

Trouble with Spots

It was a warm summer day at Birchfall Farm. The birds sang, and a soothing breeze wandered through the trees, Marley, the only spotted horse in the herd, entered the paddock to have a good roll in the mud. Then she strolled off to enjoy the grass with her best friend, Visa.

Phil and Becky were grazing at the back of the paddock, gossiping quietly about Marley and Visa.

"How could Visa be friends with *Marley*?" Phil whispered.

Becky smirked. "I don't know how *anyone* could be friends with that spotted *thing*."

"Let's go see what they're doing," Phil suggested.

Manes flowing, Phil and Becky cantered up.

"Not them again," Marley sighed.

Phil trotted up to Marley with a nasty smile. "Hey, Dalmatian."

"More like Dumb Dots!" Becky whinnied.

Marley didn't want to hear the hateful words any longer and quickly galloped away.

"You hurt her feelings!" Visa snapped. "How could you be so cruel!" She cantered away to join Marley, while Becky and Phil snickered loudly by the gate.

Visa tried cheering up Marley. "Marley, it's okay to be spotted. Your spots make you special."

An ocean of sorrow swept over Marley. "No, they don't. I'm ugly."

"Ugly? Marley, don't be ridiculous. Your spots are beautiful. I would *love* to have spots like you."

"Visa, please. Stop saying things that aren't true," Marley muttered and walked away slowly, sadly nibbling on some hay.

But Becky and Phil followed her. All of a sudden Phil bit her!

Pain shot through Marley's neck, "Ow!" she screeched.

Becky laughed.

This made Marley angry. "I'm going to tell Phoenix!" She stormed away.

Everyone looked up to Phoenix, a big, bright chestnut and leader of the herd. He had won multiple events and had been reserve champion once or twice.

"Phoenix," Marley said. "Phil bit me and never leaves me alone! Becky tags along and makes matters worse."

"I'm aware they bother you. I'll take care of it," Phoenix reassured Marley. "But now I have some news. Everyone gather by the gate!"

Everyone galloped up, ears perked.

"I heard our owner talking about a competition coming up next week. We are all entered," Phoenix said.

"Awesome! I am *definitely* going to win," Becky bragged.

The week flew by like leaves in the wind. Every horse was now bathed, groomed, and tacked up. Marley was shiny and clean and very self-conscious about her spots. She always rolled in the mud to hide them, but now they shone brightly.

Marley entered the show jumping ring, with its colourful rails and three-foot high jumps.

"Next up is... Marley the Mustang!"

The bell sounded. Marley cleared the first jump...the second...the third...and all ten jumps, with no rails down and no time faults.

"Yahoo!" Visa cheered. "Good job, Marley!"

Marley was thrilled. "That was fun! I didn't even knock any rails down!"

Phil and Becky threw Marley a surprised look.

Phoenix knocked down two rails and had no time faults. Visa hit one rail and had three time faults. Becky did worse, and Phil came in last.

The judge tapped the microphone. "And now the results! Third place goes to Visa. Second place to Phoenix. And the red ribbon goes to... *Marley!!*"

Everyone applauded.

"Yay! You did it!" Visa shouted.

"Good job, Marley. Let's get into the trailers and go home." Phoenix said.

The wind was strong, and tossed Marley's mane into a frenzy. She remembered the excitement and energy while jumping. "That was fun, Visa," she said.

"Yes, you did really well." Visa paused. "I wonder if Becky and Phil now realize how important you are to our owners."

Just then Becky came trotting up to Marley and Visa.

"Marley, I'm sorry I've been so mean to you," she said. "I didn't like your spots when they were covered in mud. I couldn't remember how they looked when they were

clean. But now, when they are shiny, they are gorgeous!! And you are an amazing jumper. Spots must be good luck," she added with a smile and trotted away.

Marley was surprised. "W—wow. I never thought I would hear that."

"Yeah, that was *totally* not like Becky," Visa agreed. "Here comes Phil. I wonder what *he* has to say."

Phil cantered up. "Marley, may I see you?"

"Sure, if you have something nice to say."

"Marley, you are an awesome horse. I underestimated your talents. And your beautiful spots make you unique, not ugly."

That day was the best day of Marley's life.

(750 words)