

## Marlowe's Pony

Rocky lived on a farm. He shared his field with a cow and a sheep. But they didn't talk to him. All day they ate grass. Nobody brushed his tangled mane and his tail had leaves stuck in it. Rocky wanted someone to play with. He tried to be friendly to the cow.

'I say madam, you have a lovely black and white coat. It makes my brown one look very dull.'

But the cow only said 'Moo,' and wandered off.

Next Rocky spoke to the sheep. 'Good afternoon, sir. I'm Rocky. What are you called?'

'Baa,' said the sheep and looked into the distance.

Neither of them meant to be horrid. They didn't understand him.

I wish there was someone here like me, thought Rocky. He settled down to eat a bit more grass.

Every morning, a lady came to the field. She wore baggy trousers, wellington boots and a big hat. 'Here's your breakfast,' she said, giving each animal a bucket – red for Rocky, black for the cow and yellow for the sheep.

One day she said, 'my grandson's coming today. He's not been to a farm before.'

That evening she appeared, holding a little boy by the hand. She sat him on the gate, his legs dangling over the top. The boy shouted with excitement. Startled, the sheep trotted off. The cow saw the lady had no food and joined the sheep.

Wriggling free, the boy dropped into the field, landing in a puddle. Grandma laughed. He got up, wiped his muddy hands on his jumper and ran towards Rocky.

'Wait for me, Marlowe,' said Grandma but she couldn't open the gate.

Marlowe wore his blue boots and had no fear. He reached Rocky.

'Hello,' he said.

Rocky sniffed the boy's pockets and head, breathing hot, horsey breath over him.

'Hey, get off,' laughed Marlowe, smoothing down his black, curly hair.

Grandma's face was scrunched up into a frown until she heard them talking. A smile wiped her worried face away.

'Are you lonely?' said Marlowe, stroking the soft nose.

'Sometimes,' whickered Rocky. 'No-one looks or talks like me and they won't play.' Horses can't cry so he sniffed a large horse sniff instead.

'I'm the only boy in my class with brown skin and black hair,' said Marlowe, 'but I've got lots of friends.' He looked at Rocky. 'I'm the same colour as you! We're very handsome but your tail needs a brush.'

'Will you do it?' asked Rocky.

'Yes,' said Marlowe. 'I'll bring the special comb I have for my hair. You're very big.'

'Not for a horse,' answered Rocky. 'I think you're too small. You can't see anything down there.'

Rocky lay down. 'Climb up, hold tight and I'll show you the world.'

Marlowe scrambled onto his warm back and rode to the gate. Grandma's mouth was open.

'How did you learn to ride?' said Grandma.

Marlowe hugged Rocky. 'It's easy when you speak horse.'

Rocky kissed his nose.

He had a friend.