

Tag, Minnesota, Belgian

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.

GENESIS 2:19 NKJV

The warm, spring sun glistened off the snow on the Rocky Mountain peaks, melting the snowpack and sending it trickling down the slopes. The drops of water woke up the hillsides after a long winter. Delicate yellow glacier lilies sprung up between nubbins of green grass. The frozen creeks were gently thawing, forming rivulets that skipped over mossy stones and sprayed a fine mist over the lacy ferns that lined the banks. Purple shooting stars nodded their heads in the breeze. The smaller creeks tumbled into the river named Rock Creek, which meandered through the narrow valley and close to the small ranch where I worked.

Squirrels chattered from the tops of the lodgepole pines. The heat of the sun warmed my back as I stood on the tailgate of the gold Ford pickup eyeing a tall stack of riding saddles that leaned against the cab. The truck was backed next to the side door of a tack trailer.

I lifted a saddle off the stack and lugged it through the door. Slingsing it onto a saddle rack, I sighed. Sweat trickled down my back. I tucked my thumbs into the pockets in my blue jeans and leaned in the doorway. It had been a long day arranging the tack in the trailer. I felt scruffy from doing the heavy lifting. I was dirty, tired, and ready for a shower.

Gravel crunched under Larry's cowboy boots as he walked over. He unzipped his brown vest and tossed it into the cab. "When you're done, grab the pen and the notebook off the front seat and meet me at the corrals. We're going to name the stock."

I nodded as he turned to go. Reaching for another saddle I wondered, *Name the stock? I can't tell them apart.* A couple days ago I'd accepted a job working for Larry. He was an outfitter who took guests on horse pack trips into the Bob Marshall Wilderness of Montana. He'd recently purchased a semitruckload of stock: 1 horse and 19 mules. The day he unloaded them, they all barreled down the ramp snorting and blowing, bucking and kicking—and they hadn't stopped since. I'd never seen a real live mule before. They all looked the same to me: long ears, four legs, and a tail, although I did note some were black and others were red.

I finished hauling the saddles into the tack trailer, grabbed the pen and notepad, and then headed over to the corral.

Larry leaned on the top rail. "I'm going to have you write down the names along with descriptions. Let's start with the horse."

I rested the notepad on a weathered wooden rail and wrote "horse." She was easy. She looked like a horse: a cinnamon-and-sugar-colored appaloosa mare with a stub of a tail that was nearly bald.

Larry looked her over. "Let's call her Melinda."

I wrote it down.

Larry rubbed his brown beard and pointed. "What do you think we should call that black one?"

I looked in the direction he pointed and saw a half-dozen black mules. "Which black mule?"

He waved his finger. “The gangly black mule. He’s narrow-chested and has a creamy tan patch over his left eye—like a pirate’s eye patch.”

I giggled when I spotted him.

“Or maybe it’s like a price tag. Let’s call him ‘Tag.’”

I scribbled “Tag, gangly black with price tag.”

Larry leaned his head to the side, glancing through the herd. “What should we name that black one?” He glanced at me.

I stretched up, looking.

He waved his arm to the side. “Medium height and build with a white nose and white under its belly.”

White? I frowned. I hadn’t noticed the white on him. He looked like he’d dipped his nose halfway to his eyes in a bucket of milk.

Larry chewed on his lip. “Let’s call him Minnesota.”

Scrawling “Minnesota,” I chuckled. My thoughts drifted to the story of creation in the Bible, when God created the animals and brought them to Adam. *What was it like having the Creator of the universe sit by your side as He paraded His creation before you, giving you the honor of naming them?* Did God sit in delight while He watched Adam gawk at the hopping kangaroos? Did Adam laugh at the long neck of the giraffe? Did God have the elephant blow his trumpety-trunk? A strange thought drifted through my mind. *God didn’t stop creating when He finished the Garden of Eden.* My thoughts turned inward. *I wonder what God was thinking when He created me in my mother’s womb? Did He delight when He formed me? Did He say, “I’m going to put a passion for horses in her so I’ll give her long legs. And how about blue-green eyes that will change color according to what she wears”? Did He chuckle when He thought, “Her mother’s Norwegian. I’ll give her a small, ski-jump nose.”* I smiled and brushed a tear from the corner of my eye. I’d never thought about God having fun creating me.

Even though I was sweaty and dirty, I stood a little taller and brushed a straggly strand of hair behind my ear. Eyeing the herd, I now saw them differently. One of the red mules was pudgy and short, another had a black mane and tail. I pointed to a chunky reddish one

with a blond mane and tail. “That one looks like it’s out of a Belgian draft horse. Can we name him ‘Belgian?’”

Larry nodded.

Lord, I'm glad I don't have to look special to be special in Your eyes. Amen.