

Favorites Chapter 4

Thester

I hear a swish-crunching thunk. The sound's muffled; it's both loud and soft at the same time, kind of like the sound of a bee caught in a box. Immediately, my ears flick forward to capture the next thunk. And sure enough, there it is. Yep, I know that sound, at least I think I do. My eyeballs stiffen and start raking the farmhouse; I'm looking to catch any movement tied to the sound. But I see nothing, no unusual movement, only Mrs. Fieldjoy's sunflowers whooshing in the breeze and the frilly hollyhocks wiggling along with them. But I sure hear something, and it's familiar too. Sure enough—seconds later Mrs. Fieldjoy comes tromping around the corner of the farmhouse. Her boot-thunks sound determined, like she's got a plan.

And rude or not, I can't help it; my lips automatically do the little dance thing they always do whenever there's the possibility of something good and sweet coming my way; they curl open and plop together, open and plop, open and plop. All thoughts of Dilbert have vanished. Mrs. Fieldjoy's boots might be stiff and thunky, but her smile is soft and her eyes are triggered, a look she gets when she's planning,, to do something she considers fun. And me, as usual, I get that bubbly feeling rising from my chest and motoring into my throat, until it finally rattles out my trembling nostrils. It's a rattle-sound that's part lawn mower, part purr. Mrs. Fieldjoy, she's the best—especially when she's bringing me a treat in the afternoon.

At least I hope that's what she's up to. One time, it wasn't a treat she had up her sleeve but a toothbrush. And I wouldn't exactly call that a treat. It tried telling her it wasn't necessary; I whinnied over and over that I didn't mind having blue teeth. But she wouldn't have it.

"You snoop around the kitchen and mess with my Easter-egg dye, and you can expect a little pay-up, Mister," she said, her eyes as solid-firm as a saddle horn.

Well, I didn't pay for any toothbrush scratching across my teeth, and there wasn't any "up" feeling involved during the event. So, I don't know what logic she had in her mind when she said I had to pay up. But whatever, she's just a human.

When the Mrs. is close enough, I ever so casually slide my eyes downward, catching a glimpse of her hands. Then, I look to see if she's wearing pockets, typical places a treat could be hiding. Seems to me like the perfect day for sugar cubes—love those sugar cubes. Shouldn't get my hopes up though, only get those on rare occasions. A carrot, maybe?

"Hello, Thester, you rascal."

She clomps up to me in her mud-spattered work boots, their rubber shine masked with hours in the garden. I like the squishy squeak they make when they're wet with garden mud. The criss cross weave of her straw hat makes criss cross shadows across her face. Her smile tips to one side, her sneakiness poking through. It's a good smile.

When I watch her watching me, I'm reminded of the butterflies, all dance and color. That shiny expression she has right now—it's because I'm her favorite. She tries to hide it, but I really think it's true.

“You sure look pretty today.” I give a bubbly nicker so I don’t startle her.

It’s important to reserve the stronger whinnies and neighs for more intense events. It’s true; anything could happen, at any moment—a meteor could hit the barn; a thundercloud you’re staring at could turn out to be a thousand crows that start raining bird bombs on you—anything could happen, but you don’t go around wearing a protective helmet all day long. So a horse doesn’t whinny and neigh at everything he sees, not a smart horse anyway.

She reaches out to pat my head. I turn my face, trying to aim it so her fingers touch the bridge between my eyes. She gets the message and softly drags her nails up and down against the white patch of fur that drips down my snout. I know it’s there ‘cause I’ve seen my face a bunch of times—sometimes when I sneak into the farmhouse kitchen, I steal enough time to look in the mirror that’s hanging on a wall in the dining room. That’s how I’ve learned to make so many funny faces, useful when you got a pal like Dilbert. *Aah, feels so good when she rubs that hard-to-reach place.*

One nasty fly zips away.

“OK, time to scoot over, Thester, gotta talk to Dilbert now.” She nudges my head with her shoulder, and I teasingly paw her leg with my hoof.

Mrs. Fieldjoy leans over and puts her mouth to the drainpipe—AKA the outdoor phone. She likes to copy me that way. Like I said, I can’t help it if I’m her favorite.

Dilbert

“Dilll-berrrrt, lunch time,” Mrs. Fieldjoy’s voice echoes through the phone line.

Oh boy, FOOD! I’m off—racing to the farmhouse where my bowl waits. I’m running; my ears are flopping; the air is fresh; the flowers are dancing...

Hah! There’s Thester. Just like usual, he wants to block my path to my bowl.

Thester gallops up beside me and tries to nudge me to the side. I nip at his hoof. Barely touch him, but it gets him going even more. Soon we’re running circles around Mrs. Fieldjoy. She likes it when we do that. We speed around her, our paws bouncing up and down like a scarecrow’s hat ribbons on a windy day. I try to break from the circle, but Thester leaps in front of me, blocking my path. Cleverly, I act like I’m going to run to the right, but instead I jerk left, baffling the poor horse.

Zoom... I race toward my bowl. Now we’re running side by side, leg to leg (can’t run neck to neck on account of height differences). Like usual, I slow down just a hair so Thester can beat me to the bowl. I know what he plans to do—he’s gonna pretend to eat my food. Don’t worry; he won’t. He doesn’t like dog food. It’s a good thing too—for him, I mean. So, as I explained, we’re running, running, running. And then, we see her—Isie.

Can you hear the screams in my brain?