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## A VERY BAD HORSE SHOW

“Walk, Polly, walk,” snarled the rider in a whispered voice. He snapped the reins harshly several times in an effort to slow the pretty Morgan mare to a walk. But the chestnut horse, upset and confused, continued to toss her head as she jiggled down the rail. The bouncy movement, a mix of a walk and a trot, threw the rider around in the saddle. Polly’s ears were pinned back and she swished her tail constantly. It was not a pleasant sight.

The rider grew more and more annoyed at his horse. His body became tense as he once again pulled back on the reins. Polly was afraid. She could feel her rider’s anger and grew more anxious. The heavy-handed rider was hurting the frightened mare’s mouth. “I said walk!” he whispered to his horse in a spiteful voice. He didn’t want anybody to hear him, especially the judge.

While horse and rider fought, the judge, standing in center ring, carefully watched them. Noting the horse’s uneasiness, the judge wrote something on his notepad and then looked elsewhere.

“Lope, all lope,” came the order over the loudspeakers.

Fifteen Morgan Horses all decked out in fancy western show attire, with silver oozing from every part of their saddles and bridles, calmly broke into a relaxed, slow lope, the western version of a canter.

The sixteenth horse, Polly, jumped up with her front end and landed hard as she stumbled into a lope. Her head flew high into the air, mouth gaping open as her rider jerked hard on the bit. He had tightened the reins so much that the poor mare was forced to open her mouth to try and get away from the pain. She swung her tail violently as she cantered sideways down the rail. The judge, who had been watching a lovely bay mare in front of Polly, now focused his attention on the chestnut mare.

Polly was a very pretty horse with a long, flowing mane and tail, both colored light brown with streaks of red. Her body was a little darker, which made her left hind sock, shaped like a small triangle, and white hoof stand out. She had a big, bold star on her forehead and a little white snip of hair and pink skin between her nostrils. Her fancy western saddle had silver on every flat surface, while the bridle reins were wrapped in the shiny metal. The headstall, the portion of the bridle that ran along the side of Polly’s head, had so much silver on it that it was hard to see any leather under-

neath. The bit, too, was incredibly ornate, with a fancy floral design. Unfortunately, the part of the bit that ran through Polly's mouth, the section nobody could see, was an extremely severe device. With a little pressure on the reins, it could cause a lot of pain. Polly knew this all too well as she tossed her head, desperately trying to get away from the discomfort. The judge watched Polly struggle with her rider, but he only needed a moment to determine the mare wouldn't place in his ring. He quickly turned to watch another horse.

The horses loped twice around the ring while the judge carefully observed them. Then, satisfied that he had seen enough, he called for a walk. Polly once again refused to walk, instead prancing down the rail. "Kevin! Make her walk!" commanded a middle-aged man standing on the outside of the ring.

"I'm trying, Jim!" snapped the rider in reply. "She won't listen to me."

"Line up in center ring," ordered a voice over the loudspeakers. Kevin, Polly's rider, had thought the command would never come. He hated riding the unruly mare and was glad the class was over.

Polly jiggled into the middle of the ring and came to a stop between two other mares. The other horses calmly waited as the judge slowly made his way down the line. Polly, however, refused to stand still. She pawed at the ground, swished her tail,