

Hooked on Horses



Chapter Six by Kay Hively

Every day Suzanne rode into town to look for Tom Bass. He was not like her other instructors, but she liked the little man who was training her to win a ribbon.

On the first day of lessons, he taught Suzanne how to sit in the saddle and how to hold the reins. He scolded her for gripping the reins too tight. He said to let Babe have freedom.

Suzanne listened carefully when Mr. Bass told her what to do to make Babe canter and rack and trot sideways. It was hard work, but Suzanne loved taking lessons.

Mr. Bass did not talk very much. Mostly he talked to Babe. He said the best way to train a horse was to carry on some “horse talk.”

Suzanne worked hard, but at times she became frustrated. Once, in her frustration, she jerked on the reins and yelled at Babe.

That was a big mistake.

Tom Bass ordered her off the horse. He told her if she ever raised her voice to Babe again, she was never to come back to his stables.

Although he was a small man, not much bigger than Suzanne herself, Tom Bass seemed ten feet tall when he lashed out at Suzanne.

Tom Bass ranted at Suzanne, saying that no one should ever take a whip or a club to a horse and no one should ever jerk hard on the reins. A horse needed freedom, he said. No horse could be a champion if he didn't have freedom.

Knowing she had disappointed Mr. Bass, Suzanne felt like crying as she let the little man's hot words fly around her. Then Suzanne

apologized and promised never to jerk the reins or raise her voice again.

“Will you give that horse freedom?” Tom Bass demanded.

Suzanne promised to give Babe complete freedom.

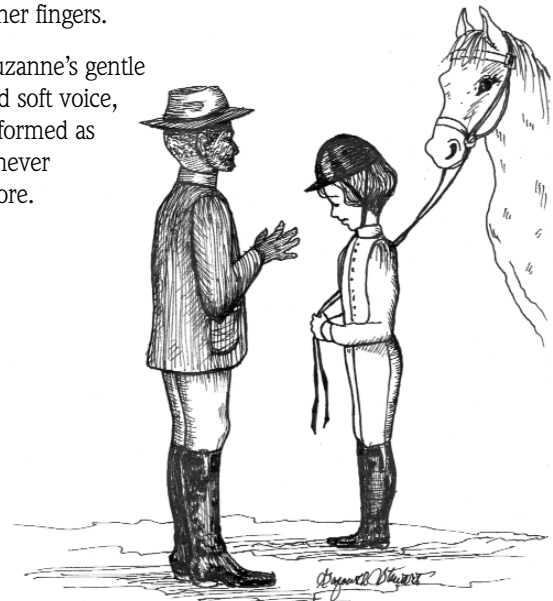
Then, as quickly as he had become angry, Tom Bass cupped his hands and boosted Suzanne back into the saddle. Gently he reached up, took the reins from her hands and showed her how they should be held.

He told her to let the reins simply lay between her fingers. Hold the reins like you would hold a blue ribbon, he said.

Suzanne took the reins and gripped them as gently as she would a horse show ribbon. Tom Bass nodded his approval. Then, without a word, he turned and started toward the barn. As he walked away, Suzanne could hear him mutter the word “freedom” over and over.

On their way home, Suzanne spoke encouragement to Babe as they practiced all the gaits that would be expected of them in the show. As Mr. Bass had shown her, she let the reins lap gently through her fingers.

Under Suzanne's gentle touch and soft voice, Babe performed as she had never done before.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- A. What did Suzanne do that made Tom Bass angry? How did she react when he scolded her? Do you think she acted in the proper manner?
- B. Tom Bass talked more to Babe than to Suzanne. What did he call his conversation with Babe? Tom Bass told Suzanne to treat the reins like they were what? Did she follow his advice?

Show Me Standards Correlations – G1:5; G2:3; G3:6; CA2

Next Week: Chapter Seven – The Story of a Slave