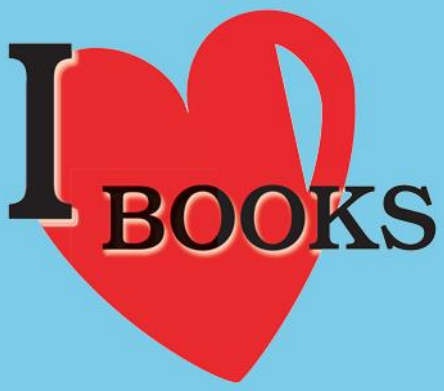

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Opening extract from

Such Stuff:
A Story-Maker's Inspiration

Written by

Michael Morpurgo,

Mark Morpurgo & Clare Morpurgo

Illustrated by

Michael Foreman

Published by

Walker Books Ltd

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Introduction

I don't go looking for ideas for my stories. They just seem to come to me. I've always been very lucky that way. Of course, like any writer or artist, I keep eyes and ears and heart and mind open and alert; my feelers, my antennae always out. That is how all of us catch our dreams. Much of *Such Stuff* explains how I have done this with my books, which of course is why it is called "Such Stuff as dreams are made on". Not my words of course, but William Shakespeare's, from *The Tempest*. Reassuring to know that Shakespeare used the same source material for his dreams as I do: memories, history, war and peace, the lives of others, the times we live in, the people and places we know and care about.

I am also very receptive to the ideas of others for my books. So many have been suggested in the first place by friends and family, by publishers and illustrators (particularly Michael Foreman, the instigator of a dozen or more

of my stories, and the illustrator of this book too). In this case, though, it was my younger brother Mark who came up with the idea. Mark has very kindly often come along with his wife Linda to talks I have given at festivals, particularly in Scotland where they live. He had noticed that by far the most common question asked at these events was: "How do you come up with your ideas?". Sometimes it was a general question about inspiration, Mark said, but more often it was specific to one book. And over the years he had heard me tell the story behind just about every single one of my stories, heard me talk often of the seed of a story and the growing of it in my mind, in my research, in my dreamtime. And, Mark kindly pointed out, "because the question is so often asked, you do rather too often, repeat yourself. Then of course I have to sit there and listen to it all over again. Not that I am complaining, much. In fact not at all. It is really interesting for a reader to know what gives rise to a story in the first place, the history, the anecdotal background, the cause. So, why don't you write a book that definitively answers this question?"

So that is what we have done. In this book I have revealed the memories, stories and history, the people and the places, that weave themselves, dream themselves into many of my stories. Mark has researched the historical roots, the facts and figures of the historical truths and myths that do often run through my books. And Clare, chief collaborator on all my books over the last forty or

more years, and my wife too, has picked out an excerpt from each book, to encourage you to read the rest! Well, she is the daughter of a publisher. And Rosalind Morpurgo took on the huge task of reading all our scribbles and getting the manuscript typed and into good shape. So this is very much a family book, made together, by all four of us. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we loved making it.

Michael Morpurgo.

PS If you allowed a PS to an introduction, I want to thank Michael Foreman, Gill Evans and everyone at the wonderful Walker Books for taking on this unlikely book and enabling it to happen. Thanks to William Shakespeare too who helped with the title.

War Horse

THE DREAM

For all sorts of reasons, when the time came in 1980, at thirty-seven years of age, I was ready to write *War Horse*, and later *Farm Boy*, too, which is almost a sequel, but not quite. To begin with, I was a child of war. I grew up in London just after the Second World War. Next door to us, in Philbeach Gardens, was a bombsite, where we played – no one ever invented a better or more sinister adventure playground. Right by my school, St Matthias in the Warwick Road, there was another bombsite, a forbidden and therefore fascinating place. You got the ruler on the back of your hand if you crawled in there. I got the ruler on the back of my hand a lot. We had rationing. Sometimes I was allowed to carry the ration book for my mother when we went shopping – maybe the first proper responsibility I ever had. One-legged soldiers sat on street corners, wearing their medals, begging. We played war in the streets and bombsites, in the school

playground, us against the Germans. If you were picked as a German, you had to die and lose in the end. We learnt *Achtung!* and *Heil Hitler!* from the war comics we read. We sang songs about Hitler, and learnt that Himmler was very "sim'lar".

Then there were the tears, my mother's tears on the anniversary of my Uncle Pieter's death in the RAF. His photo was always there on the mantelpiece, a young man in his RAF uniform, looking right at me, I thought; I noticed later he was actually gazing into space. But I felt then he was looking into my eyes. I revered him, though I never knew him. He was the hero of the family, and in a way, still is, for me, anyway. I am seventy-one. He died aged twenty-one. He had been an actor, a promising one by all accounts. He only had two years on the stage. He never had a family, never had the chance of peace, never knew the contentment that the years can bring. I learnt very young that the grieving never dies, that the loss lingers.

As a schoolboy I read the poems of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas, who had fought in an earlier war, the one that was supposed to end all other wars, the First World War. When I was older, I saw the musical *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the play *Journey's End*, read *All Quiet on the Western Front*, witnessed in all this the courage and camaraderie, the killing, the grieving that so many had lived through. For a brief year I went into the army, in part at least because I was in awe of

those generations. Maybe I was testing myself, I don't know. But a taste of preparing for war, training for it, taught me rather quickly that I wanted to live my life in a world of peace, that peace was what these generations had been fighting for, peace and freedom, not simply a continuation of war.

Many, many years later, after years of teaching in junior schools, I found myself moving to Devon, with Clare and the family, to help with Clare's great project of bringing city children into the countryside and giving them an experience of farming life they would never forget. She called it "Farms for City Children". We set up the charity at Nethercott House near the village of Iddesleigh, a place as deep in the Devon countryside as you could find. I was already writing, and had been for a while. *Friend or Foe*, my Second World War evacuee story was just out, and there were one or two others as well. But so far I had written well within myself; my readers, very often the children I was teaching, rather more important to me than the stories themselves. It had been a means to an end: to get children enjoying stories, and writing their own stories too. So, as I was already a bit of a writer, I used to go one evening a week up the lane to Nethercott, and read to the city children by the log fire. Sometimes half of them were asleep by the time I had finished. Country air, I kidded myself.

We were new in the village, still finding our feet, getting to know people. We joined in the community. I rang

the bells in the church; Clare helped with the flowers. Everyone made us feel very welcome and we soon got to know who everyone was. There were three old men in the village who particularly interested me. They had been living there at the time of the First World War, I was told. Two of them had been soldiers, and gone to the war. I went up to the pub one day, and there was one of them, sitting by a fire: Wilf Ellis, in his eighties by then, an antique dealer in those days. We had bought only one thing from him, an oil painting of a fine racehorse called Topthorn, and thereby hangs a tale too! We got talking. All I said was: "I heard you went to the First World War, Wilf. That right?"

"I did," he said.

I thought that was it, that he would say nothing more. I could feel it was a question I should never have asked. But then, after a while, Wilf spoke up again. I don't think he stopped for an hour. It was an outpouring, to a comparative stranger, of all that had happened to him in the trenches. He had been gassed, hospitalized, wounded, his life spared by a German soldier. He talked of how they longed only to be warm, dry, not hungry, free of lice, how they longed above all for it to be done with, just to go home and see the ones they loved. They wanted the agony to be over. He took me down to his cottage later and showed me his trenching tool, his photos, his medals. As he was talking, two things occurred to me: that he was passing his story on to me, a young man (then), a

writer, and that for the first time in my life I was hearing about war not through a film, a play, a poem, a comic, nor a novel. I was hearing it straight from someone who had been there, lived through it.

Within a day or two, my interest quickened further. I went to see the other old soldier in the village who, I had been told, had fought in the war. He fished in the river and he had been Master of Foxhounds – that's all I knew of him. Captain Budgett, he was called. He lived down the end of my lane and seemed only too willing to talk. "I was there with horses," he said. He had been to Palestine, the desert, been captured and imprisoned by the Turks. It was obvious he wanted to talk more about the horses than the Turks. I let him talk. This was not a sentimental man, that was clear. But he spoke movingly about how much man and horse relied upon each other for survival. "My horse, he was my best friend," he told me. "And I'm telling you, he listened, really listened."

I think it was as he was talking that I first conceived the notion about writing a story about a horse in that war. This way, if the war could be seen and told through the horse's eyes, I could follow a horse's journey through the war as it was first used as a British cavalry horse, then captured by the Germans, then as it wintered on a French farm. This way, I thought, I could tell a story of that war from all sides – friend and foe, and civilian too – and this way, witness the universality of the suffering of war, of the pity, of the killing and the dying, and of

the longing and hope too.

One phone call to the Imperial War Museum the next day helped hugely. "How many horses went to that war?" I asked.

"About a million," came the reply.

"And how many returned home afterwards?"

"About sixty-five thousand."

So then I thought: the horses died in about the same numbers as the men, and in the same ways too, shot, blown-up, on the wire, in the mud. They died of exhaustion and disease. Now I didn't just want to tell the story, I had to tell it, needed to tell it. But there was a problem that could not be solved, that seemed insurmountable. To tell the story, as I now knew I had to tell it, from the perspective of the horse, I was going to have to write it in the first person. The horse would be telling it, writing it. There is, of course, a rather famous book where this happens, but which was written a long time ago, when such a device might have been acceptable, *Black Beauty*. So iconic is this classic story that any book using the same technique might seem to be some sort of pale imitation. And then, of course, told in a horse's voice, it could so easily become mawkish and sentimental. The more I thought about it, the more I worried about the voice. This was to be a serious book – yes, certainly at its heart a story about a boy and a horse and their love for each other, but also a story about the suffering of war and the longing for peace. Above all, it

had to be credible, and certainly not ridiculous.

Could I do this the way I wanted to do it? Could I risk using the horse's voice? Would even *I* believe in it as I was writing it? Could I become horse? Faced with this difficulty, I very nearly gave up altogether. But so much else was in place. I would set the story on the farm where I live, in the cottage where I live. I knew by now who had lived where at the time of the war. I had researched the lives of the working people, stood by their graves in the churchyard. I walked where they walked, was familiar with the fields they tilled, the ditches they dug, the streams and rivers where they fished; I knew the bluebell woods where the badgers roamed and where the swallows nested in the barns. I had even chosen the name of my horse – Joey, after a roguish, strong-willed foal we had on the farm. I had watched him growing, helped train him to a halter, lunged him. So much was ready, and I so much wanted to get on and write it. But I simply could not find the confidence to do it. I could not believe in the voice.

One small incident gave me the spur I needed. As I have said, I used to go up to read to the city children who came to stay at Nethercott. I would go up to do this, usually on their last night, before they returned to London or Birmingham or Bristol or Plymouth. So one dark November evening, after milking, I found myself walking through the fine drizzle up the lane and into the stable yard at the back of this large Victorian house, their home

for a week. There was one light on over a stable door. I saw a small boy standing there stroking the horse's head – Hebe, she was called, a Haflinger pony, and a great favourite with us and with the children. The boy was in his dressing gown and slippers. He was called Billy. I was about to call out to him to go indoors out of the rain, when I heard him talking to the horse.

Now Billy should not have been talking, because Billy didn't talk. Everyone knew that. I had been told by the teacher the first day the school arrived, almost a week before. "Michael," she said, "best not to ask Billy any questions because he won't answer, and if you try to encourage him to answer, he is liable to run off home. He's done this at school. We just leave him be. That's how he likes it. We think he must have a terrible stutter or something. He's been with us two years and he never speaks, not to us, not to the other children." But here was Billy talking to this horse, the words simply flowing from him, all about his day on the farm and what he'd done and how he was going home the next morning, and how he'd miss her.

I went to fetch the teachers. They had to witness this miracle, I thought. So I did, and we all stood there in the darkness, and watched and listened, in disbelief, in wonder. It was in those few brief moments that I realized something else. This wasn't just a miracle because Billy was talking. There was another one going on that I had not taken in until now. Hebe was listening. Captain

Budgett had been right: horses listen, really listen. Hebe was standing there because she knew at that moment she was loved and needed. Horses are sentient, feeling creatures. They have great need for affection, as we do. No, it is not sentimental. Of course it isn't, I thought. And if I can write it right, then my story might just work. I could try the voice. I could do it.

I made one concession though: I decided not to let Joey tell his story right away. I would set the scene, introduce Joey to the reader, and ask the reader without really asking, to make that leap of imagination, tell them that this was a story written for all the men and horses who went to that war, and especially for those who did not come home. In the little introduction set in the village hall in Iddesleigh, I wrote that there is still hanging today a painting of Joey on the wall, under a clock that stands always at five to ten. There is, in fact, no painting, but there is a clock. So the painting is a pure invention, a device.

For two decades this book of *War Horse* was hardly read – it barely sold a thousand copies a year. We tried to get a film going, wrote several scripts for it. No one was interested. Then Michael Foreman suggested I write a sequel, the story of Joey when he comes home after the war, when tractors were taking over from horses on the farm. Great idea, I thought. So I wrote *Farm Boy*, and Michael illustrated it beautifully. But *War Horse* was still hardly being read. So no one discovered there was

no painting in the village hall, because no one was interested enough to come and look.

Then the National Theatre decided to make a play of *War Horse* – with life-sized puppets. Ridiculous idea, I thought. Well, I was wrong. In over seven years, more

It was grand, but there were no carriages waiting at 11.30!

than seven million people have seen it globally.

The National Theatre has never had such a hit. Steven Spielberg came to see it and made a movie of it, seen

worldwide. Soon dozens of people were visiting our little village to find out where Joey was born, to see the village green where he was sold off as a cavalry horse to the army in 1914; and of course they would turn up at the village hall asking to see the picture of Joey on the wall, and the clock. There was a clock. But there was no painting.

Local people became a little tired of making lame excuses for the absence of the picture to these *War Horse* tourists. "Sorry, we can't find the key to the village hall door." "Sorry, the picture has been sent away to be cleaned." Something had to be done, they said. So in the end, we did something, something very naughty.

By great good chance, on the film set of *War Horse* we met the artist Ali Bannister who had been commissioned by Steven Spielberg to make the drawings of Joey for the film. Clare had a sudden brilliant idea. She asked her if she would do a portrait of Joey in oils, in the manner of the time, around 1914, as described in the book, sign it underneath as it is so signed in the book.

So that's what Ali did. She painted a portrait of Joey in the style of our Topthorn picture that we had bought from Wilf Ellis some time before, and painted it exactly as I had described it in the book. It was perfect. No one would know the difference!

We even had an unveiling ceremony in the village hall to celebrate. And now when visitors come and ask to see the picture of Joey, and they do, he is there looking down

on them, ears pricked forward as if he has just noticed them standing there. "He's just like I imagined him in the book," one visitor from Canada was heard to say. Happy ending then!

Ali Bannister's painting of Joey, now in Iddesleigh village hall

WAR HORSE

Author's Note

In the old school they now use for the village hall, below the clock that has stood always at one minute past ten, hangs a small dusty painting of a horse. He stands, a splendid red bay with a remarkable white cross emblazoned on his forehead and with four perfectly matched white socks. He looks wistfully out of the picture, his ears pricked forward, his head turned as if he has just noticed us standing there.

To many who glance up at it casually, as they might do when the hall is opened up for parish meetings, for harvest suppers or evening socials, it is merely a tarnished old oil painting of some unknown horse by a competent but anonymous artist. To them the picture is so familiar that it commands little attention. But those who look more closely will see, written in fading block copperplate writing across the bottom of the bronze frame:

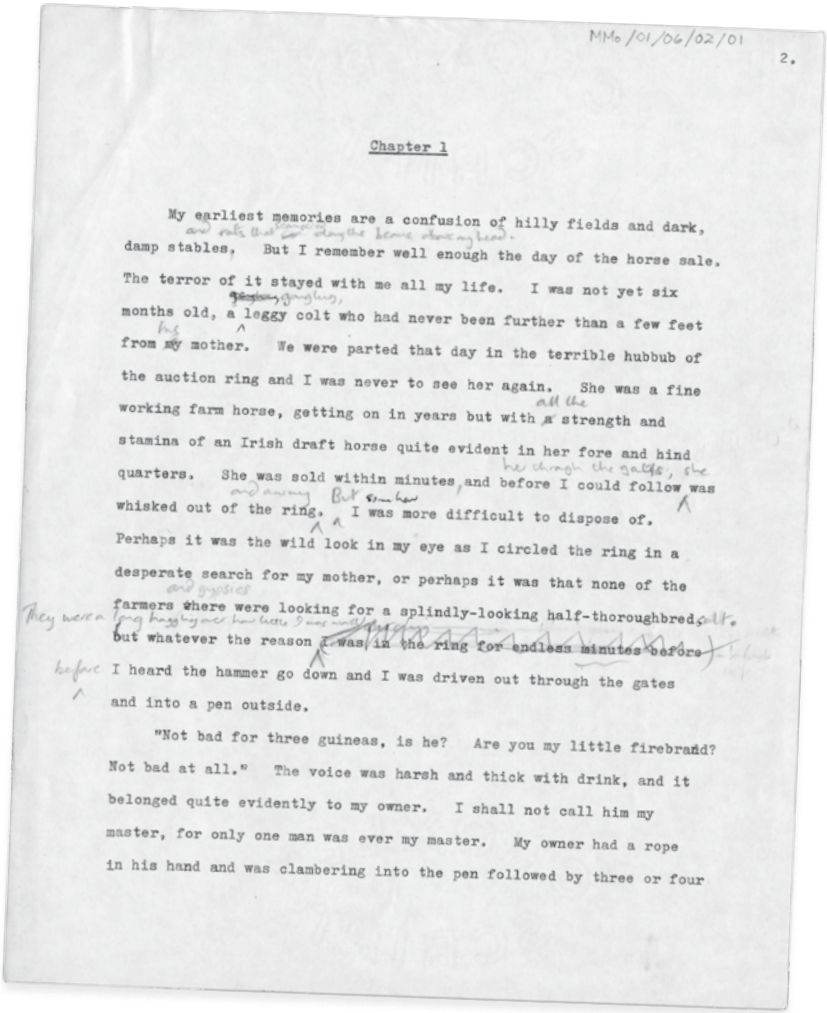
Joey, by Captain James Nicholls, Autumn 1914

Some in the village, only a very few now and fewer as each year goes by, remember Joey as he was. His story is written so that neither he nor those who knew him, nor the war they lived and died in, will be forgotten.

My earliest memories are a confusion of hilly fields and dark, damp stables, and rats that scampered along the beams above my head. But I remember well enough the day of the horse sale. The terror of it stayed with me all my life.

I was not yet six months old, a gangling, leggy colt who had never been further than a few feet from his mother. We were parted that day in the terrible hubbub of the auction ring and I was never to see her again. She was a fine working farm horse, getting on in years but with all the strength and stamina of an Irish draught horse quite evident in her fore and hind quarters. She was sold within minutes, and before I could follow her through the gates, she was whisked out of the ring and away. But somehow I was more difficult to dispose of. Perhaps it was the wild look in my eye as I circled the ring in a desperate search for my mother, or perhaps it was that none of the farmers and gypsies there were looking for a spindly-looking half-thoroughbred colt. But whatever the reason they were a long time haggling over how little I was worth before I heard the hammer go down and I was driven out through the gates and into a pen outside.

"Not bad for three guineas, is he? Are you, my little firebrand? Not bad at all." The voice was harsh and thick with



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2.

Chapter 1

My earliest memories are a confusion of hilly fields and dark, damp stables. But I remember well enough the day of the horse sale. The terror of it stayed with me all my life. I was not yet six months old, a leggy colt who had never been further than a few feet from my mother. We were parted that day in the terrible hubbub of the auction ring and I was never to see her again. She was a fine working farm horse, getting on in years but with all the strength and stamina of an Irish draft horse quite evident in her fore and hind quarters. She was sold within minutes, and before I could follow was whisked out of the ring. But somehow I was more difficult to dispose of. Perhaps it was the wild look in my eye as I circled the ring in a desperate search for my mother, or perhaps it was that none of the farmers there were looking for a splindly-looking half-thoroughbred colt, but whatever the reason I was in the ring for endless minutes before I heard the hammer go down and I was driven out through the gates and into a pen outside.

"Not bad for three guineas, is he? Are you my little firebrand? Not bad at all." The voice was harsh and thick with drink, and it belonged quite evidently to my owner. I shall not call him my master, for only one man was ever my master. My owner had a rope in his hand and was clambering into the pen followed by three or four

Here's how I got started

drink, and it belonged quite evidently to my owner. I shall not call him my master, for only one man was ever my master. My owner had a rope in his hand and was clambering into the pen followed by three or four of his red-faced friends. Each one carried a rope. They had taken off their hats and jackets and rolled up their sleeves; and they were all laughing as they came towards me. I had as yet been touched by no man and backed away from them until I felt the bars of the pen behind me and could go no further. They seemed to lunge at me all at once, but they were slow and I managed to slip past them and into the middle of the pen where I turned to face them again. They had stopped laughing now. I screamed for my mother and heard her reply echoing in the far distance. It was towards that cry that I bolted, half charging, half jumping the rails so that I caught my off foreleg as I tried to clamber over and was stranded there. I was grabbed roughly by the mane and tail and felt a rope tighten around my neck before I was thrown to the ground and held there with a man sitting it seemed on every part of me. I struggled until I was weak, kicking out violently every time I felt them relax, but they were too many and too strong for me. I felt the halter slip over my head and tighten around my neck and face.

"So you're a fighter, are you?" said my owner, tightening the rope and smiling through gritted teeth. "I like a fighter. But I'll break you one way or the other. Quite the little fighting cock you are, but you'll be eating out of my hand quick as a twick."

I was dragged along the lanes tied on a short rope to the tailboard of a farm cart so that every twist and turn wrenched at my neck. By the time we reached the farm land and rumbled over the bridge into the stable yard that was to become my home, I was soaked with exhaustion and the halter had rubbed my face raw. My one consolation as I was hauled into the stables that first evening was the knowledge that I was not alone. The old horse that had been pulling the cart all the way back from market was led into the stable next to mine. As she went in she stopped to look over my door and nickered gently. I was about to venture away from the back of my stable when my new owner brought his crop down on her side with such a vicious blow that I recoiled once again and huddled into the corner against the wall.

"Get in there you old ratbag," he bellowed. "Proper nuisance you are Zoey, and I don't want you teaching this young 'un your old tricks." But in that short moment I had caught a glimpse of kindness and sympathy from that old mare that cooled my panic and soothed my spirit.

I was left there with no water and no food while he stumbled off across the cobbles and up into the farmhouse beyond. There was the sound of slamming doors and raised voices before I heard footsteps running back across the yard and excited voices coming closer. Two heads appeared at my door. One was that of a young boy who looked at me for a long time, considering me carefully before his face broke into a beaming smile. "Mother," he said deliberately. "That will be a wonderful and brave horse. Look how he holds his

head." And then, "Look at him, Mother, he's wet through to the skin. I'll have to rub him down."

"But your father said to leave him, Albert," said the boy's mother. "Said it'll do him good to be left alone. He told you not to touch him."

"Mother," said Albert, slipping back the bolts on the stable door. "When Father's drunk he doesn't know what he's saying or what he's doing. He's always drunk on market days. You've told me often enough not to pay him any account when he's like that. You feed up old Zoey, Mother, while I see to him. Oh, isn't he grand, Mother? He's red almost, red-bay you'd call him, wouldn't you? And that cross down his nose is perfect. Have you ever seen a horse with a white cross like that? Have you ever seen such a thing? I shall ride this horse when he's ready. I shall ride him everywhere and there won't be a horse to touch him, not in the whole parish, not in the whole county."

"You're barely past thirteen, Albert," said his mother from the next stable. "He's too young and you're too young, and anyway Father says you're not to touch him, so don't come crying to me if he catches you in there."

"But why the divil did he buy him, Mother?" Albert asked. "It was a calf we wanted, wasn't it? That's what he went in to market for, wasn't it? A calf to suckle old Celandine?"

"I know dear, your father's not himself when he's like that," his mother said softly. "He says that Farmer Easton was bidding for the horse, and you know what he thinks of

that man after that barney over the fencing. I should imagine he bought it just to deny him. Well that's what it looks like to me."

"Well I'm glad he did, Mother," said Albert, walking slowly towards me, pulling off his jacket. "Drunk or not, it's the best thing he ever did."

"Don't speak like that about your father, Albert. He's been through a lot. It's not right," said his mother. But her words lacked conviction.

Albert was about the same height as me and talked so gently as he approached that I was immediately calmed and not a little intrigued, and so stood where I was against the wall. I jumped at first when he touched me but could see at once that he meant me no harm. He smoothed my back first and then my neck, talking all the while about what a fine time we would have together, how I would grow up to be the smartest horse in the whole wide world, and how we would go out hunting together. After a bit he began to rub me gently with his coat. He rubbed me until I was dry and then dabbed salt water onto my face where the skin had been rubbed raw. He brought in some sweet hay and a bucket of cool, deep water. I do not believe he stopped talking all the time. As he turned to go out of the stable I called out to him to thank him and he seemed to understand for he smiled broadly and stroked my nose.

"We'll get along, you and I," he said kindly. "I shall call you Joey, only because it rhymes with Zoey, and then maybe, yes maybe because it suits you. I'll be out again in

the morning – and don't worry, I'll look after you. I promise you that. Sweet dreams, Joey."

"You should never talk to horses, Albert," said his mother from outside. "They never understand you. They're stupid creatures. Obstinate and stupid, that's what your father says, and he's known horses all his life."

"Father just doesn't understand them," said Albert. "I think he's frightened of them."

I went over to the door and watched Albert and his mother walking away and up into the darkness. I knew then that I had found a friend for life, that there was an instinctive and immediate bond of trust and affection between us. Next to me old Zoey leant over her door to try to touch me, but our noses would not quite meet.

The real war horses

Of all animals, the horse is one of the shyest, least aggressive and most highly strung. Yet for thousands of years horses have been coerced into participation in wars.

In 1914, the British Army had around 25,000 horses. They only had eighty armoured vehicles, relatively new inventions and prone to mechanical breakdown. In contrast, horses and mules were thought to be reliable forms of transport. The army depended on them for transporting goods, ammunition and the wounded.

As the war continued, 15,000 new horses and mules had to be found each month to replace those killed or injured.

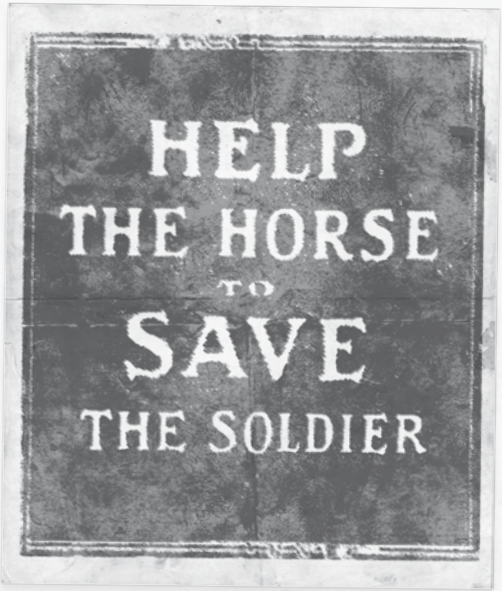
Battle conditions represent everything that horses dislike and fear. General Jack Seely remembered: "He had to endure everything most hateful to him - violent noise, the bursting of great shells and bright flashes at night, when the white light of bursting shells must have caused violent pain to his sensitive eyes. Above all, the smell of blood. Many people do not realize how acute is his sense of smell, but most will have read his terror when he smells blood."

For many horses it was the weather and the

mud, rather than the bullets and bombardment, that was the final straw. Roads were broken up, and the poor animals would sink deep into the mud. Sometimes they could not get out, and died where they fell.

Additionally, a horse's daily grain ration was just 9 kilos. This was 25 per cent less than recommended in England in peacetime, where the work would have been much easier. Hunger became a constant problem, particularly in the bitter winters. Horses tried to eat the wheels from wagons, and were sometimes fed sawdust. Besides being injured or killed in battle, thousands of animals died from stress, disease and malnourishment.

Particularly strong and fit horses were sent to the cavalry. Although these horses were not hauling heavy loads, a cavalryman and his equipment weighed about 150 kilos, and cavalrymen were instructed to dismount and walk their horses at every opportunity. In 1914, generals and decision-makers on both sides still used nineteenth-century warfare strategies and assumed that the cavalry would play a pivotal role. At the outbreak of war, Britain and Germany each had a cavalry force of 100,000 men. However, on the Western Front, men and horses came up against barbed wire, machine guns and tanks for the first time. The horrific slaughter that ensued



persuaded many that the traditional cavalry charge was obsolete. Yet, even by the end of the war, there were some who still did not accept this. For example, General Douglas Haig wrote: "I believe that the value of the horse ... is likely to be as great as ever. Aeroplanes and tanks are only accessories to the men and the horse ... As time goes on you will find just as much use for the horse - the well-bred horse - as you have ever done in the past."

Many letters and memoirs touchingly show the effect on soldiers of the slaughter of the animals. Lieutenant Dennis Wheatley described what happened one night: "There were dead ones lying all over the place and scores of others were floundering ... broken legs ... terrible neck wounds... We went back for our pistols and spent the next hour putting the poor, seriously injured brutes out of their misery. We lost over 100 horses."

At the end of the war, a scheme was established to enable officers who had sold their horses to the army to buy back survivors. This was extended so that soldiers who had worked with an animal in the war would be told when it came up for auction. Trooper Huggins bought his "Billy", and wrote: "we had him for years and years on the farm ... he ended his days in clover."

Sadly, happy endings like Billy's, and Joey's in *War Horse*, were all too rare. By 1917, the British Army had over 760,000 horses and mules overseas, but only 65,000 horses returned to Britain after the war. Charities like the RSPCA highlighted the plight of the abandoned animals. The horses were starving, being worked to death, or being sold to French and German abattoirs. In Cairo, the first Brooke Hospital was eventually

set up by Dorothy Brooke - the Old War Horse Memorial Hospital.

The removal of horses from Britain had a profound effect on home society. Farming and transport, which had depended on horsepower, had to find mechanized alternatives and by 1918, there was no going back to using horses as before. Today, with fewer than a million horses in the UK, it is difficult for us to understand just how integral to everyday life they used to be. Up to eight million horses from all sides died in the First World War.