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## Searching for Color

My hands shook excitedly. I finally have a horse; And not just any horse, but an American Paint Horse. But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let's go back to earlier this week.

I had been waiting eagerly for two long hours on this dreadful car ride. Hopefully, this time, the scrolling through hundreds of ads and the traveling of hundreds of miles to look at different horses to buy will finally pay off. Ever since owning my first paint, I had fallen in love with the breeds disposition and personality, so I hoped to find some color in my new horse. We bumped down the dusty road in Eustus, Florida in my moms old white Chevy suburban. Everyone was admiring the lush green pastures that layed out in a quilt before us on each side of the road. Except for me that is. My eyes were locked on the six stall wood barn that lay just ahead; The barn that could hold my future horse in it. As we pulled up to the barn, I eagerly got out of the car and went over to the door where my mom was, as a short woman with sandy, dirty blonde hair greeted us and told us to go ahead up to the barn. She told us she would be there in a minute after she finished her lesson and that Tee Cee was in the third stall on the right. My mom, my sister Kaycie, my trainer Cathy, my Aunt Shelly, my friends Savannah, Chelsea and I all waddled stiffly up to the barn, me leading the line. As I walked in, I tried to glance through the cracks in the boards of each stall looking eagerly at the horses that were covered in thick blankets and hoods. Each stall had a bronze nameplate on it with each horses name delicately scribbled across it in bold, long letters. As we reached the last stall on the right, I checked the nameplate just to be sure we were at the right stall and sure enough, it had the name Major Tee Cee written boldly on it. I quickly undid the bolt and with a reluctant squeak the door opened to reveal a big stall, with a blanket of

shavings covering the black mats. And standing with his butt to us, munching hay happily, was Tee Cee.

I couldn't see much of him except for that he had two stockings and a chestnut tail because he was covered in a thick maroon blanket and hood. He turned his head toward us and peered at us with two curious blue eyes. His delicate sorrel ears were pricked forward as he ambled happily over to us. "Hey buddy," I crooned as his baby pink nose explored my hands; hoping for a treat. Then he did something that I didn't expect. His pink lips parted to reveal a slobbery pink tongue that greedily licked from my hand to my elbow. I laughed at him as he discovered that I didn't have anything to eat and moved on to his other admirers. The owner of the barn and trainer of Tee Cee reappeared with a faded blue halter and lead rope in hand. She greeted us once more while telling us her name. She told me to halter him and bring him to the cross-ties and I eagerly did as I was told. Tee Cee was bigger than I had expected. He was about sixteen hands but that's not why I thought he was big. He was big because of his sheer mass! I was so used to the horse that I leased, a 15.2 hand, sleek, lean, and elegant bay quarter horse mare, that this was a whole different world! Yet, even though I was shocked, I was amazed. His trainer quickly unsnapped the blankets and I shuffled impatiently wanting to see what he looked like. As she slid the blanket off, it revealed a slick chestnut coat that was spotted with large white spots. Even though it was January his coat still gleamed and was as slick as an ice cube. I stared in awe as she took off the hood. He had a bald face with one and a half blue eyes. The light that shone above him in the aisle swayed silently in the wind, making the dapples that flecked his deep red coat dance. He stared at us curiously then bobbed his head as if to say, "Are we just going to stand here all day or what?"

His trainer told me to grab some brushes and start grooming him. I happily agreed to and got to work. After I was done, she flicked a light blue saddle pad on his broad back and I went to get my saddle. As I walked to the car I remembered not to get my hopes up. I had already been through failed attempts to buy a horse twice since my search began after my old four year old paint gelding had to be

put down because of colic. I recuperated, grabbed my english saddle and girth, then headed back up to the barn where Tee Cee watched me impatiently. We saddled him up and headed out to the arena. His trainer got on him first to warm him up and show me the basic maneuvers of him. He was spur stopped trained, so I payed close attention since I had never ridden like that before but have read and heard of it many times. Before I knew it, she was getting off and it was my turn to get on. I readjusted my stirrups then mounted easily. As my leg slid over his side. He was even wider then I expected! Even though I was 5'7 and only thirteen years old and still growing, I still had a good three inches of girth beneath my foot. I asked him to walk and after a couple of rounds to get used to him, I kicked him up to a trot. To my surprise he was as bouncy as a spring board because he had such a big stride! I was so used to my mare who had one of the smoothest trots I've ever felt, that I had to readjust my whole body to be able to sit to his trot. I rode around happily, with his trainer coaching me all the way. After getting off, I stroked him diligently telling him what a good boy he was. Once again he licked my hand sending me into a couple of giggles. I walked him over to where the rest of the group was and grinned happily. We were the perfect match. "You looked good up there!" My mom said. I told her thanks and then brought Tee Cee back up to the barn. I quickly untacked him. He was coated with a sheen of sweat so I took him over to the cross ties and gave him a quick rinse. After securing a hunter green cooler on him and putting him back into his stall, where he happily dug his face into the pad of waiting alfalfa, I walked back up to where everyone was standing. My mom pulled me aside and asked "So what do you think?" "I LOVE him!" I replied happily. She smiled and agreed. She walked back over to his trainer so that she could get the owners number to discuss some more details.

It seemed as if he was already mine. But then I remembered. There was still one looming obligation he had yet to pass- the pre-purchase exam. The last two horses we fell in love with all had hock, hoof, or knee problems. I tried to calm the butterflies that fluttered in my stomach at the thought of yet again losing another horse. As the day came to an end, we said our goodbyes to his trainer and Tee Cee. The vet check was scheduled for that Wednesday. That was two whole days! How was I

supposed to endure that much waiting?

The next two days went slower than molasses. I spent the day at school wondering if he would pass his exam, thinking of possible outcomes, and above all, worrying that he wouldn't. When the day finally rolled around, I was literally bouncing off the walls to get back to Tee Cee. The drive there seemed even slower than the past two days. Was that even possible? When we finally bumped up the road to the barn, everyone piled out once again. I was to ride him western today and after that the vet was coming. We greeted his trainer and once again I walked up the barn to his stall. I eagerly opened his door to see him peering happily at me. As I petted him he did his signature lick as a greeting, and whispered my hello's. Then tacked him up and rode again. After another lesson, untacking him, and putting him away, we waited for the vet and farrier to come. We were planning to do x-rays on all four legs and the farrier had to pull his shoes off for it. When the vet finally arrived, she went through a very thorough exam. About halfway through, my trainer asked if we could go to a tack shop so that we could leave my mom alone to make the decision. After a very interesting trip to the tack shop, which is another story for another time, we arrived back at the barn to see her lunging Tee Cee. He bucked a couple of times and I worried that it may have been out of pain from something the vet had done. Not a good sign. In the end, it turned out that he was just frisky. I got out of the car and my mom gave me the update. He had passed everything with flying colors. Now the only thing left to do was the x-rays. Tee Cee stood patiently, half asleep, as the vet maneuvered around him taking them. As she uploaded them onto her computer, I held my breath. This could make it or break it I thought. As the images blinked up on the screen, her experienced eyes scanned them for flaws. As she turned to us she said, "Looks about as clean as it could be." I broke out into a smile. This was it. He was mine! As my mom made the transaction I got to know my new horse. It was about 6:00 by the time we loaded him up into the trailer and made our way home. After calling almost everyone I knew, I needed time to soak it in. My hands shook excitedly. I finally have a horse; And not just any horse, but an American Paint Horse.