

## Trust me

Lisa Pike

‘COME ON, ya silly girl. Two. More. Steps.’ My outstretched arm strained over the rails to grasp the mare’s halter. My other hand attempted to entice her with carrots as the dusty grey mare gingerly took the smallest step I’ve ever seen a horse make. Her lean neck stretched warily forward and her nose pointed outwards in the hope of somehow snatching the carrots while avoiding contact with the human. I let out a stifled snicker at the sight of this animal tilting her head at all angles in an attempt to stretch her neck as close to the carrots as it could go, lower lip wobbling at the sight of the carrots. Mistake. I saw her ears twitch towards the sound of my giggle before she immediately shot backwards, grunting, snorting and prancing at the other end of the yard. I slipped down from the fence, frustrated.

‘Damn it!’ I dumped the carrots on the ground. I heard a slow clap begin behind me and spun around to see Caleb the stablehand grinning and shaking his head.

‘Nice,’ he acknowledged mockingly from his vantage point on the porch.

‘So maybe she’s not a bomb-proof, push-button trick pony like yours,’ I snapped, not particularly in the mood for friendly banter.

He jumped down from the porch, his sudden landing sent the mare off on a few more laps of her yard, snorting and tail swishing in disapproval.

‘Hey now, don’t take it out on me!’ He held his hands up in a shielding style. ‘She’s the one you’re mad at.’”

‘I’m not mad. She’s just so frustrating. She doesn’t want to be patted, she doesn’t want to be with people, she doesn’t want to trust. She doesn’t want to do anything!’

Caleb looked at me with that painfully irritating ‘I-know-best’ smirk. I knew he had something to say, and what was worse, I knew he was going to be right.

‘What she wants to do, is be a horse. You’re being too human for her.’

I sighed. There it was, that nauseating advice that was exactly what you needed but the last thing you wanted to hear.

‘Well, we can’t all be one fifth horse like you,’ I joked. It was true. Caleb was weird like that, he could make his gelding do whatever he wanted, and he looked so much more natural working with a horse than he ever would in the company of other people.

‘I could have a go, if you like. What did your dad get her for anyway? She’s not exactly the competition type.’ Caleb scanned the mare’s conformation. She didn’t have the sloping pasterns or long neck my father usually looked for in his champion mounts. And the temperament, that was a whole other issue all together.

‘She’s my project, apparently. Dad wants me to learn from her, figure her out, I don’t know.... She was dirt cheap at the auction; no one else would have her. Anyway, since she’s my project, you’re not going to have a go. I can deal with it. Haven’t you got work to do?’

‘All right, I get the message. I’ll leave you to it then, good luck.’ He wandered off towards the barn, whistling. I glanced back over at the mare. She had returned to the front of the yard, her head resting over the railing, ears pricked forward. She’d been watching me and Caleb, contentedly and quietly.

I stepped up onto the rail and swung my legs over to sit about three feet from her head. Her ears flickered and her eyes narrowed, but she hadn't moved. I breathed with relief, feeling a smile creep onto my face. I had never been this close to her, and I took this opportunity to get a good look at her. Her coat was a dusty grey colour, its smooth direction interrupted by scores of nicks and scars scattered across her body. Her flanks were heaving as she caught her breath from her recent hoons across the yard. I could tell she was young, three or four at the most. Just a baby, she still had some growing to do. Nothing so young should ever be given a reason not to trust a single person, I thought.

Her legs were long and fine, a lot darker in colour than the rest of her. Her hooves were chipped, and parts of a hoof had broken off in some places — a farrier's worst nightmare. 'Where did you come from? Who let you get like this?' I wondered aloud. I was fully prepared for her to skitter off sideways and snort her contempt for me. But she didn't; the little mare walked over to me, her muzzle twitching as she breathed heavily.

She was so close, I could feel her warm breath on my hands. She was undeniably a beautiful animal, despite her battle scars. Her face seemed perfectly sculpted. Her forelock was long and matted, thick with prickles and twigs. She turned her head and I gasped. A long scar reached from her cheek right past the side of her eye. I knew it must have been deep when first inflicted.

'Oh dear,' I breathed. 'That really must have hurt, sweetheart.' I reached out and brushed the side of her face, forgetting about being dead quiet and still, sweeping her forelock away from her eyes. Her head settled in my lap and she let out a deep nicker. I used this chance to untangle her forelock, extracting prickles and burs from the strands of silver mane.

'I see you figured her out.' A deep but quiet voice sounded behind me. Avoiding a sudden movement that might ruin this moment, I didn't turn around.

'Caleb I swear to god, if you scare this horse away ...'

'She's not going anywhere. She's fine. She trusts you.'

I turned slightly and grinned at Caleb. He was right. This creature had decided that I was okay, I was safe. From everything she had been through, and whatever created those horrid scars all over her, she put her head in my arms, closed her eyes and decided to stop running.



**Lisa Pike** wrote this in 2013 when she was in Year 11 at Werribee Secondary College in Victoria.