



The Girl and the Friendly Mule

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Hannah lived on a farm with rolling green fields and a big red barn. She was nine years old, with warm light-brown skin and curly dark-brown hair in two puffy pigtails. One pigtail had a blue ribbon, and her round face had freckles across her nose. She loved helping with the animals, wearing her faded red overalls and yellow shirt. Every morning, she fed the chickens and collected eggs with a bright, gap-toothed smile.



One sunny afternoon, Hannah skipped toward the barn and saw a large, dusty grey-brown mule standing quietly in the shade. His name was Jasper, and he had long ears with dark tips and a lighter grey muzzle. He wore a worn brown leather halter with a small brass name plate that said 'Jasper.' His gentle dark-brown eyes looked tired, but they softened when Hannah came near. 'Hello, Jasper,' she whispered, and he flicked his long ears toward her.



Jasper was very old and had worked on the farm for many years. The farmer, a tall man with a thick grey moustache and a straw hat, had relied on him to pull plows and carry heavy loads. Now Jasper's back was slightly lowered, and his knees were knobby. He stood by the fence, swishing his wispy tail. Hannah noticed faded scars on his shoulders from years of harness work. 'You've done so much,' she said softly.



Hannah decided to make friends with Jasper. She found a soft brush in the barn and gently brushed his dusty coat until it shone. Jasper stood very still, and his tired eyes closed with contentment. 'That feels nice, doesn't it?' Hannah said. She took a shiny red apple from her pocket and held it out. Jasper nuzzled her hand and crunched the apple happily. From that day on, they were best friends.



Every day after school, Hannah visited Jasper. She brought him apples and brushed his shaggy forelock. She talked to him about her day, and Jasper listened with his long ears pricked forward. Sometimes he nuzzled her shoulder as if to say thank you. Hannah's small leather work gloves peeked out of her pocket as she worked. She loved the calm, loyal mule, and he loved her gentle kindness.



One morning, Hannah heard the farmer talking to Jasper in the barn. 'You've been a good worker, old friend,' the farmer said, patting Jasper's neck. 'But you're too old to work now. I think it's time for you to rest.' Hannah peeked around the corner, her large brown eyes wide. She felt a lump in her throat. What would happen to Jasper now that he couldn't work anymore?



Hannah ran to the farmer. 'What will happen to Jasper?' she asked, her voice trembling. The farmer smiled kindly, his hazel eyes warm. 'Don't worry, Hannah. He can stay here, but he can't work anymore. He'll need a comfortable place to rest.' He rubbed his grey moustache. Hannah thought hard. Then her face lit up. 'I have an idea!' she said. 'I can make a cozy retirement home for him!'



Hannah chose a quiet corner of the barn, away from the drafts. She swept the floor clean and spread soft, golden hay for Jasper to lie on. She found an old wooden bucket and filled it with fresh, cool water. She hung a rope with a soft cloth for Jasper to rub against. The farmer helped her carry fresh hay and water. 'This will be perfect,' Hannah said, looking around with satisfaction.



When Jasper saw his new corner, he walked over slowly. He sniffed the soft hay and took a long drink of water. Then he turned to Hannah and nuzzled her hand gently. His dark-brown eyes seemed to say, 'Thank you.' Hannah hugged his neck. 'You deserve this, Jasper,' she whispered. 'You worked hard for so many years, and now it's your turn to rest.' The mule let out a soft, happy sigh.



From that day on, Jasper enjoyed his happy retirement. Hannah visited him every morning and every evening. She brought him apples and brushed his coat until it gleamed. Sometimes she read him stories while he chewed his hay. The farmer often stopped by to pat Jasper and thank him for his years of service. The barn corner became the coziest spot on the whole farm.



Hannah learned an important lesson. Loyal helpers like Jasper deserve our thanks and care. She realized that kindness and friendship matter more than anything. The farmer agreed. 'You have a good heart, Hannah,' he said. 'Taking care of Jasper is the right thing to do.' Hannah smiled her gap-toothed smile. She was proud to give Jasper the happy retirement he had earned.



One chilly evening, Hannah brought Jasper a warm blanket. She draped it over his back and tucked it around his knobby knees. 'There you go, old friend,' she said. Jasper nickered softly and leaned his head against her shoulder. The farmer watched from the barn door, his red handkerchief in his pocket. 'You've made him very happy,' he told Hannah. 'And he's lucky to have you.'



As the sun set, Hannah sat beside Jasper in the soft hay. She told him about her day at school, and he listened with his long ears relaxed. The barn was quiet and peaceful. Hannah felt warm inside. She knew that friendship and kindness made the world a better place. Jasper closed his eyes, content and safe in his cozy retirement home.



The farmer came over and sat on a hay bale. 'Jasper worked hard for this farm for many years,' he said. 'He carried heavy loads and never complained. Now it's our turn to take care of him.' Hannah nodded. 'He's my best friend,' she said. The farmer smiled. 'And you're his. That's what friendship is all about.' They watched the stars come out through the barn window.



Hannah gave Jasper a final apple and a gentle pat. 'Goodnight, Jasper,' she said. 'Sleep well.' Jasper nuzzled her hand and settled into the soft hay. As Hannah walked back to the house, she felt happy. She knew that every loyal helper deserves appreciation, and that kindness makes a big difference. The farm was a better place because of a girl and her friendly mule.



And so, Hannah and Jasper remained best friends. Every day, Hannah made sure Jasper was comfortable and loved. The farmer often said that Hannah's kindness was the best thing on the farm. Jasper lived out his days in peace, knowing he was appreciated. The story of the girl and the friendly mule reminds us all that loyalty deserves thanks and that friendship is a treasure.