



## Don't Gallop to Conclusions

Colleen D., Wisconsin

"Top o' the morning, Darby!" I called cheerfully. I leaped up onto the wooden fence and glanced around. The vast green hills stretched as far as I could see. I had never ridden Mr. Plooy's old-friendly horse. But, on my way to school each day, he patiently anticipated my visits as something new, fresh and exciting happened. This morning in County Cork was bright and colorful.

"What new adventure will we have today, Darby?" I questioned, skipping across the pile of cobblestones. I expected Darby to welcome me with his low nicker, but he just hung his head low, and reluctantly swished his tail at a pesky fly.

"Is something wrong, Darby?" I asked, reaching up to scratch behind his ear. Then I heard a noisy rumbling. I turned briskly to spy a rusty old truck with a trailer as big as a steam ship. The trailer shouted with red letters, and I squinted in the intense sunlight to try and read them. Then my heart sped with alarm. Two men were coming towards the pasture!

I dove under the fence, allowing the tall weeds to disguise me. My eyes glimpsed high enough to see Mr. Plooy, the skinny man with silver hair, pointing straight to Darby. The other man held a long, shiny object like a crow bar. There was more mumbling, and I caught the word "tonight". It entered my mind like fireworks.

"They're going to send Darby to the glue factory tonight!" I gasped. "That's what owners do when they don't want their old horses anymore."

The two men turned their backs and left. I sprung to my feet, flinging my arms around Darby's strong neck.

"Don't you worry." My feet felt like cement. I pulled myself away, only to run breathlessly to school.

In the classroom, my eyes watched the clock for what felt like an eternity! Something poked my back.

"Here, Kate!"

I peered over my shoulder to see my friend, Keslie, her blonde bangs skimming her smiling eyes.

"Here's a glue stick," she offered. I stared at the glue stick in disgust.

Mrs. Empty walked straight towards my desk and pivoted directly in front of me, with a giant box in her hands.

Her eyes shone as she announced, "Class, I have a special project for today." She then opened the box right under my nose, revealing an endless trove of glue! The 75% red discount

tags glared at me like bullets!

“How many horses had to die?” I choked.

Instantly the bell rang, so I ran outside and dashed behind the playshed to escape. Sitting cross-legged, I grabbed a handful of sticks and begin breaking them in half, as I always did when I chilled.

“What’s wrong, Kate?” My two friends approached. I spilled out the heavy news.

“That’s awful!” Chloe exclaimed, wrinkling her nose like a pickle.

“Something must be done!” Keslie declared.

We all paused for a moment to think hard. Then I loudly snapped a twig.

“I’ve got it! Let’s hide Darby tonight. If they can’t find Darby, then he doesn’t go!”

“That’s brilliant!” Keslie exclaimed.

“It’s a plan!” they both chimed. I flashed my friends a grateful smile.

That night the phone set off a shrill, “Ring, ring!” Keslie was on the other line, and she sounded like a kid who had just dropped her ice cream cone.

“I’m sorry, Kate,” Keslie went on, “Chloe is busy too. I have to go, bye!”

“But,” I said, feeling the zing of rejection while laying the phone down.

“I will rescue Darby myself!” I said boldly, and marched out the door. Soon I arrived at the familiar pasture, but there was no Darby! My heart dropped.

“Am I too late?”

My insides fluttered and I whirled around to grab the biggest branch off a towering maple tree. I cracked it over my knee, then ran home, screaming.

My mother greeted me with her warm smile. “Honey, did you look in the empty stall?”

“Empty stall?” I echoed. I tore to the stall behind our house.

There, wearing a dazzling new purple halter and lead rope, was Darby! And next to him were Chloe and Keslie, beaming.

“Kate,” Keslie explained, “Mr. Plooy said Darby’s not going to the glue factory after all. He was just putting new shoes on him!”

Suddenly it dawned on me.

“The crow bar was a hoof clipper, and the man a farrier?” I guessed.

Chloe bounced her head and added, “We met him by the corner drugstore, and he was so impressed to hear our rescue plan that he wanted us to have Darby!”

We all doubled over in giggles of relief. I couldn’t have been happier.

That night, tightly tucked in bed, I thought over the day’s events. Mr. Plooy had taken my offer to clearing brush next to his stable house.

“I’m good at breaking sticks,” I grinned, as I gently closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep. Tomorrow would be the best day of my life. For it would be the first day I would ride Darby!