

Blame It on the Girl

Chapter 5

Thester

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh! It's her! I put on the brakes and skid to a screeching stop. A powdery cloud of dust now permeates the air, making everything blurry. Mrs. Fieldjoy's coughing. I stand there, waiting. I feel my ribcage pump in and out, working to calm my heart, but other than that, I don't move. Maybe I was seeing things.

Then, the dust clears, and—nope— it's her, all right: Isie, the miniature human, the too-everything girl, the too-loud, too-bossy, too-huggy, too-change-everything kid: the monster in my nightmares. The clog in my drainpipe.

Each and every blessed summer, the wasp girl injects her toxic self into my day, infecting my thoughts and rotting all my perfectly good plans. The little troll thinks she's my shadow or something. I mean, come on; even a shadow disappears after a while. But not Isie, no; she can't seem to do much of anything without me. She has about as much stability as Mrs. Fieldjoy's bend-in-the-wind flyswatter...following me around the way she does. She sticks to me like flypaper, except she's both the stick on the paper and the fly, and I suppose she's the flyswatter too.

"Hi, Thester," the words slither out of her mouth; her eyes' devious glint stuns me.

The girl is leaning out of the farmhouse's door; she's halfway in and halfway out, like maybe she'll decide to just go away, like I said, taunting me.

I know Mrs. Fieldjoy is watching, so I muster all the strength I have to act nice and smile back, but instead I snort and kind of bare my teeth. My bad.

Out of my eye's corner I can see Dilbert; he's got the same look on his face, but his snort is more of a *grrr*.

Mrs. Fieldjoy stretches her arm behind her and scoops the air, motioning for Isie to join them. "Thester, Dilbert, your summer friend is here," she coos.

(In case you didn't notice—I would like to point out that when Mrs. Fieldjoy reintroduced us, she said my name before Dilbert's. Told ya I'm her favorite.) Isie approaches; I'm reminded of a skunk that once waddled up to me.

"Say hi to my granddaughter," Mrs. Fieldjoy instructs, giving Isie a little sideways squeeze.

I hang my head. I'll obey, but I don't have to look at the girl when I do. I try to nicker, but a crackly, jagged neigh jumps out instead.

"I have a gift for you, Thester," Isie goads, her words worming toward me.

Not another ballerina tutu, better not be. If it is, I'm not wearing it. I refuse. That frilly contraption she put on me last time is more than a burly horse like me should have to bear. I'm a horse, not a fluffy tippy-toed clown, for cryin' out loud.

But then, Isie plunges her hand into a bag and pulls out a carrot.

Huh, didn't expect that.

You should know; I really like carrots. I tell my nose not to, but it doesn't listen; it leans in for a whiff. Isie thinks she's winning; she gives me that fake huge smile where she shows all her fat white teeth. (It's so weird. Mr. and Mrs. Fieldjoy don't have those harsh white teeth; theirs are a soft sort of yellow, a ray of golden light.)

Now fang-faced Isie's dangling the carrot in my business, poking around in my personal space with that...that fresh, fragrant carrot.

Nope—I pull back, won't fall for it; I know a trap when I see one. Can't help but notice this one, a huge, juicy, orange trap, with its dance-on-your-tongue sweetness. I squeeze my lips, pulling them inward.

She's a rude, rude girl, trying to lure me in, pretending to be nice with that carrot. I paw the ground.

"Come on, Thester." She swings it side to side in front of my mouth. "You know you want it."

She's a mean snake. I take two steps back. I'm no idiot; I know that carrot's part of her plot. She's an imposter—acting all nice and generous in front of Mrs. Fieldjoy just so she can murder me later.

... The Fieldjoys will find my cold, dead body lying in the pasture. They'll be so sad they won't even notice the blue eye shadow and hot-pink lipstick Isie put on my manly horse-face, stuff she does just to humiliate. It will be a lovely funeral though; everyone will gather around me, their eyes full of sadness; they'll say what a wonderful horse I was. It will be a beautiful goodbye. Except for Isie; she'll sob fake tears, acting like we were best friends. What a crock.

"Thester, come and get it." The carrot twirls like bait on a hook.

I must be strong; it could be covered in poison. I hold back; my hooves are firmly planted; I won't budge. Won't even take a lick of that carrot...*that crisp, sweet carrot, that beautiful essence of gentle sweetness. That freshly harvested carrot. With a luxurious crunch.*

Stubborn girl keeps swinging the carrot under my nose. I can be stubborn too; I dig my heels in. But somehow my teeth don't get the message; before I can tell them to stop, they chomp the sucker—the carrot, not Isie.

Now I've done it. I'm chewing Isie's poisonous plot, chewing and swallowing.

Oh well, they'll throw me a nice funeral.

I keep one eye on Isie as I chew.

Meanwhile, with my other eye, I see Dilbert slinking over to his bowl. He's so low to the ground he looks like a brown log—well, a wrinkly one with ears. He finds his bowl on the back porch and starts to chew. Every once in a while, he lifts one saggy eye and glares at Isie. Loyal pal.