

From *On the Other Shelf* in *The Secret Life of Model Horses* by Marie J.S. Phillips

In the dark lonely confines, his rage quickly gave way to apprehension. The box moved, carried from place to place, bouncing and tossing him against the protective bubble wrap with each change of transport. He heard humans speaking and talking when the box halted, but during travel, only the hum of tires on asphalt and the drone of engines reached his ears. Anxiety and anger tumbled inside him, but the angst won during the lengthy journey. The box jolted him for perhaps the hundredth time but this time he heard no other humans speaking. The unseen carrier tossed the box and Number Two uttered a scream of terror as it landed hard, sliding before stopping. Trembling, Number Two listened and waited, but he heard nothing except the wind, and the song of a large nearby conifer. Cold seeped into the carton, and Number Two shivered, realizing the box lay outdoors somewhere. Time passed, and Number Two felt cold through his entire body, wondering if he might ever escape this dark, cold, box. **THE SECRET LIFE OF MODEL HORSES**

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After many long hours, he heard a door open and a woman's voice, someone older than his previous owner. The woman lifted his box off the ground, and carried it, setting it down inside somewhere warm. She slit the top open and reached in, grasping Number Two. The bright light of the room dazzled his eyes, but in moments a big kitchen materialized to his sight. A young woman held him in her hand, appraising him.

"Finally," she said. "Pleistocene, you are here! I know you will be happy here."

Number Two gazed back in surprise. She called him a name right away, and he felt hope stirring. The new owner carried Pleistocene out of the kitchen and down a hall, where they passed a knick knack shelf that opened up into the living room. He saw an old mare and foal standing on the knick knack shelf. The mare appeared very distracted but the foal eyed him. He noticed horses standing on a table in the living room, in different phases of remaking.

"Low Shelves!" Pleistocene rumbled, anger returning.

"What?" the little foal asked.

"I am in a den of stupid haughty Low Shelves!" Pleistocene snorted at the foal, keeping his eyes on her as the owner carried him up the stairs. "Including you."

"What's a Low Shelves?" The foal's question faded, as the owner carried him up a second flight of stairs into a big attic. She set him down on a shelf beside another sorrel 5-Gaiter. Annoyance swept away Pleistocene's hope that this place might be different. No dust lay in the other's mane and tail, nor coated his back. Younger eyes gazed back at him. Pleistocene glared at the other, and stamped a foot, but before he uttered a single word, the other spoke.

"Hello! Welcome to Tardis Stables. I am Equinox," he whinnied, his voice radiating warmth, and no scorn, pity or anger tainted his tones. Pleistocene's anger abated.

"Hello," he answered. "I am, uh, oh yes, she called me Pleistocene."

"Wild name. I like it," Equinox whinnied.

"Thank you."

"You will like it here."

"I hope so," Pleistocene grumbled, remembering the nosey foal and the Low Shelves

in midst of their transformations downstairs.

"Well, well, what do we have here? A grouch?" A soft, silken voice chuckled. Pleistocene locked eyes with a sparkling white Andalusian and rage fired through his system. In the other's dark eyes Pleistocene saw disapproval and he shook with exploding fury.

"Low Shelver! So what if I am grouchy! What do you care? Who are you to judge me?" Pleistocene took satisfaction in the Andalusian's startled gaze.

"I do not judge." The Andalusian's eyes darkened, and he pawed the shelf. "I merely made an observation. I am Time Lord, not Low Shelver."

"Weeeell, exccuuuuuussee meeee!" Pleistocene squealed.

"Be civil! What is your problem, Stranger?" another sharp voice turned Pleistocene's head. Another younger Andalusian, this one a dapple grey, glared at him. Hate flashed through Pleistocene's entire being.

"Shut up, Low Shelver!" he snorted, kicking the wall behind him.

"I am Full Moon. That is my name and I suggest you use it." **Marie J. S. Phillips**

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"Lousy Low Shelver, so full of yourself. You Andalusians sure stick together. You . . ."

The owner's entrance forestalled further angry retorts. Pleistocene fumed, breathing hard, anger trembling his limbs. By time the owner left the attic, Pleistocene felt exhausted from holding in his rage. He eyed Time Lord, but a soft voice stopped him from saying anything.

"Hey, hey, my friend," Equinox nickered. "Don't be so upset. Please, I like you. So what if others don't. You may have had some hard times, but certainly not as bad as our herd Elder, T'Pal."

"Who?"

"Our Elder. She is downstairs on the knock knock shelf with her foal."

"Oh, her. She ignored me completely just like any Low Shelver, even with a missing leg."

"Low Shelver?"

"Yeah, pretty show horses who are too conceited to even talk to us on the high shelves where we gather dust." Pleistocene stamped a foot. "Like all your Andalusian friends."

"I don't understand." Equinox twitched an ear, and fell silent. Pleistocene decided not to pursue the issue, and endured the next few days in silence, speaking only to Equinox. One morning, excitement rippled through the herd, and Pleistocene turned to Equinox.

"Why are they so excited?"

"T'Pal will be arriving soon to begin the Awakening," Equinox neighed, eagerness in his voice.

"That old Low Shelver? What is an Awakening?" Pleistocene asked, annoyed and curious at the same time.

"You are in for a treat," Time Lord nickered.

"Shut up, Low Shelver," Pleistocene snorted, before eyeing Equinox. "Why is this T'Pal so great? How was her life so hard?"

"She is very old, and has experienced much. The least of which was the loss of one

leg. She recently went through some hard emotional turmoil, but she has broken out of it."

"How do you know that?"

"Her energies reach us even from all the way downstairs. Can't you feel it?" **THE SECRET LIFE OF MODEL HORSES**

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"I. . ." Pleistocene broke off, realizing he felt something odd. His body twitched. Suddenly, TS Jalapeno bounded from his shelf, racing across the floor. Pleistocene stared, his eyes widening with amazement.

"He moved!! He runs! How?"

The attic door rattled, and the sound of trotting hooves echoed from the other side of the room. Pleistocene rolled and eye and in sudden shock, moved his head toward the clap of hooves. The three-legged old mare moved into view, flanked by her spunky foal. TS Jalapeno met her, and trotted at her side. She ambled with a strange gait, but as she moved, a phantom limb glimmered, growing more distinct as the mare drew closer.

By time she stopped in the middle of the floor, the translucent limb held her up firmly and obeyed her every movement. Pleistocene's stunned astonishment suddenly gave way to jealousy as he watched all the horses dancing with joy on the shelving.

"Only a Low Shelver gets that sort of thing happening," he rumbled. The old mare glanced up sharply, leveling dark eyes on him. She scowled, and a few rainbow sparks flickered around her. Pleistocene froze, his indignant jealous anger vanishing like a fire under a torrential downpour. In those eyes, he saw a pool of wisdom and maturity he never before experienced. He knew beyond any doubts, to the core of his very existence, he beheld not an old nag to scorn or pity, but an Elder, an Ancient One, to respect and obey. Equinox broke his trance with a humorous nicker.

"She is T'Pal, our Elder. She's twenty-five years old. I suggest you say hello."

Pleistocene stammered like a shy foal, unable to speak.

"So, you are the cause of all this Low Shelver nonsense." The mare's smooth, surprisingly deep voice admonished him. "I suggest you forget all that, and learn civility."

"Yes, Elder," Pleistocene managed to stutter. T'Pal returned her attention to TS Jalapeno and the black Arabian stallion who jumped down to her side. Pleistocene let out a breath of relief.

"Glad you found some courtesy," Equinox whinnied a laugh, then sobered. "She is not one you wish to anger. You did not know she was an Elder, did you?"

"Not until she looked at me."

"At least your instincts are good." Equinox snorted with good cheer. "The Awakening is about to begin!"

"I have never experienced this before." Pleistocene lifted a hoof, and tapped the shelving.

"To have such, you need a good leader, preferably an Elder, but a good strong older stallion will do."

"We had a very old one there, my TWH friend. But he was so depressed, worn out, and unhappy, and he never showed a bit of the Power she wields."

"I do not understand why not," Equinox dipped his head. "He could not have been

more worn out than T'Pal was. Besides, his mold is not as old as hers. Perhaps, he was not as old as he appeared. Look at us. Our run is long, and I'm younger than you, but I'd bet you're not much older than I am."

"You may be right. But we never had an Elder or Awakenings at my old home. We had no leader and we older models and reject repaint projects sat on the top shelf near the ceiling, and did not speak to the pretty new show horses on the bottom shelves. They scorned us, and we hated them." **Marie J. S. Phillips**

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"Ah, your stable was riddled with strife. That explains a lot, but had you a true Elder, I think it would have been different."

"Maybe," Pleistocene muttered, and before he said another word, T'Pal's voice rang out in a joyous neigh.

"Let this Awakening begin!"

"Come on! This is the most fun you will ever have anywhere." Equinox shoved Pleistocene with a head, before leaping from the shelf to the floor. Pleistocene danced gingerly in place, then gently jumped to the floor. It felt fantastic to move and gallop like a real horse.

In the coming weeks, Pleistocene realized Equinox spoke the truth. The Awakenings filled his world with joy, and as time passed, horses arrived, some receiving paint jobs, others shimmering in perfect original finish condition. All stood proud before the owner's camera, earning show photos, yet his turn never came. His anger rekindled, and he took the other's good-natured teasing as scorn. He hated the Andalusians, abhorred the little Clydesdale foal and his ribbons, speaking only to Equinox. Wisely he kept quiet during Awakenings so as not to anger the powerful Elder, but his old feelings returned.

One evening, as the sun sank in the western sky, slanting orange beams on the wall, the owner walked up to the attic. To Pleistocene's surprise, she grabbed him and a few other horses, then, went downstairs. In the living room, he met a new horse, a fiery bay Appaloosa who called himself TS Vesuvius. Pleistocene responded with a civil tongue, then spied the brushes and paints. Delight, then apprehension flashed through him, and he thought of his old home. He wished for a new paint job, but the thought of returning to his old home shot fear through every part of his body. He realized he loved this place, despite his feud with the Andalusians and other show horses. He waited, and days passed. TS Vesuvius received a halter one evening. Pleistocene ignored the plucky stallion, and felt impatience and anxiety as two mares received base coats but he felt not a single brush stroke.

One afternoon, rain and wind lashed the old windows, and the owner's mate occasionally peered out into the stormy weather. Finally, right before nightfall, the owner returned, complaining about the horrendous weather. She pulled two new horses out of a bag while chattering to her mate. Pleistocene ignored them, letting TS Vesuvius welcome them. The owner returned to the room and sat down, and to Pleistocene's shock, picked up a newcomer and prepped the model for painting. Pleistocene's innards knotted up with outrage. As the night progressed, the new Stud Spider turned liver chestnut under the owner's experienced hands, and in mere days, stood proud and happy with a new flaxen mane and tail that fluttered in the breeze of the overhead fan. TS Vesuvius, overjoyed as the new horse, dubbed TS Adirondack,

who became his half-brother, expressed his feelings in shining eyes. The owner and her mate retired for the night, shutting off the lights. The nightlight in the hall dimly illuminated the room, casting long shadows across the rug. Pleistocene's eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, and he noticed TS Adirondack looking at him.

"What are you staring at?" Pleistocene vented his anger in a scream.

"Sorry." TS Adirondack shook his head. "I am just checking out your color. 5-Gaiters do not come in that color any longer." **THE SECRET LIFE OF MODEL HORSES**

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"You have no right to gape at me! I may be old and dusty, but you don't have to rub it in by showing off that new coat and hair!" Pleistocene stamped a foot in rising wrath.

"I have half a mind to thud you with my heels and mess up that pretty coat!"

"Wait a minute," TS Vesuvius spoke up. "He hasn't done anything to deserve that."

"Oh, no? Here he is, brand new arrival and all prettied up, while I wait and wait, not knowing my own fate. Like you! I have never seen you upstairs so you are new, too!" Pleistocene screamed a challenge at the red stallion, not caring if he wasted precious energies.

"You obnoxious bigot!" TS Vesuvius rumbled, eyes flashing. "You don't belong here!"

"I do so! I'm not a bigot! All you Low Shewlvers are! Snobbish twits! Come on! I'll take you on! I have nothing to . . ."

"Pleistocene!" The sharp neigh cut through Pleistocene's red hot wrath. Startled, he looked up, and saw T'Pal standing on the knick knack shelf bridging the living room and hallway. The soft nightlight silhouetted her form, and her eyes glinted in the low light. Pleistocene's anger cooled.

"Pleistocene," T'Pal repeated, this time her voice a stern nicker. "Why do you attack the newcomers? They have not hurt you. This is abhorrent behavior, and must cease at once. Did I not tell you to learn tolerance?"

"Yes, Elder, but I have waited and waited. I want to be repainted. But I also don't want to go back home. Will that happen?"

"I cannot know the owner's full intent, but I am pretty sure you are here to stay. The owner gave you a name. Now, your friend TS Equinox is still waiting for his touch up, and TS Lunar Eclipse waited NINE years for his repainting, spending eight of those years covered in little white dots," T'Pal answered, her voice rising. "You have a bad attitude, and that is why many do not like you, Young One. Did you ever wonder why?"

"They are Low Shelvers." Pleistocene retorted, anger flaring, momentarily forgetting to whom he spoke. "The lucky ones in life. They get everything."

"Low Shelvers?" T'Pal retorted, and Pleistocene's anger drained at her sharp words. Her voice rumbled with unmistakable tightly controlled wrath. Her eyes scintillated with her furious exasperation. "I am sick of that derogatory term that holds NO meaning in this place. You are no worse, or no better than any other here. Lose the use of it immediately."

T'Pal's scathing words burned into Pleistocene's ears, and he cringed like a frightened foal. Humility filtered past his vanishing anger. To his relief, her voice softened as she continued.

"Your turn will come. When the owner decides what color and such is best for you,

she will work on you. The herd grows swiftly, and I am certain you will not be sent away, though many do come and go, returning to their homes a changed horses. You should never begrudge that which they have earned from the owner. You are not gathering dust now, are you?"

"No," Pleistocene choked out his reply.

"Of course you're not." T'Pal tossed her head. "Be patient. You will be repainted."

"Yes, Elder," Pleistocene wuffed, hanging his head. "I apologize."

"It is not me you should be apologizing to." T'Pal's eyes softened, and she returned her attention to the foal at her side.