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Once upon a time there was a horse called Ben. A Shire horse actually. A very large Shire horse. That's why people called him Big Ben.

He was not to be confused with the world famous Big Ben in London, for he was not a clock, nor did he chime. He was, when all is said and done, a horse, and he lived in Wiltshire, not London, in the field next door to Little Sammy's house. He was an intelligent beast, however, and very knowledgeable despite his lack of a formal education, and very well mannered.

Everyone in the parish agreed Ben was a handsome animal with his very dark brown coat, russet nose with a pure white blaze down the middle of it, his jet black mane and tail, and white "socks" on three of his very hairy ankles. Occasionally Ben stamped one of his back hooves to shake off the flies that tried to land on him, and when he did, people for some distance around could feel the ground shake.

Nevertheless, Ben was as gentle and mild as a lamb.

But poor Ben had no shelter so he had to live outside in the cold and the rain and snow, and when someone suggested to the farmer who owned him that he should build Ben a simple lean-to, he replied that Big Ben was so used to living out of doors he probably wouldn't go into a shelter anyway, so it wasn't worth the trouble and the expense. "He's got broad shoulders," the farmer said. "He's as tough as old boots," which was probably true.