



Author's Note

Internationally bestselling author of *Gossip Girl*, Cecily von Ziegesar, on her inspiration for *Dark Horses*

I've always wanted to write a horse book. I grew up around horses. As a baby, I sat in the saddle in front of my mother or father on one of our cranky gray mares on the farm where we spent the summers. As a young girl, I read and reread every horse story I could get my hands on. My favorites were Walter Farley's *Black Stallion* series and Mary O'Hara's *My Friend Flicka*, both about wild horses tamed by the boy they love. I also adored *A Very Young Rider* by Jill Krentz because it was full of photographs of a girl and her pony.

When I was older, I became more serious about riding. My junior year of high school, my family moved to Connecticut from Manhattan. I didn't want to leave the small all-girls school I'd attended since 1st grade, so I commuted. In those days I was always on a Metro North train or driving my horses to horse shows in a two-horse trailer I pulled with a pickup truck. At sixteen, I was a latecomer to the horse show circuit and I felt like an outsider. I had to be observant and work hard to fit in. Merritt Wenner—the girl in *Dark Horses*—feels like an outsider in the horse world too. And what a colorful world it is, full of wealthy scoundrels and promiscuous partiers.

As a writer, I'm fascinated by Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*. It's so markedly different from other horse stories because it's written from the horse's point of view. I became determined to try that too, but being the writer I am, my horse wouldn't be as earnest and well-meaning as *Black Beauty*. He would be more like Judd Nelson's character in *The Breakfast Club*—smart and funny, with the potential to be a good guy, but damaged and full of resentment. My horse would attract an equally damaged girl. And maybe they could save each other. That became the story I wanted to tell: A messed up girl and a messed up horse meet and fall in love and try to fix each other; a classic bad boy tale with an unconventional twist.

Writing *Dark Horses* was a great pleasure and a great challenge. It's not like any book I've ever read or any book I've ever written. I'm excited to release it into the world, but also terrified. As the very last line in my first *Gossip Girl* book reads, "She couldn't wait to see what would happen next." Enjoy.

Sincerely,

Cecily von Ziegesar

Distributed to the trade by Penguin Random House Publisher Services. To order, contact your Penguin Random House rep!

Publisher Contact: • Meredith Barnes mbarnes@sohopress.com • 212-203-4991

DARK HORSES • Soho Teen • September 13, 2016 • Hardcover • 9781616955175 • \$18.99

