



# The Bride and Her Groom

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After a six year respite, my daughter, Jamie, has returned to horses. But not in the life consuming, "I'm gonna buy eighty acres, get fifteen horses, and show every week," sort of way. Not yet.

For the time being, Jamie is content to board out her Morgan, Eddie, and show when she can. The big difference between now and her teenage years is that now she has a job, a house, and a husband. But I don't think the additional responsibilities will be a problem. Her husband is up to it.

Marc is a novice, of course. If he is going to help Jamie with Eddie, he will have to be taught everything. But that's what Jamie wants. She wants to be able to mold her helper into her version of perfection. The last thing she wants is to argue with another horseperson about how to take care of Eddie – and all future horses. Not that I'm suggesting horsepeople ever bicker about such things. No way.

Marc is a tinkerer. A genius in the practical arts. He likes cars and machines and buildings. He loves repairing them and tearing them apart and seeing how they work by looking at their innards. And he is constantly on the go. He's sort of a high octane, lit up tinkerer.

With Jamie's standards and Marc's talent, their potential as a horse couple is unlimited. Someday they just might own 'em all. But first, Jamie must teach Marc the basics.

The first lesson involves a simple piece of equipment called a halter. One of the fundamental realities of horse maintenance is that the animal often needs to be moved from place to place. From the stall to the cross ties, from the cross ties to the pasture, from the neighbor's vegetable garden back to the pasture, and so on. Since a horse cannot be moved by remote control (yet), he needs to be led. Like a husband or a

boyfriend in a department store.

Jamie decides to give Marc a demonstration on how to apply the halter. She slips the device over Eddie's head in that single, graceful motion I've never quite understood. It's not one of those things you can break down into steps and figure out. It's more like an art. Experienced horsepeople are really good at it.

Jamie removes the halter as smoothly as she put it on and hands it to Marc.

"Here, you try."

There is something about halters that horsepeople do not understand. A halter is a living entity and it has the ability to alter its shape the moment a non-horseperson touches it. A simple, functional piece of equipment in Jamie's hands becomes a tangled mass of nylon and buckles in Marc's.

But in the spirit of every trial and error practitioner since God created the world, Marc went ahead and gave it a shot. Ten minutes later, Eddie looks like a three-year old boy who attempted to put his shirt on in the dark. The halter is on. It's latched. But there's something not quite right. It could be inside out. Or upside down. Or twisted cross ways. Who's to say?

"There," Marc says and steps back to admire his work.

Jamie undoes the halter, flips it around a couple of times and slips it back over Eddie's head.

"No, like that," she says.

The orientation advances to the next phase as Jamie explains the intricacies of leading a horse on foot. Again, it looks simple. Again, it's not.

"Lead from the left side, slightly ahead of the horse. Place your right hand near the latch and your left hand near the end of the rope. Remember not to wrap the lead rope around your hand. Then, you go."

Jamie clicks her tongue and the pair stroll toward the end of the barn. That's the real bride and groom, I keep myself from saying. I half expect a dressage judge to appear at the

end of the aisle to conduct the ceremony.

Jamie and Eddie swing around and saunter back to Marc. "Okay, honey, lead him out to the pasture. Don't let him pull you and don't let him rush you." She's speaking to Marc.

Marc positions himself and his hands perfectly. He glances at Eddie and makes the clicking noise. The pair begin moving together like experienced dance partners. But after a couple of steps, Marc's partner begins to angle toward him. The space between their bodies begins to close. Marc compensates to keep Eddie from stepping on his foot. The two exit the barn sort of diagonally.

Half way to the paddock, Eddie's leaning becomes too pronounced for Marc to ignore. He takes action:

"Hey..."

Eddie cranes his head toward Marc and bobs up and down:

"Hey!"

Now the two are actually heading away from the pasture gate:

"Hey ... hey ... hey!"

And they begin a twisted journey to random locations around the grounds. They end up back at the barn door. Eddie is ready for supper.

Jamie snatches the lead line and gives Eddie a solid yank. "HEY!" she says. And she leads Eddie straight to the pasture.

I watch until I'm sure Jamie is out of sight.

"You did pretty good today, Marc."

"I did?"

"Yes, you did. You made it through two whole lessons without any fractures or lacerations. And you're still married. That's success."

"Maybe so."

I lower my voice and look Marc in the eye:

"She's going to want at least twenty acres. That's good news for you."

"Why's that?"

"Because that's more than enough room for two pole barns and..." I look around to see if anyone is listening, "a small junkyard."

"Honey!" (he's talking to Jamie), "Would you like to show me how to mix Eddie's grain next?"

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