

## **SILVERBELL**

### **A Christmas Tale**

by Timothy Willms and Andrew Adleman  
based on a story by Timothy Willms

Set in Santa Fe, New Mexico at the end of World War II, this is the story of a remarkable girl named Maria and her mythical starlight adventure with a magical rocking horse named Silverbell. What eight-year-old Maria knows of life comes from her loving widowed mother, Angela, who has struggled with the loss of her medic husband in the war. Angela also endures the bitterness of her ethnically intolerant in-laws, particularly Aunt Gertie, who is also Angela's mean-spirited employer. Angela has many worries, including her finances, her home, and the way Maria, who has a cloud-shaped birthmark on her neck, is relentlessly teased and taunted by other kids.

As Christmas approaches, life becomes even more difficult when Angela's job and home are in imminent jeopardy due to the hostile ways of Aunt Gertie. Yet, for Maria, there is hope in the appearance of a mysterious yet kindly older couple, Henry and Hannah, traveling woodworkers, who have made a beautiful rocking horse, Silverbell. In conjunction with a colorful Winter Fiesta, the rocking horse is the prize, along with money, in a Christmas talent contest to be held at the school. Maria wants to win so she can gain acceptance, but she doesn't know her talent. Henry tells Maria that Silverbell can help her find her talent if she sings a special rhyme and has a "generous heart."

Maria practices rhymes in the modest room she shares with her comically mischievous younger brother, Rudy. When Silverbell does not magically appear, Maria gets discouraged. At school, while nervously giving a report in front of the class, Maria is mocked for her birthmark and runs out. One night, Maria hears her mother crying because they don't have enough money. This spurs Maria to recall Henry's words: "Have a generous heart." Maria realizes that, rather than wanting to win the contest to be popular, she now wants to win money to help her mother who she loves.

Maria tries a new rhyme and, suddenly, a live version of Silverbell flies through the window and lands in a slightly comical manner. The gentle, endearing, majestic horse, who speaks in rhyme, seems real, or is it a dream? Using the magical medallion he wears to light the way with the energy of joy and charity, Silverbell spirits Maria and her younger brother into the night on a magical journey to the Starlight Circus in the sky.

At the circus, among tents, clowns, ponies, and various circus acts, the Ringmaster tells Maria how she can find her special talent and also get back home: She must solve three riddles and be awarded three stars before midnight. The Ringmaster warns of the Evil Sorceress who seeks to steal Silverbell's magical medallion which she believes holds the power of Christmas Spirit.

As they strive to solve riddles and be awarded stars, Maria and Silverbell save an Angel Prince and Princess trapeze artists, get lost in a maze of imagery, encounter unusual clowns and ice-skating polar bears, among other exciting adventures. But then the Evil Sorceress steals Silverbell's magical medallion. Can Maria and Silverbell retrieve it in time to get back home? Will Maria find her special talent so she can enter the contest to help her mother? Even if she does find her talent, will she have the courage to perform in front of the school, knowing she will be taunted for her birthmark? And, will Maria be able to use her "generous heart" to make a difference in the lives of her mother, her schoolmates, and the community of Santa Fe by touching their hearts with the true spirit of Christmas?