

## Pokey the Mystery Horse

A fine, young horse named Pokey once lived on a farm at the edge of the great forest. Pokey lived to make others happy. Day after day, he got up at dawn to plow the farmer's field. He worked tirelessly pulling the farmer's wagon. He amused the children working in the barn, gave them rides, and kept the other animals there motivated to do their jobs. He even helped round up some stray cows. He was always very careful to do a good job. Pokey really had a big heart. His only trouble was that he was sooooo slow... The farmer was always annoyed with him for being slow, and this made Pokey very sad. Try as he might, he could not please the farmer, and his sadness caused him to hang his head in shame. This was the last straw for the farmer!

One day, Pokey overheard the farmer telling his foreman that he was buying a new plow-horse...one with spirit, that wouldn't be so darned slow! This came as quite a shock and a devastating blow to Pokey.

The very next day, Pokey woke up feeling strange—as if his mouth were full of cotton and his stomach full of bricks. Pokey wondered what this all meant.

Well, the new horse arrived with much pomp and celebration. He certainly did have spirit, as well as speed! He had been a racehorse for some time, until a sprain had caused him to retire. Now that the leg had healed, he seemed to be fit enough for whatever needed to be done around the farm. The farmer certainly liked him! The official papers said his name was Trigger. That pleased the farmer, as well. "Don't need no Pokey-horse around this farm!" he laughed. "Now we have a horse like a speeding bullet!" Pokey sighed in his stall, and sunk gradually lower and lower until his whole body lay flat on the ground. The next morning, Pokey did not wake up.

As the morning started for the barn folks, it was apparent that something was wrong. Pokey didn't come out of his stall to wake everyone up. He didn't even answer when the stable keeper whistled for him. Then they found him laying there, eyes shut, breathing heavily. Someone ran to the house to get the farmer.

"We need a vet right away!" said the stable keeper.

"What's wrong?" asked the farmer.

"It's Pokey! He's very sick!" said the stable keeper.

"That ole horse ain't worth no vet!" scoffed the farmer. "We'll send him to the glue factory this time!"

So the stable boy ran back to the barn crying, as the farmer started to dial the phone...

"Pokey! You've got to get up NOW!" cried the boy. "Farmer White is calling the glue factory! We've got to get you out of here!"

Pokey tried to get up, but his legs just wouldn't hold him. It was no use!

Then the stable boy had an idea. He got two dairy cows, rigged up a makeshift sling, and hoisted Pokey up between them. Slowly, they staggered out to a trailer that was waiting, and the stable keeper and a couple of farmhands shoved Pokey up the ramp. Pokey promptly fell over again inside the trailer, while the stable keeper gave instructions to the others: "Tell Farmer White that I will pay the vet bill myself, and if he doesn't like it, I'll buy the horse from him, too!" Then he bounded into the cab of the truck and sped away in a cloud of dust. The farmhands headed off to the house.

It was a difficult task getting Pokey out of the trailer, but somehow the stable keeper and all of the vet's assistants managed to do it. "It doesn't look good..." the doctor informed him. "I'll see what I can do, but I'm not making any promises."

Several weeks passed, and finally Pokey had enough strength to stand again. He was eating and drinking on his own, but still looked terrible. He reminded the vet of a scarecrow more than a horse. Then at last the day came when Pokey was well enough to go home...except that he now had no home.

"Where do you suppose I could keep him?" the stable keeper asked the vet. "I was lucky I didn't get fired for bringing him here, but Farmer White gave me very strict instructions not to bring him back to the farm."

"Oh, I think I know just the place!" said the vet. "I have a friend who trains horses, and I know they have a few extra stalls in their stable. You might even find yourself a better job there, if you show them how well you handle horses."

So Pokey went off to a new home, and the stable keeper did find himself a better job there. Everything was quiet and peaceful for a while. Pokey felt much better in his new home, and made many new friends there, but he was still sad.

"I feel so useless!" he said to his horse companion, Aveto. "You are a racehorse, but what am I good for?"

Aveto said, "Maybe you are supposed to be a racehorse, too!"

That got Pokey thinking...

Meanwhile, Pokey's friend the stable keeper was learning lots of new skills. One day, he took Pokey out into the woods for a ride, and told him all about the training and racing, and his new position as a jockey. For the first time in a very long time, Pokey's ears stood up.

Then his friend said something that took the wind right out of him. "I wish you were a fast horse, so I could get you into that racing program. I just don't think you can run fast enough to get in. I'm really glad you are my friend, though."

That night, Pokey didn't sleep a wink. His mind was racing... literally.

The next morning, as he was slowly chewing his breakfast, Pokey thought he heard a voice. At first it was very faint, but after a while it became clearer, and then he was able to make out the words. "What are you so gloomy about?" Pokey looked about, and finally spotted a fuzzy caterpillar munching a leaf just outside his stall.

"What am I so gloomy about? I'll tell you what I'm so gloomy about!!!" Pokey snorted. "I want to be a racehorse, just like the other horses that live here. That's what I want to do! But everyone tells me I'm just too slow!"

"Oh!" said the caterpillar. "I thought it was something else, like maybe something you couldn't change."

"Huh???" choked Pokey.

"I thought you were down about something beyond your control. Why don't you do something about it?" said the caterpillar.

"What can I do?" said Pokey. "I'm just a slow horse. What's the point, anyway?"

"I'll tell you what you can do!" said the caterpillar. "You can go out running every day! The more you run, the stronger you'll get, and you'll gradually run faster and faster. Pretty soon, you will be able to run with the other horses."

"No way!" said Pokey.

"I'll help you," said the caterpillar.

Pokey gave it some thought, and wondered if the caterpillar might be right. He decided to give it a try.

When Pokey left the stable that day, there was a caterpillar sitting on his head, whispering encouragement into his ear.

It was really hard those first few days. Pokey came in tired and sore. But running became easier and easier for him each day. Pretty soon, the other horses began to notice him.

"Hey there!" brayed Aveto. "What's up with you? I noticed you running with the rest of us lately. That's great! What gives?"

Pokey explained his strategy, and the helpful advice he'd received from the caterpillar.

"I'll help you, too!" said Aveto. "We'll race each day until you can outpace me."

"Outpace you?" sneered Pokey. "That's impossible!"

“Nothing is impossible unless you believe it is!” said Aveto.

So they raced and raced...

A few months went by, and one day the owner of the stables came by to visit. That happened to be the day Pokey outpaced Aveto for the very first time.

“Wow!” shouted the owner. “Did you see that? That white horse over there just outpaced my prized stud! Get that horse into the next championship race immediately!”

So all the stable hands went to work. It was hard work for Pokey, as he prepared for the upcoming championship race. But by now, he was really starting to believe all the encouraging things his friends Caterpillar and Aveto had told him.

Race day came, and Pokey was nervous, but excited. The gates opened... Pokey ran for all he was worth! The crowd cheered! Pokey pulled ahead—3, 4, 5 lengths! Pokey won by half a lap!!!

The owner ran up and hugged him. The judges put a wreath around his neck, and his stable keeper friend hopped down and gave him a juicy, bright red apple. “I’m so proud of you!” the stable keeper said.

Pokey smiled all the way home. Things were different for him after that. He got a bigger stall, and his favorite foods, but best of all, he got respect from the stable keepers and the other horses in the barn. Pokey was very happy.

As the years went by, Pokey began to slow down once again. But now, Pokey wasn’t distressed by his slowness. He knew in his heart that he was a fast horse, and so did everyone else. He even had a racetrack named for him. That settled the matter! Age came gracefully.

One day, Pokey was out in the pasture, feeling a little tired. He looked down and saw a nest on the ground with one little egg in it. The egg was cracked, and something inside was moving. Pokey watched curiously. The egg was hatching, and out popped an eaglet. “This was strange, indeed!” thought Pokey.

The bird looked up at him and spoke. “You are the fastest horse on the farm! You are going to race in the championship finals!”

Pokey was very excited to hear this. He felt faint. Then he leaped into the air, and spread his wings.

As Pokey flew into the clouds above, he waved to all his friends at the stables below and shouted, “THANK YOU!!!”

The End.