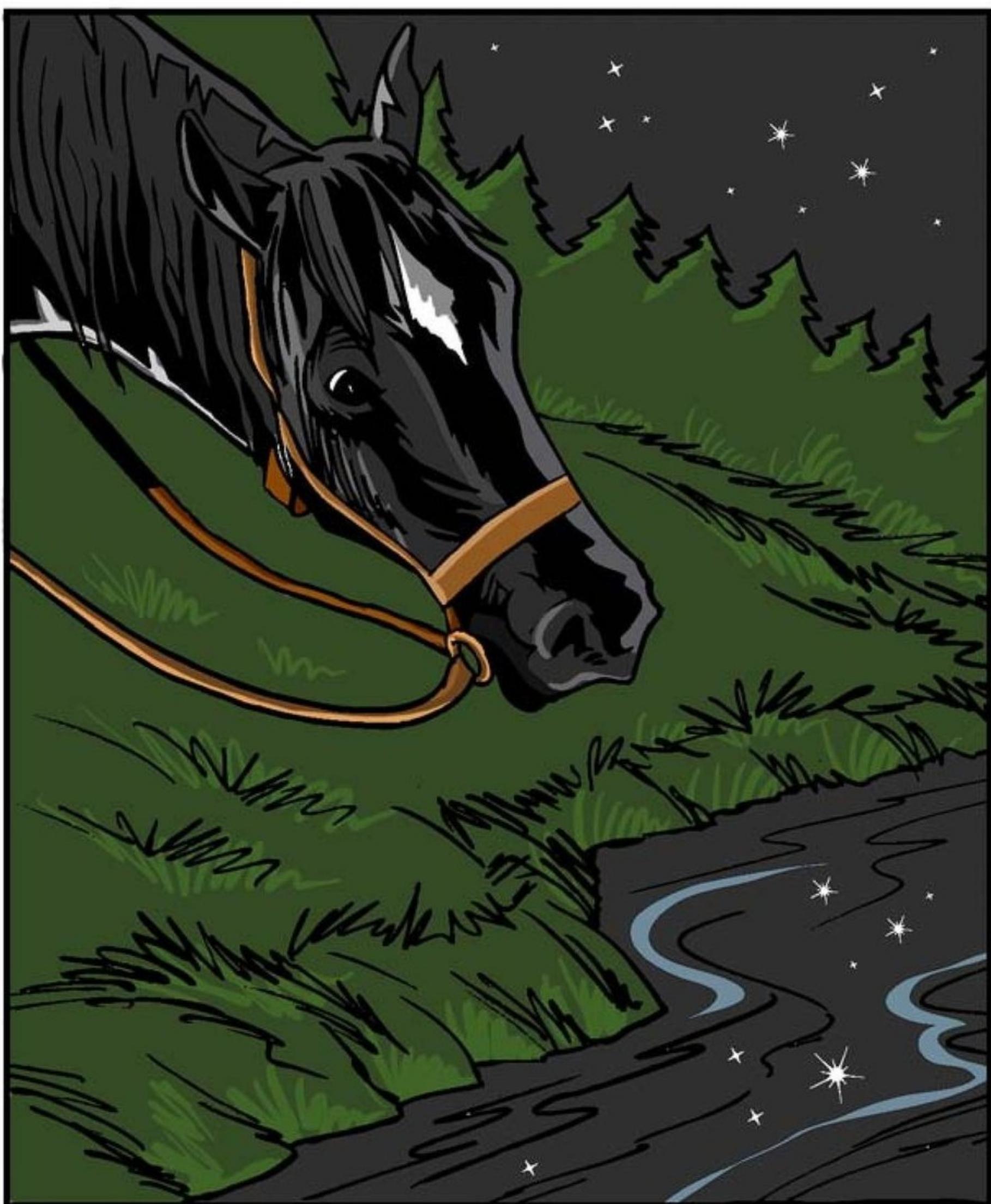
Which way, doctor? I tried to shout, but all that came out were grunts. I swung my head back and forth, but both paths looked the same. I had no idea where to go; I couldn't remember the way John and I had come. I pawed the ground with my hooves.

"Use your senses, Beauty," Dr. White said. "You know the way home."



I felt totally senseless. My body went limp. I hung my head, and that's when I remembered the golden star that I'd found with the book.

Then I caught sight of a glittering reflection in a nearby stream. The water rippled and twinkled, ever so slightly, as it reflected the stars above.



Ideas in my brain ignited like sparks in dry brush. The stream ended in a lake at the manor. Of course! I needed to follow the water.

"We're going home!" I yelled, which came out in long, happy neighs. I shook my head and leapt around in circles.

"Whoa, Beauty!" the doctor yelled, laughing and clinging to the reins.



I stood in front of the fork in the road and I turned to the right. With the sparkling water shining proudly next to me, off I ran. Through the darkness. Into the hills. To the manor. To my mistress.

"Hee-yah!" the doctor yelled.

And with that,
I found myself
back in the loft.

My heart still racing, I stood up and leapt in circles again.
“Neeeeiiighhh!” I yelled, climbing down the stairs and into the shop.

There, I found Trevon and Leo staring at me.

“What are you so happy about?” Leo asked.

“Oh, nothing,” Miguel said. “Why are you guys here?”

“The Black Cobras gave us another chance,” Trevon said.

“Six-thirty tonight,” Leo said. “And we got the map, see?” He fumbled through his backpack and pulled out a yellow sheet of paper.



"That's not a map, that's your math homework," Miguel said, laughing.

"What?" They searched the pack.

"I must have turned in the map instead of my homework!" Leo stomped his foot.

Miguel laughed again.

"What are you laughing at?" Trevon asked.

"Nothing."

"We're going to miss the game, again!" Leo said.

"No, don't worry, guys." Miguel grabbed his glove and walked toward the door. "You've got me!"



Glossary

adrenaline (<i>n.</i>)	a hormone released by the adrenal glands that elevates heart and respiration rates (p. 11)
balance (<i>n.</i>)	a state of being steady (p. 16)
crease (<i>n.</i>)	a wrinkle or line formed where skin or fabric folds (p. 5)
dead end (<i>n.</i>)	the end of a street, path, or road beyond which there is no way to go further (p. 6)
exhausted (<i>adj.</i>)	very tired (p. 12)
galloped (<i>v.</i>)	moved at the fastest pace a horse can go (p. 11)
lifeline (<i>n.</i>)	a diagonal line on the palm of a person's hand believed to indicate how long that person will live (p. 5)
navigate (<i>v.</i>)	to find one's way over a long distance; to steer a course toward a destination (p. 5)
night vision (<i>n.</i>)	the ability to see in the dark (p. 16)
reins (<i>n.</i>)	a pair of long, thin straps that are part of a horse's headgear, used to control the direction and speed of the horse (p. 14)
sense of direction (<i>n.</i>)	an awareness of orientation in relationship to the cardinal directions of north, south, east, and west (p. 8)
shale (<i>n.</i>)	a kind of sedimentary rock formed from compacted mud, clay, or silt (p. 14)
traversed (<i>v.</i>)	moved through an area (p. 13)

Note: The Great Gallardo's Books are a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura as he experiences a classic adventure inspired by Anna Sewell's Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse.

Saved by the Stars
Level X Leveled Book
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