

# *Restless Spirit* by Susan Brocker

## Chapter One

### **The Grey Colt**

The shaggy grey colt clung to his mother's side, seeking shelter from the biting wind which whipped down from the mountains. The band of wild horses grazed peacefully, but the colt could not settle. He could hear something in the distance. It was a noise like rolling thunder, yet the sky was clear. Finally his father squealed a warning to the band. He gathered up the mares and foals and they turned as one into the wind. They galloped off toward the safety of the open plains.

The colt ran alongside his mother as fast as his spindly legs could carry him. The thundering noise grew louder. His mother was dripping with sweat and he smelt her fear. Suddenly the sky exploded. A massive bird swooped down on them, its wings beating the air and its mouth spitting fire. His mother screamed and fell, blood spurting from a wound in her shoulder. The colt raced on in a blind panic.

The colt tried to remember the lessons his mother had taught him in times of danger. When the horrible bird dived on them a second time, he was ready. He threw himself onto his side and slid along the ground. He returned to his feet facing in the opposite direction and galloped away, his heart pounding in his chest. He kept running until he could no longer hear the terrified cries of his family.

The colt stopped on a high ridge and looked down into the valley. The band of horses lay scattered like broken pebbles across the valley floor. The helicopter landed nearby and the colt saw men walking among the bodies. He had seen men once before. They had come on the backs of strange horses and carried sticks that spat fire. The band had escaped that time and he had learned that men were to be feared. Now he learned that they were to be hated, too.

The colt pawed the ground and snorted. He watched and waited until the men climbed back into the huge bird and flew off. Two dead horses hung from ropes tied beneath the helicopter. It roared out of the valley, its ghastly cargo swinging in the air. When it was out of sight, the colt cantered down the hill to search for his mother. He found her lying in a ditch, her neck bent and eyes glazed. He nudged her gently and nickered softly. She did not reply.

The colt stood beside his dead mother until the sun dropped behind the mountains and a heavy fog crept along the valley. He could not pull himself away. His mother and the band was the only life he had ever known. He hung his head

and shivered in the bitter cold, missing the warmth of his mother. When dawn came, he was still beside her, lonely and scared.

From deep within him, something finally stirred. It was a voice from the past, calling to him. It told him that this place was not safe and the men might return with the daylight. He should head for the hidden valleys to the east, beyond the mountains. There he would be safe.

The wind blew down from the jagged, snow-clad peaks of Mt Ruapehu as sharp and as cold as icicles. The colt stumbled on across the barren plains of the Rangipo Desert. He knew he must find shelter and food if he was to survive. The voice within him led him to a tumbling river which cut a deep gorge through ancient lava flows. Here at last he found shelter from the wind, water to drink, and tussock grass to eat. The three great mountains that watched over the land - Mt Ruapehu, Mt Tongariro, and Mt Ngaurahoe – were now his only friends.

The voice of the colt's ancestors had saved him. They had lived in the wilderness for hundreds of years. Their knowledge had been passed on down to him through the generations. The colt's great-grandfather had once galloped across the burning deserts of Egypt. His mother's ancestors had roamed the windswept hills of Wales. His closest ancestors had adapted to life in the harshest wilds of New Zealand. He came from fighting stock. He would survive.....

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