

## Chapter 10

### Big Changes

It was a couple weeks since Little Black passed away, and while the horses still missed him every minute of everyday, life carried on at Moccasin Lake Ranch. The grass continued to grow greener and longer, the trees stretched their arms higher and higher towards the sky as their leaves unfolded, rich and green, and the days grew warmer and longer as summer crept ever nearer. There was a rumor of a big change coming soon to MVRU. It was the hottest topic amongst the horses. They discussed it as they grazed, as they went out on hacks, as they drank water, as they stood in their dirt pens, and every other minute of everyday. Was the rumor true? How would it affect them? What would it be like?

It turns out the rumor was true, and the “big change” arrived one day in Bob’s trailer. As the “big change” stepped gracefully out of the trailer, all the horses craned their necks to see. The newcomer was grey, of medium height, and had dark dapples on his legs. Even from a distance, he looked athletic. He walked down the aisle way with a dignified air, hardly glancing at the other horses as they nickered and stuck their noses over the fence in welcome.



“He looks very handsome!” Berry whispered to Ginger. Ginger rolled her eyes and went back to grazing, as she replied, “He looks very stuck-up if you ask me.”

The newcomer took his time surveying his pasture, much like an old fashioned prince surveying his new palace. He introduced himself to Forest and Brushy as “Trav,” short for “Traveller.” He said he was Bob’s new horse, and that he had a long resume of eventing with amateur riders. Paddy, who had come over to

the fence to listen, pinned his ears and stalked away. Forest sighed as he noticed the look of jealousy on Paddy's face. Change is good, but it can also be hard!

The horses settled back down after the excitement of the arrival, and Trav became part of the everyday routine at MVRU. He didn't speak to the other horses much, which some of them took as a sign that he was too dignified for them. Wall\*E in particular had a hard time not rolling his eyes everytime Trav walked by. "Perfect Trav" he called him in a mocking voice behind his back.

And in many ways, it did seem that Trav was perfect. Every morning at 430am he would unlock his pasture and jog up into the hills. He had a fancy watch with lots of buttons, which he brought with him to calculate his per-mile time and to do interval training. By 530am he finished his run, and did 45 minutes of swimming in the lake, despite the freezing temperatures. He did an excellent crawl, and was working on perfecting his breast stroke and side stroke. ("What's wrong with doggy paddle?" Wall\*E grumpily muttered when Berry told him all the swimming strokes Trav could do). By 630am he was back in his pasture, and did an hour of core exercises combined with yoga.



Wall\*E always stalked away to the farthest corner of his pasture when Trav started these exercises. Willy, who was happily eating grass and snoozing when this happened one day, told Wall\*E, "I don't know why you care so much, Wall\*E. If he wants to waste all that energy then that's his problem." Wall\*E glared at Willy and retorted, "I don't care. I don't care at all. He can do whatever he wants. I just don't like watching show offs, that's all." Willy shrugged and kept eating.

Wall\*E wasn't the only one who thought Trav was a showoff, and rather stuck up. As he never said much to the horses, they stopped trying to make conversation with him. They integrated him into the MVRU world with civility, but hardly with friendship.

One day, the horses were going for an afternoon frolic together. It was Buttons's idea. She invited Ginger and Finn, who invited Berry and Sparks. Berry invited Wall\*E, who invited Homer. Homer invited Forest, who invited Brushy, and Paddy. When Myles saw Paddy leaving, he took off after him. Who cares if he was invited or not? He was not going to be left alone. Soon, all the horses except Trav were on their way up to the lake for a frolic in the sunshine. As they walked by the lower pivot field, Forest stopped and asked Wall\*E, "Did anyone invite Trav?"

Wall\*E scoffed and said, "Oh him? I'm sure he has more productive things to do than go frolicing with all of us ordinary lesson horses." Forest shrugged and kept walking. Maybe Trav did have more productive things to do.

Unfortunately, Trav was standing in his pasture, just on the other side of the creek from where Wall\*E and Forest had been talking. He heard Wall\*E's sneering comments. With low head and drooping ears, he walked gloomily away from the creek to stand alone in his pasture.

Homer had heard Wall\*E and Forest's conversation, and had also seen Trav sigh and walk away. Homer paused for a moment, then turned back towards the ranch, a frown creasing his brow.

All the horses, except for Homer and Trav, arrived at the lake and started snacking, napping, chatting, and playing a roudy game of tag. It was a beautiful, late spring afternoon, and soon the lake echoed with the sounds of their laughter.

An hour or so later, Homer and Trav appeared. Everyone paused what they were doing to look up at the new arrivals. Buttons and Finn nodded politely to Trav in welcome, but Wall\*E, who was already in a bad mood from being teased during tag for his short legs, scowled. Paddy also pinned his ears and stalked away. Trav, upon seeing this, hung his head and his lips began to quiver. "Have you come to show us all up by swimming laps?" Wall\*E sneered. Ginger snapped at Wall\*E for being so rude, but Wall\*E didn't care. He was sick of being shown up by horses with longer legs than his. He was sick of being teased about being a pony, and not only a pony, but one of the smallest ponies on the ranch! He was sick of Berry, Annie, and Bob talking about how great Trav was. Wall\*E had all these thoughts running through his head when he glanced up and saw something that made his heart sink. Trav was quickly wiping away tears as he turned back towards the ranch and walked away alone. Wall\*E made up his mind and trotted after Trav.

"Trav! Hey, Trav! Wait up," Wall\*E called. Trav slowed to a halt and turned his head back to look at Wall\*E. He didn't say anything, but his eyes looked sad and lonely. "Trav, I'm sorry I made fun of you back there. That was a really mean thing for me to say. I'm just tired of being small." Wall\*E looked at his feet and scuffed the ground. "I shouldn't have taken out my anger on you."

Trav smiled sadly and sighed. "That's okay, Wall\*E. Thanks for the apology." They walked along in silence for a few minutes. "I miss my old friends, Wall\*E. I find it really hard to make friends."

Wall\*E looked at him, perplexed. "You find it hard to make friends? But you're so perfect, I thought it would be easy for you. I thought you didn't want to be friends with us because we're not good enough for you."

"Not good enough for me? Wall\*E, I think you all are amazing. All I've wanted since I got here is to be friends with you. But I'm shy, so it's hard for me to talk to horses I don't know."

"I didn't know you were shy, Trav! You should have said so."

Trav laughed. "I suppose if I wasn't so shy I could have told you. But I was too shy to tell you that I was shy."

"Why are you so determined to do that workout routine, Trav? I thought maybe you were showing off, but now I don't think so."



Trav hesitated, then said, "That was the way I was brought up. Every morning we would all get up together and do a morning workout routine. It was fun. We would chat and laugh, and welcome the new day together. Now it's very nostalgic for me. It reminds me of when I was young, and all the friends and family I had. That's why I do it everyday."

"Hey Trav, do you think I could come on your workout routine sometime? I know my legs are short, I mean, maybe I would slow you down too much..." Wall\*E trailed off and looked down.

"I would love it if you came with me! You can show me all your favorite trails on the ranch." Trav smiled at Wall\*E, and Wall\*E smiled back.

That night, all the horses--Trav included--gathered in the hay barn for a meeting. Buttons cleared her throat. "We are gathered

here tonight in honor of Trav. Trav, we are sorry that we have not been more welcoming to you. It seems there were miscommunications on both sides..."

Ginger muttered, "Ah miscommunications. We've been spending too much time with the humans."

“But we should have been more welcoming and made more of an effort to get to know you. We are all really excited to have you here!” All the horses smiled and cheered at this. Trav smiled sheepishly. From that day on, Trav was truly part of the MVRU community. He played “bite face” over the fence with Forest and Brushy, went on morning runs and swims with Wall\*E, and discussed literature with Ginger. Finn and Willy showed him their Hope Garden, and he and Homer had long chats about the horses and places they missed. Berry never missed a chance of saying hi to him, although she was too much in awe of him to say much more. Even Paddy became close friends with him, spending long spring evenings discussing Bob and their favorite places to go for hacks. One thing didn’t change, however. Everyone still referred to him as “Perfect Trav,” but this time very fondly. Given his athleticism, hard work ethic, honesty, kind heart, and true friendship, the name seemed to suit him perfectly.