My own special donkey

A story by Patricia Hall

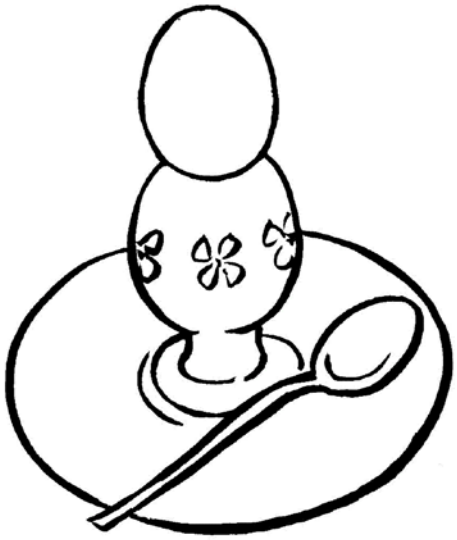
These are some of the words you will find in the story.

village distance majestic meeting involved available survive

farrier pleaded serious thrilled whispered precious

paddock file hooves unbalanced comfort hoofpick lonely

Stephanie lived on a farm outside a small village in the Western Cape. The Langeberg Mountains in the distance gave the farm a majestic backdrop. They kept a lot of animals on the farm such as chickens, geese, horses, pigs, sheep and cows.



Stephanie was nine and always wore her hair in pigtails. Her job on the farm was to collect the eggs while her brother fed the geese and chickens. Every Saturday morning the family ate breakfast together and enjoyed the fresh eggs from the farm.

Stephanie looked at her father and asked, 'Daddy, you didn't read me a story last night. Why not?'

'I had to go to a meeting about the Donkey Sanctuary,' her dad said.

'What is a sanctuary, Dad?' asked Stephanie.

'It's a special place where donkeys are loved and looked after and where no-one can harm them,' her dad said. 'The trouble is that they've run out of space at the Sanctuary. They can't take any new donkeys.'

'We have lots of space on our farm,' Stephanie said. 'Couldn't we keep some of the donkeys?'

'I know Stephanie, but looking after donkeys takes work. I don't have the time.'

'But I can look after just one donkey!' cried Stephanie.

Her father sighed and put down his coffee cup. 'It's not just a question of time, Stephanie.'

'A donkey also costs money,' her mother said as she gave Stephanie a slice of toast.

'You can have all my pocket money,' said Stephanie.

‘I think you should learn more about donkeys so that you understand what is involved,’ Stephanie’s dad said. ‘The horses eat all the available grass. Donkeys can’t just survive on the veld, they also need hay in the evening.’ He got up from the table and took his plate to the kitchen.

Stephanie’s mom held her hands. ‘Donkeys need care and attention. If your donkey gets sick the vet will have to visit. The farrier will also need to come and file his hooves.’

Her dad called from the kitchen, ‘Donkeys are a lot of work and cost a lot of money. Now I don’t want to hear another word about it!’

Stephanie jumped out of her chair. ‘P-leea-se, Dad!’ she pleaded. ‘I promise to look after the donkey properly. I’ll feed it every morning. I’ll brush its coat every evening and I’ll phone the vet myself if the donkey gets sick.’

Stephanie wouldn’t let the idea go. She grew more and more excited at the thought of having her own donkey. After days of Stephanie’s begging, her dad gave in. ‘All right, all right!’ But he had also been testing Stephanie to see how serious she was about having a donkey. When Stephanie asked to help to look after the donkeys at the sanctuary he knew she really wanted a donkey.

One day a large horse box arrived at their farm and Stephanie was thrilled. Jacob, who worked at the sanctuary, opened the door and Stephanie saw *her* donkey inside. He looked so small and lost in the big horse box. His bones stuck out through his skin and his skin had sores on it, but she loved him at once. His coat was light grey, almost white, and down his back and shoulders there were lines that made a cross. She had never seen such a beautiful mark on an animal before.

She walked towards him slowly and reached out to touch him. He allowed her to come closer and she whispered in his ears, ‘Little donkey, your name is Treasure because I am going to treat you like the most precious treasure I have ever had.’

From then on Stephanie got up earlier each morning. Before she caught the bus to school she greeted Treasure in his stable. She slipped on a halter and led him to the field and put out hay for him to eat. Later, when she came back from school, she ran straight to the paddock where Treasure waited for her at the gate. He greeted her with a loud ‘Hee-haw, hee-haw.’ To Stephanie it sounded like a happy song and it warmed her heart. She stroked the soft fur under his neck and cuddled him and promised, ‘I’ll come and brush you as soon as I have had my lunch.’

One day the dentist came to file Treasure’s teeth with a black metal file. It was longer than her school ruler.

‘Why do you need to do that?’ Stephanie asked.

‘When a donkey grows older than twenty years, his teeth grow very long,’ the dentist said. ‘If you don’t file his teeth he won’t be able to eat. Then he could die.’ Stephanie was shocked and ran to tell her brother what she had just learnt.

Later Stephanie's Dad said, 'I've booked the farrier for the horses. He might as well do Treasure's feet at the same time.'

'What does the farrier do Dad?' Stephanie asked.

'He will check Treasure's feet. He will see if his hooves are too long and if they are, he will file them down.'

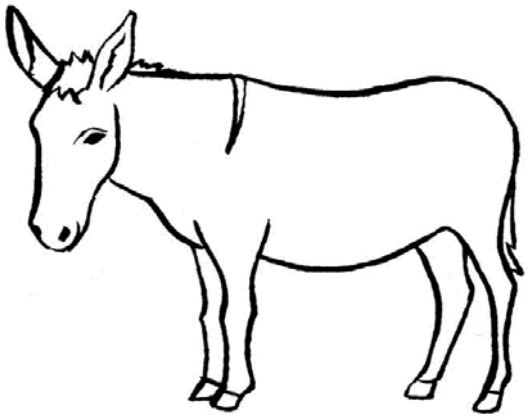
'Oh no, not another file!' cried Stephanie.

'Don't worry, it doesn't hurt. Treasure's hooves are like your fingernails that keep growing and need to be filed or cut.'

But Stephanie made sure she was at Treasure's side when the farrier came so that she could comfort him if he became frightened. When the farrier tried to pick up his foot Treasure kicked at him. Stephanie was surprised but the farrier only laughed and said, 'If he stands on three feet he feels unbalanced. So we'll take it slowly until he gets used to it. Stephanie, you can help by cleaning out his hooves regularly with this hoofpick.'

After a few months Jacob came to see how Treasure was doing. He couldn't believe what he saw. 'Where is the donkey we gave you?' Jacob joked. 'Surely this is not the same skinny donkey with the dull coat?'

'Yes it is,' said Stephanie proudly. She hugged Treasure who was now round, but not too fat, and had a beautiful shiny coat.



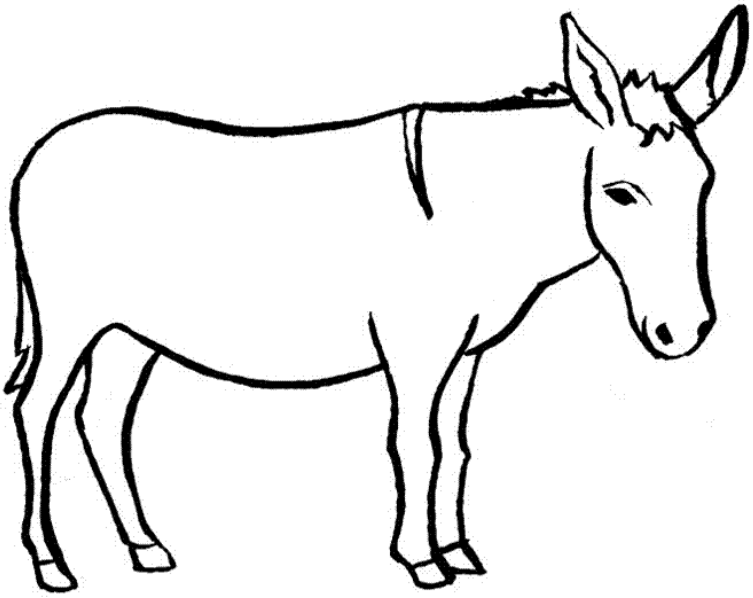
Jacob took Stephanie's Dad aside. 'Could you possibly take on another donkey?'

'Oh yes please Dad, please!' said Stephanie, jumping up and down.

'We have a donkey that needs a good home,' said Jacob. 'But most importantly, donkeys don't like to be on their own.'

Stephanie held her breath, waiting for her dad's reply. After a while he nodded his head. He knew what a good job Stephanie was doing taking care of her donkey. 'We can do that,' he said.

'Thank you so much Dad,' she said, giving him a hug. Stephanie felt so happy because now she would not have to worry about Treasure being lonely when she went to school.

Some years later Stephanie married and moved to a town just below the tall Langeberg Mountains. Her two donkeys remained on her parents' farm. They lived long enough for Stephanie's children to learn how to brush and care for them. Stephanie's children learnt to love the donkeys and all the animals on their grandparents' farm as much as Stephanie did when she was a young girl.

This is Stephanie's first donkey. Choose your own name for him and write it above him. Colour him in. In the space below him do your own drawing of the second donkey she got. Give her a name too.