

THE PRINCE – AN EASTER STORY

Pedro was the oldest of all the animals in the barn. His coat was shabby and bits of fur hung in clumps around his neck where the farmer's children had clung to him as they rode on his back. One of his ears was badly crumpled; the other jagged and torn from a run-in with a much younger donkey – poor Pedro always seemed to come off worst in a brawl. Maybe it was because he had such a gentle nature and shied away from conflict: not like some of the others in the yard who were always spoiling for a fight.

If truth were told, Pedro had turned into a bit of a joke. The farmer had thought more than once about letting him go but the children kept begging him not to and anyway, who would want such a mangy, weather-beaten old scrap of a thing? He was good for nothing except pulling the hay-cart to market once a week and he was getting slower and slower doing even that.

All the other animals made fun of Pedro. 'Look at that useless old-timer!' mocked the cocky young stallion. 'He should be put out to grass!'

'Yes, he gives the rest of us a bad name,' agreed the pretty new mare. Her coat was a silky, shimmering black, dark as ebony and smooth as glass. It glistened whenever the sun caught it and the stable lads loved to brush and polish it. Heads turned wherever she went. She would acknowledge these admiring glances with a haughty toss of her mane and a swish of her luxurious tail.

One day there was great excitement in the barn and a flurry of activity. None of the animals knew what was going on until the old cart-horse overheard two of the stable lads talking together. He reported back to the other animals who huddled round and listened with great interest. 'It seems a very important Prince is expected in the city any day now,' he confided. 'Not sure who he is, didn't catch the name, but someone of the utmost majesty and style. They reckon he'll come here to find a mount.'

At this the young stallion and the pretty mare became quite agitated. 'The Prince will want to ride into the city on my back,' boasted the young stallion, his chest puffing up with pride. 'There is no finer animal in the whole kingdom to carry him.'

'Well, I don't think so,' retorted the pretty mare. 'You are strong, to be sure, but my mane is braided and tasselled with fine beads and sparkling jewels. A grand Prince will need to display his riches and authority, and what better way than to enter the city on my back.'

The wise old cart-horse said nothing. He was used to their silly boasting and preferred to keep his opinions to himself. But that night he wondered which of them might be chosen, if their stable were indeed to provide a mount for the Prince.

The day of the Prince's arrival came. The route into the city was decked with garlands. People started gathering at the roadside from first light, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the Prince as he rode by. Some brought home-made banners to welcome him; some had flags to wave; others had gathered rose-petals to scatter on the path as he approached. There was a buzz of excitement and anticipation throughout the city. What would the new Prince look like? Would his robes be covered in splendid jewels? Would he wave to the crowd or would he be too high and mighty to take notice of them?

Pedro stayed behind in the barn. He felt too insignificant to join in the preparations.

Suddenly, there was a great commotion: people running here and there in a mad panic. The farmer's booming voice could be heard approaching the stable. 'Well, your Majesty, I have many fine animals who might carry Your Highness into the city. Please, I beg you, take your pick. Here is my young stallion, the pride of the whole region.' At this the stallion bowed a deep and reverential bow. The Prince smiled. 'Or what about this pretty mare? See how her coat glistens and reflects the light. Her jewels will convey your greatness to all who see you, for I notice you wear no finery yourself, Sir.' The farmer seemed rather puzzled as he spoke, for indeed, the young Prince looked like no other he had ever seen. He was simply dressed and looked for all the world as though he were just an ordinary peasant. The farmer could not understand why he had not made more of an effort to display his wealth and power.

The Prince glanced politely at the pretty mare but he seemed distracted. 'Are there no other animals here?' he asked the farmer.

'Well none except my old donkey, Pedro, and really he's good for nothing. I only keep him because the children are fond of him.' The farmer was becoming more embarrassed by the minute.

The Prince went over to the corner of the barn where Pedro stood quietly munching some hay. 'Hello, old fellow,' he whispered. 'My, what soft fur you have.' He patted Pedro gently. 'How about taking me into the city today?'

Pedro could hardly believe his ears. The Prince wanted him, the oldest and shaggiest of all the animals in the stable, to take him into the city for the grand parade!

The other animals snorted with disgust. But Pedro was speaking. 'Yes, my Lord, nothing would give me greater pleasure. It would be an honour to carry you on my back.'

And that is how a lowly donkey, was chosen to carry the greatest Prince of all into the city of Jerusalem and why his story will never be forgotten.