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A Careless Master

Mary Graham Bonner

There was a horse who was very thirsty.

He had been working hard all morning, going from street to street while his master delivered parcels. But his master had forgotten all about water, and the horse couldn't make him understand. His tongue grew dry. He opened his mouth and held it that way, hoping for rain — but the rain wasn't coming. The drops were hanging in the mist but wouldn't fall.

A fairy called Princess Joy happened to be hovering nearby, wrapped in a long dress the color of fog.

"Thirsty," she murmured, looking at the horse. "Why doesn't your master give you something? You're such a good horse. You go wherever he tells you, and cheerfully. You let the children climb on you. Can't he give you a drink?"

"He's forgotten," said the horse. "He isn't cruel. He's just forgotten."

"Then we'll remind him," said the fairy.

She knew that the horse's master and the iceman who worked the same street did not get along — which is exactly the sort of thing a fairy notices. The iceman came trundling his cart along, and the fairy, very gently, saw to it that the cart paused in just the right spot.

"Walk up a little," she whispered to the horse.

The horse stepped forward and found a great block of ice right at nose level. He pressed his dry tongue against it and drank and drank as the ice melted under the warmth of his breath.

Just then both men came out of their respective houses at the same moment. They looked at the horse, licking busily at the half-gone block of ice.



"You owe me for that piece," said the iceman flatly. "I can't sell it now. What kind of man forgets to water his horse?"

The master flushed. "I forgot," he admitted. "I'm sorry. I'll pay you for the ice."

"First sensible thing you've said to me in years," said the iceman. "Keep it up."

They shook hands — awkwardly at first, then more warmly. And the master never forgot again.

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