

# The Problem with Ponies

by W.M. Akers



"I don't like ponies!" said Stacey.

"Too bad," said Jane. "It's my house."

Stacey looked at her friend. Jane was wearing a hat with a pony on it. Her shoes had ponies on them. So did her shirt, and her bracelet, and her pants. She was even wearing a ponytail. On the walls of her bedroom were posters of ponies. Her notebook was covered in pictures of ponies. All of her stuffed animals were ponies, except for one that was just a horse. She was a pony girl.

Stacey was not a pony girl. She thought horses were just okay. Sometimes, she liked to play Jane's games. They would make up names for different ponies. Names like Windcatcher, or Starfire. Sometimes, they would pretend to be ponies. They would run around and make pony noises and play pony games. Other times, they would pretend to ride ponies.

"Whee!" Jane would shout. "I'm riding a pony!"

After a while, though, Stacey would get tired of ponies. There were so many other games to

play. They could play school. They could play house. They could even play pirates. But whenever her mother took her to Jane's house, it was only ponies. All the time.

Today, Stacey said no.

"I don't care," she said. "I want to play something different."

"Like what?" said Jane.

"What about pirates?"

"Pirates is a game for boys."

"Then what about house?"

"House is boring," said Jane. "You know what isn't boring?"

"What?" said Stacey.

"Ponies."

Stacey sat down. She dug her fingers into the dirt, and pulled up a thick clump of grass. She tried to think of a way to make them both happy.

"I have an idea," said Jane.

"What?" said Stacey.

"We could play unicorns."

"Unicorns are the same as ponies!"

"They are not," said Jane. "Ponies don't have a horn. Unicorns have one horn."

Stacey thought that Jane was difficult. That's what Stacey's mother said whenever she had to get her way, no matter what.

"What we need," said Stacey, "is a compromise."

"What's that?" said Jane.

"A compromise is where you get a little of what you want, and I get a little of what I want. And then we're both happy."

Jane did not like the sound of this.

"I promise it will work," said Stacey.

"Okaaaaaaaaaay," said Jane. "What is your idea for this compromise?"

"We play school," said Stacey. She saw Jane start to get mad. "But it isn't an ordinary school!"

"Why not?"

"It's pony school."

This made Jane smile.

"Am I a pony?" asked Jane.

"Yes."

"And you're a teacher?"

"Yes."

"But not a pony?"

"I'm not a pony."

Jane thought for a minute. She thought hard. Finally, she stood up. She made her pony face.

"Are we ready to begin the lesson?" asked Stacey.

"Whinney!" said Jane. They played pony school all day.

# Looking for a Bear

by W.M. Akers



"I want to see the bears!"

"I don't care. I want to see the whales first."

"But bears are so much better."

"Yeah, if you're seven. I'm ten now. I like whales."

"So what? I want to see the bears."

"I don't care! Coming to the museum was my idea, and we're seeing the whales first."

"Bears!"

"Whales!"

"Bears!"

"Whales!"

"Mommmmm! Graham is being mean!" shouted Sarah. Everyone in the main lobby of the Museum of Natural History turned to look at her. Mom turned around with an embarrassed look on her face—the one that she called mortified.

"What did he do?" whispered Mom.

"He said that bears are for little kids, and that we have to see the whales first."

"We're going to see everything in the museum. We have all afternoon."

"But I want to start with the *bears*."

"Then you should have asked nicely instead of shouting. Graham, take us to the whales."

Sarah's heart sank. Graham didn't even have to say anything. The look he gave her was bad enough. He was smiling ear to ear like one of the chimpanzees in the Africa exhibit. She dragged her feet all the way to Ocean Life. She knew she shouldn't have shouted, but Graham made her so angry. And the simple fact was, they didn't have all afternoon. It was 3:00 PM now, and the museum closed at 5:15 PM. Sarah had seen the sign. She had read her mother's watch. She knew there was not much time left for bears.

Ever since they started learning about them the year before at school, Sarah had had bears on the brain. She had paid extra close attention during that unit and now knew all sorts of facts about bears. Grizzly bears were some of the biggest in the world, and they were her favorite.

"Did you know," she asked her mother, "that grizzly bears can get as big as 850 pounds?"

"I did, Sarah. You mentioned that several times in the car."

"Well, did you know they can run 35 miles an hour?"

"Yes, I did."

"That's speeding in some places!" said Sarah, but Mom didn't seem to care.

"Whales are way bigger than bears," said Graham. "That means they're better."

"Yeah, but whales live in the ocean."

"So what's wrong with the ocean?"

"It means they're wet all the time. And they smell like fish."

"You smell like fish!" Graham cracked up. Clearly, he thought he was very clever.

"How big are whales?" asked Sarah.

"What do you mean?"

"Grizzly bears weigh 850 pounds. How much do whales weigh?"

"Uh...I don't know. A whole lot."

Sarah scoffed. Graham didn't even know anything about whales. He just wanted to make sure she was unhappy. She had been looking forward to this trip for months. She read about the museum online, about all the dioramas that were built in the 1940s. They were a very old-fashioned kind of exhibit, but they

looked beautiful in the pictures. It was as close as she could get to a real bear, and she had stayed up all the night before thinking about it. And now Graham was ruining the fun.

The Ocean Life exhibit was dark and quiet. Spooky sounds filtered down from the speakers which were supposed to make them feel like they were underwater. Sarah didn't feel underwater. She just felt grumpy.

"Oh look," she said. "A whale."

"That's a humpback whale," said Graham, doing his best to show off.

"No, it's not. It's a beluga whale. Read the sign."

The model of the beluga was one of the ugliest animals she had ever seen. It had a smooshed-up face and a sad grey color, and it looked like it definitely smelled like fish.

"Well I think it's so good that I'm going to stand here and appreciate it," said Graham. "For a while."

"Mom-can I please just go look at the bears by myself?" asked Sarah.

"No," said Mom. "You have to stay in this room."

As Graham pretended to be interested in the whale, Sarah watched the seconds tick by on her mother's watch. Finally, she couldn't take the beluga any longer. She stomped away, her arms swinging at her side, looking desperately for something in the Ocean Life exhibit that wasn't ugly, boring, or stinky. And then, from across the room, she saw it.

It was a diorama of Alaskan seals swimming just below a sheet of ice. Above them, peering hungrily into the water was a polar bear, looking so real that Sarah flinched when she saw it. It had snow-white fur, a wet-looking, black nose, and claws as sharp as razor blades. As Sarah pressed her face up against the glass to look at it, she forgot about the whales behind her. The polar bear was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Use the article "Looking for a Bear" to answer questions 1 to 3.**

**1.** What does Sarah want to see first at the museum?

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**2.** What does Graham want to see first at the museum?

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**3.** Sarah is upset with Graham. Support this statement with information from the story.

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**Use the article "The Problem with Ponies" to answer questions 4 to 8.**

**4.** What kind of games does Jane want to play?

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**5.** What kind of games does Stacey want to play?

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**6.** Stacey does not want to play the same kind of game as Jane. She says they need a compromise. What is a compromise?

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**7.** What compromise do Stacey and Jane make? Support your answer with information from the story.

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**8.** What effect does their compromise have on how they get along with each other? Support your answer with information from the story.

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**Use the articles "The Problem with Ponies" and "Looking for a Bear" to answer question 9.**

**9.** Compare how Sarah and Graham get along with how Stacey and Jane get along. Support your answer with information from both stories.

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Use the article "Looking for a Bear" to answer question 10.

**10.** What is a compromise that might have helped Sarah and Graham get along better? Support your answer with information from both stories.

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