

CHAPTER SAMPLER



HORSE DIARIES

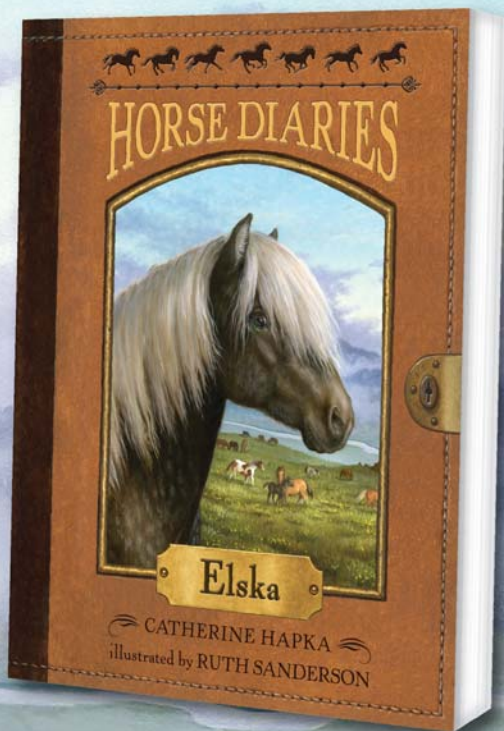


Elska

⌘ CATHERINE HAPKA ⌘
illustrated by RUTH SANDERSON

For anyone who's ever dreamed of hearing a horse's story ...

Elska is a silver dapple Icelandic filly. She spends her summers frisking about the countryside and winters in the farmyard, where the girl Amma takes special care of her. But when a powerful neighbor notices Elska, her contented life suddenly changes. This is Elska's story ... in her own words.

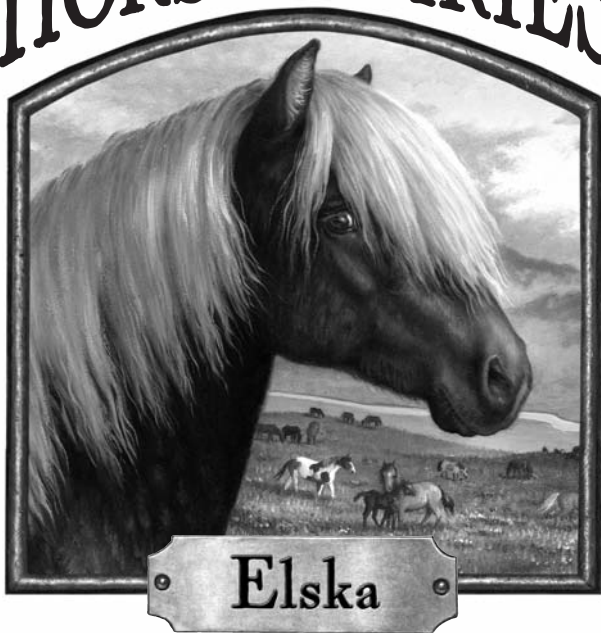


Keep reading for a sneak peek ...





HORSE DIARIES



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RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK



“Oh! if people knew what a comfort to
horses a light hand is . . .”

—from *Black Beauty*, by Anna Sewell





Iceland, Circa AD 1000

My name is Elska. That is what the people call me, though in the first months of my life I knew nothing of people.

I was foaled in early summer, in a meadow dotted with flowers. My first memory was the feeling of the warm sun on my

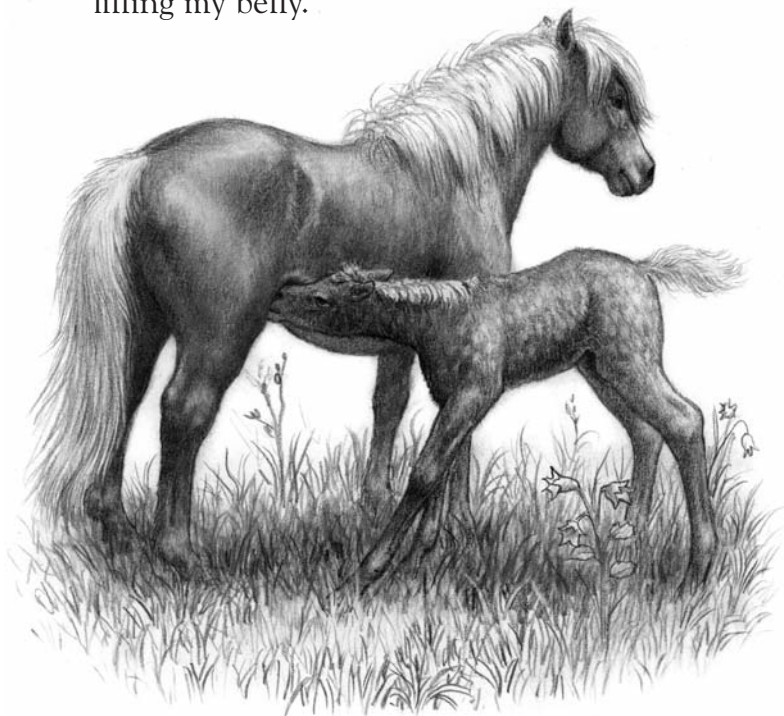
back. I did not know it then, but in summer in Iceland, the sun shines for more than twenty hours each day. My dam, Silfra, was on her feet within moments of my birth. She nudged at me with her soft muzzle. The scent of her surrounded me and made me feel safe.

My long legs twitched. They felt new and strange. I moved them, trying to figure out how they worked. Finally I got my two front legs out in front and my back legs under me. I gave a push and staggered to my feet.

I swayed back and forth and almost fell. Then I found my balance. I stood on my shaky legs. My brushy tail swished behind me, and my ears twitched at the sounds of my brand-new world. I opened my eyes wide,

trying to understand the things I saw. Interesting smells drifted past my nostrils.

My dam nudged me again with her nose, almost tipping me over. I realized I was hungry. I searched along her body until I found the right spot. Then I nursed, the warm milk filling my belly.



Soon I was full, which made me very sleepy. I allowed my new legs to collapse under me, and was asleep almost before I hit the ground.

When I awoke, I stood and nursed again. Energy coursed through my body, and I turned away from my dam. I noticed other creatures nearby—horses like me.

Curious, I tried to run to them. But my long legs tangled with each other and I went sprawling face-first on the ground.

My dam was amused. *Patience, little one,* she told me. *Soon you will be running like the wind.*

Wise Silfra was right. Within hours I was running and playing as if I had been doing so forever. The others welcomed me to the herd.

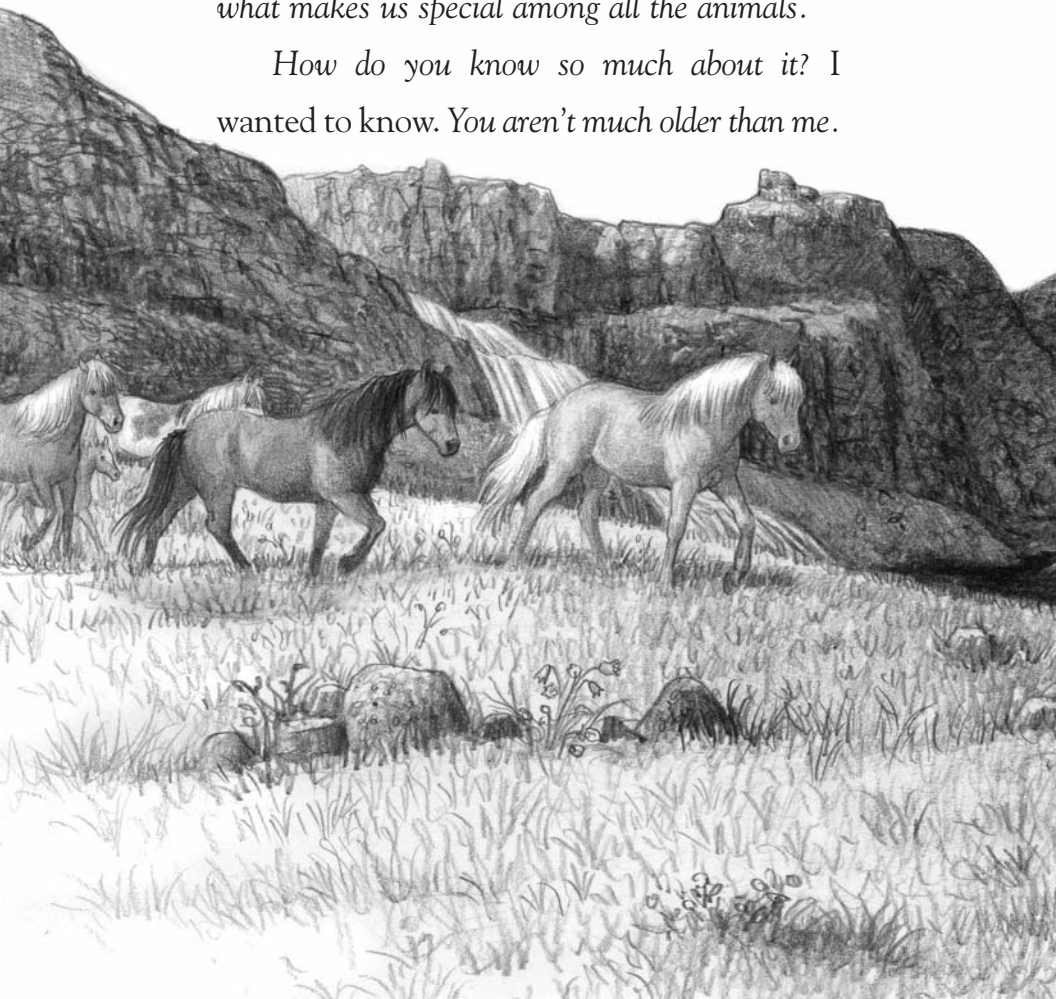
I met Bergelmir, the herd stallion and my sire. I also met an older filly known as Leira; her patient old dam, Irpa; a sweet filly the humans would call Tyrta, who was only a few days older than I was; and a playful colt with a colorful pinto coat who would be called Tappi.

It was Tappi who first showed me how to tölt. I already knew how to trot and gallop. I could walk, too, though I did it as little as possible—it was too slow when there was so much to do and see! When I first noticed Tappi, he was moving in a different way. His legs flashed beneath him, one-two-three-four, while his head and back stayed straight and proud.

I galloped after him, curious. *Why do your legs move like that?* I wanted to know.

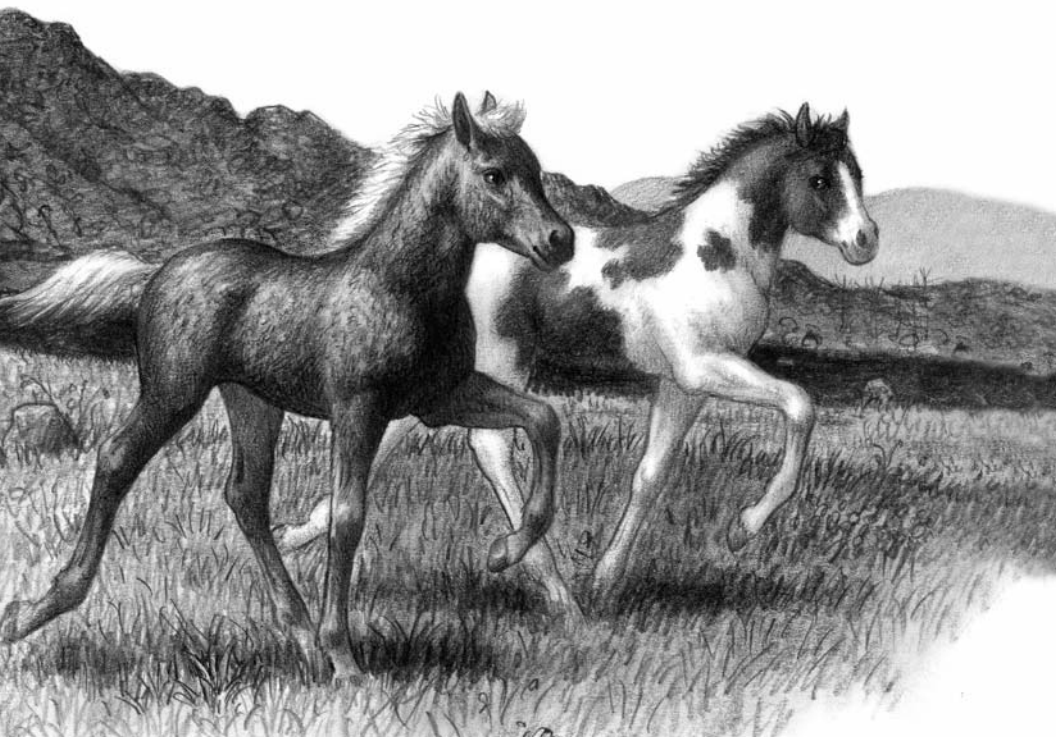
He lifted his knees higher, showing off as he tölted around me. *All the horses of this land can do it, he told me. It is called a tölt, and it is what makes us special among all the animals.*

How do you know so much about it? I wanted to know. You aren't much older than me.



*My mother, Perta, told me, Tappi said.
She is the oldest mare in the herd. She knows
everything!*

I watched his legs carefully. Then I tried
to make my own move in the same way.
After a few tries, I got it. I was tölt! Before
long it felt as easy as breathing. My hind legs



stretched under my body, one at a time, pushing me forward. My front legs lifted and curled, helping to propel me along. One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four, faster and faster. Tölting was fun!

A few days after my foaling, the rest of the herd left my birth meadow. I kept pace easily, sometimes walking or trotting and sometimes tölting with Tappi. We forded a fast, cold, shallow river that tumbled down from the mountains in a series of waterfalls. Then we climbed a steep, mossy hill and found ourselves overlooking a green valley. A herd of smaller creatures dotted the slopes of the valley and nibbled at the grass. They were white, gray, black, and brown—almost

as many colors as there were in my herd. My mother told me that such creatures were known as sheep.

They share our summer grazing lands, she told me. In autumn, the men come and round them up, along with us.

I didn't understand all of what she told me. *Summer, autumn, and men* meant nothing to me. But I didn't let it worry me. Like the way my legs worked, I figured these things would become clear in time.

The herd continued through the valley of the sheep. On the far side, we found ourselves in the shadow of a mountain. Its iron-gray slopes stretched up toward the blue sky. Near the top, veins of silvery white

trickled down, like the strands of my friend Tyrta's creamy mane and tail against the dark golden palomino color of her body.

The wise old mare Irpa saw me looking. *That is ice and snow, little one, she told me. You will learn more of that soon enough.*

I wanted to know more *now*, but the herd was on the move again. We traveled through more valleys, across high meadows and lava fields, past hot springs and geysers, and over rocky foothills coated with moss. By late evening, when the sun set for the first time in many hours, we reached a broad, grassy plain with a river running through it. Most of the horses waded into the river, drinking deeply. I nursed from my mother, then collapsed onto the soft ground and slept.

That was the first of many journeys I made with the herd. We moved around often in search of grazing. Several months passed and I grew bigger, faster, and stronger. I drank less of my dam's milk and nibbled more grass with the older horses. I grew taller and stouter, and a layer of fat covered my ribs.

Then one day in early autumn, something different happened. Tappi was the first to notice.

New horses! He came running toward the herd, breathless. *Come and see!*

Before we could move, horses crested the next hill. But what was that upon their backs?

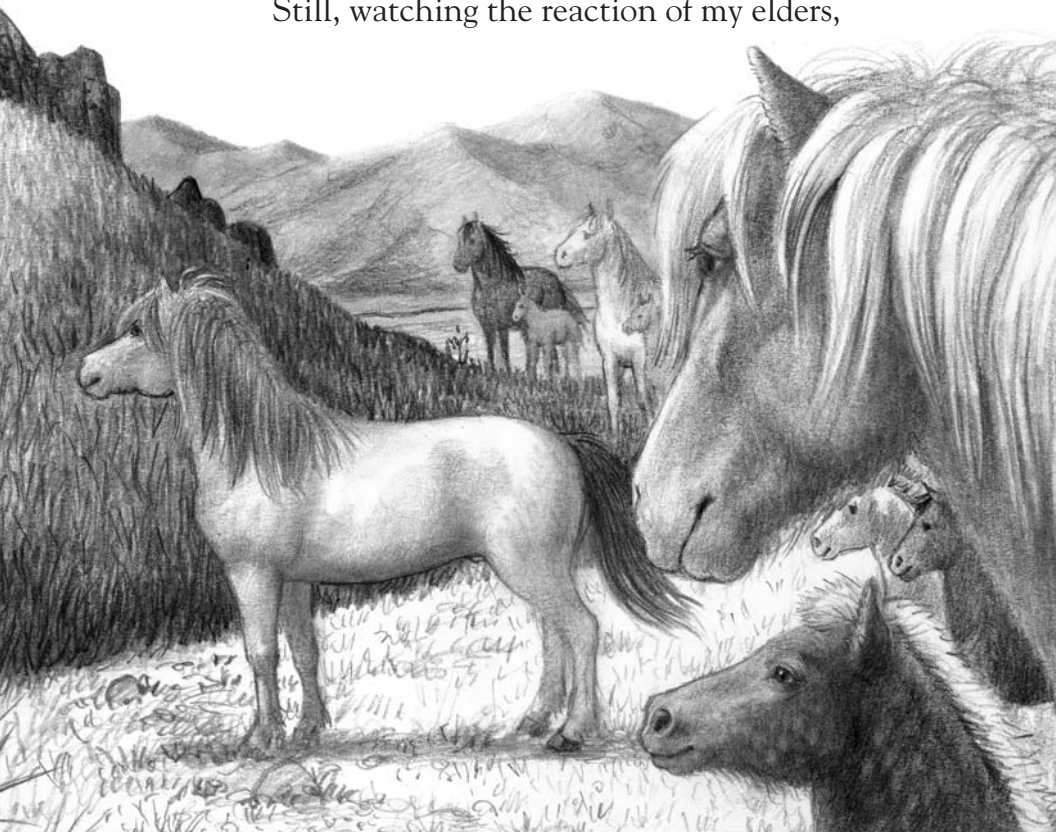
Ah, it is Hamur! My dam, Silfra, snorted with pleasure. Her ears were pricked forward



and her gaze trained on a particular roan horse. *See how big he has grown since winter!*

All around me, the other adult horses were expressing similar things. The other foals were just as confused as I was. What was happening?

Still, watching the reaction of my elders,



I knew it could be nothing frightening. The horses came closer, and I got a better look at the odd creatures that rode upon their backs. They sat upright like a bird does, or an arctic fox when it stands on its hind legs to scan the fields. But these creatures were much larger than a fox. They also made strange noises as they came, sharper than the soft snorts and nickers of a horse and louder than the calls of most birds. I cocked my head to listen to these cries.

One was tall with a loud voice: “Watch, Amma! You must stay close to us, or you will not be allowed on the *rettir* again until you are older.”

A smaller one responded, “But I am old enough, Jarl! I am nearly eight.”

Yet another’s voice was like the low rumble of a geyser: “Your brother speaks the truth, Amma. Keep your horse near mine.”

“Yes, Father. Ooh! Look at the pretty silver dapple filly over there.”

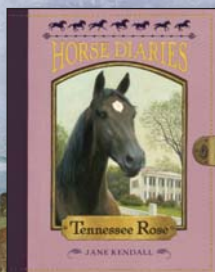
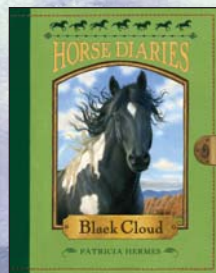
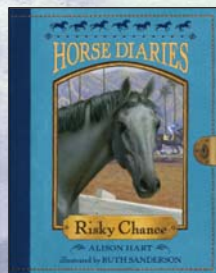
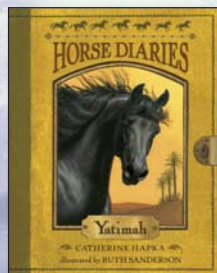
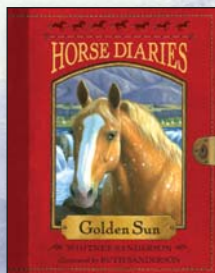
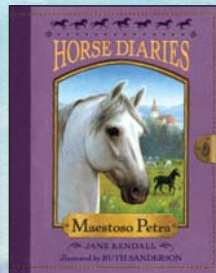
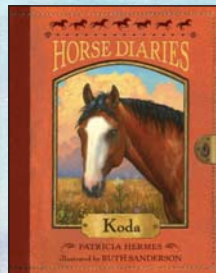
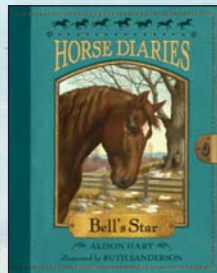
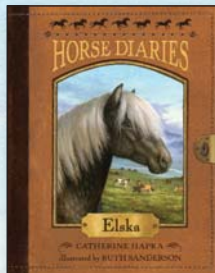
I was trying to puzzle out what the sounds might mean. Then I noticed that the smallest of the odd new creatures was staring straight at me. I took a step closer, curious.

Come, little one. Silfra walked toward me, moving her head to show me which way she wanted me to go. *We are meant to go with the humans now.*

Sure enough, the herd was already drifting

ahead of the newcomers toward the nearest mountain pass. Silfra's body blocked my view for a moment. But when I turned my head to look behind me, the small creature—a *human*, my dam had called it—was still gazing after me.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Hapka, Cathy.

Elska / by Catherine Hapka ; illustrated by Ruth Sanderson. — 1st ed.
p. cm. — (Horse diaries)

Summary: Around the year 1000, the Icelandic horse named Elska is born
and learns about life and her role in the herd, as well as love and friendship,
when she rescues the girl to whom she originally belonged.

Includes facts about Icelandic horses and Iceland.

ISBN 978-0-375-84732-5 (trade) — ISBN 978-0-375-94677-6 (lib. bdg.)

1. Iceland pony—Juvenile fiction. 2. Iceland—History—To 1262—
Juvenile fiction. [1. Iceland pony—Fiction. 2. Horses—Fiction.
3. Iceland—History—To 1262—Fiction.] I. Sanderson, Ruth, ill. II. Title.
PZ10.3.H2258 E1 2009 [Fic]—dc22 2007022109

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

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