

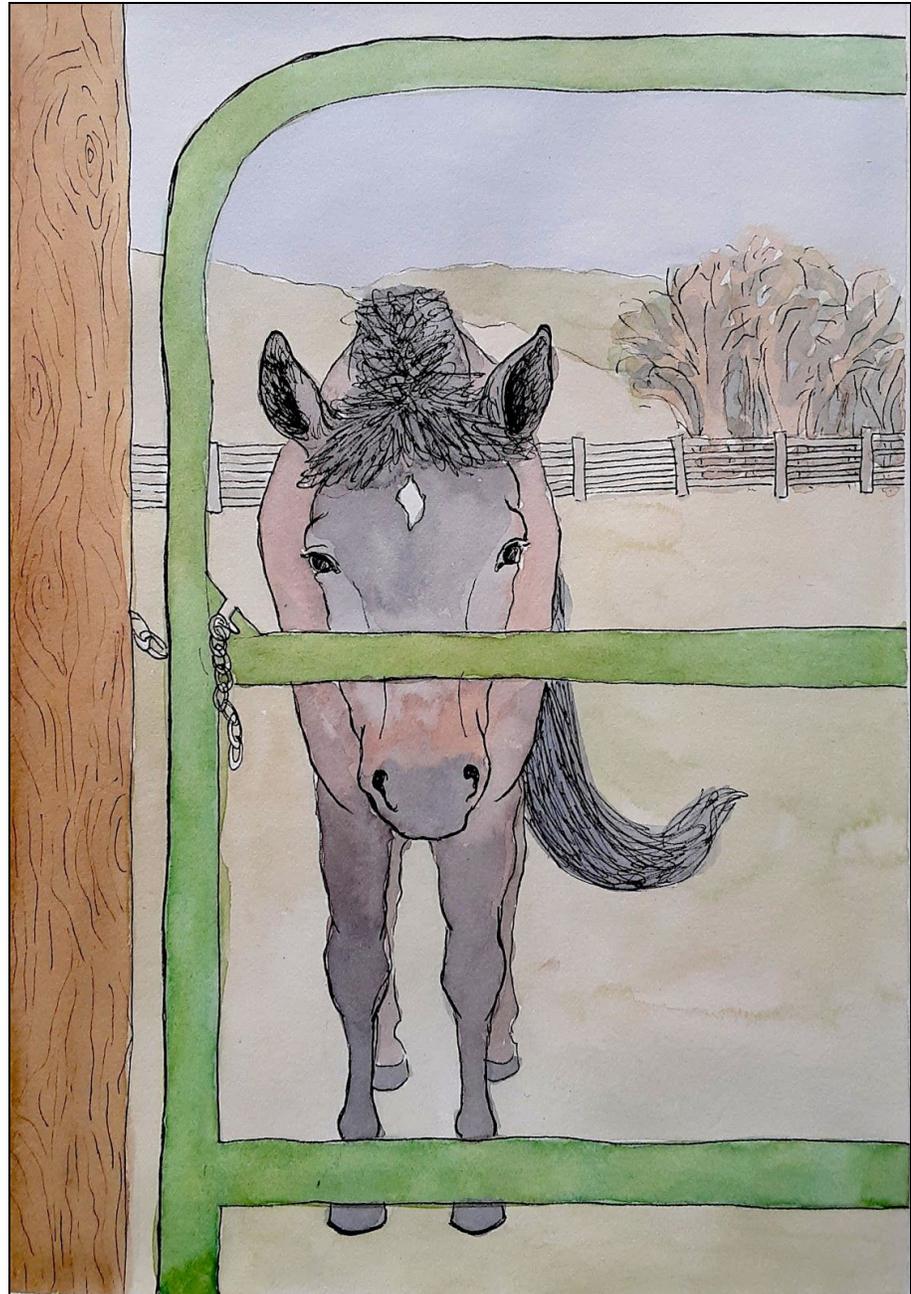
Chapter 1

The Party

Wall*E stood by his gate, waiting for the sun to go down. He could hear Annie's car pulling out of the driveway, and Steve, the ranch manager, backing his tractor into the shed for the night. It was a beautiful spring evening, the last bit of warmth from the sun fading away into a chilly night. *A perfect night for a party!* thought Wall*E.

The horses were due for some fun. All winter they had been focused on staying warm and eating as much hay as they could. And now with Coronavirus, and all the programming closed for a few weeks, the horses were bored. The tender shoots of green grass and the milder March weather made them restless and ready for an adventure.

Okay, all clear. Wall*E stuck his head through the bars in the gate, grabbed the chain in his teeth and set himself free. *Now for the others.* He trotted down the aisle way to let Willy out. "Party tonight, Willy!" "Is there food involved? Because if not... I'm not sure I want to go." "Of course there's food involved." Wall*E rolled his eyes. Then he let out Paddy and Myles. Paddy--a known escape artist--has a special clip



on his pasture, so they had to use the secret little gate into Willy's pasture to get out. Forest and Brushy were also eager to join in the celebrations.

"A party? Great! Maybe we should start up the Bachelor Band again." Brushy went to grab his guitar, which he kept tucked in the gap between the roof and the wall of his shed. Wall*E grabbed his bass, and Forest, the drummer, trotted over to the feed room to get his feed-bucket drum kit.



Buttons looked up from her grazing. *What are those rowdy boys up to now?* She thought. And went back to grazing.

"Hey Berry, Sparks! Party tonight," called Wall*E.

"Party? Ooo, Buttons let's go! Please!"

Berry began prancing around the pasture, and Sparks and Finn stood eagerly by the gate. As Wall*E opened their gate, they paused to check in with Buttons. Would she let them go?

With her ears pinned, Buttons shooed them towards the open gate. *A party's not a bad idea after all, even if it is that pesky Wall*E who's starting it,* she thought.

Ginger, who had been listening to the going-ons quietly, snuck over to her secret stash of books she kept buried in the field. Finally, a little peace and quiet! She was going to finish reading *The Art of Teaching Humans Who Think They are Horse People*, an excellent book on educational theories written by her grandmother. Buttons, however, had different ideas.

"You're coming, like it or not, Ginger. We all need a lot more fun and a little less study right now."

"Okay," Ginger sighed and marched out with Buttons at her heels.

Ginger wasn't the only one who was unsure of a party. Little Black stood under his shed, his ears slightly back and head low. Homer pranced back and forth like a colt, waiting for Wall*E to open the gate.

"A party, Little Black! Come on!"

"Phooey. Who wants a party anyways? It's all dark out" Little Black moaned.

"Well I'm going! See you later then," and Homer trotted out to join the others. *Oh bother, it's such a drag being a herd animal sometimes!* Thought Little Black, as the sight of the others trotting away filled him with panic.

“Hey! Hey wait for me! I’m coming too!” And Little Black shot off into the night after the others.

The horses met in the hay barn.

“Where’s the party happening?” Paddy asked, as he snuck up on Wall*E and bit his tail.

“Hey! Ouch. Well I got everyone out, someone else can plan the details.”

“Jump field,” said Buttons.

“Are you sure we won’t get in trouble?” Myles timidly put in. “We are supposed to be in our pastures you know...”

Little Black snorted. “Kids these days. No sense of adventure at all. In my day, we used to have a party every night on the Pigott’s golf course! But nowadays...”

Buttons interrupted, “Okay. Move out, to the jump field. Only we need to sneak quietly by Kam’s window. If she sees us, the party’s over.”

With that, the horses marched out. The dark horses and ponies could sneak by Kam’s house easily, but Buttons, Forest, and Paddy had to duck and crawl past her windows. Suddenly there was a loud crash. Forest, who can’t see well in the dark, crashed into Kam’s fence! Everyone froze and held their breath. Kam peered out the door. Thankfully, she thought the noise must have been her cat jumping off the roof again, so she went back inside.

Out in the jump field, everyone relaxed and the party got going! Wall*E, Brushy and Forest stood on the waterjump like a stage. They set up their instruments and got some tunes rolling. Homer, followed closely by Little Black, searched the creek for early spring flowers and grasses to serve as refreshments. Berry and Sparks danced in the front row with Myles and Paddy, who were head banging. Finn danced nervously: every sound seemed like a cougar to her and made her jump. It is very hard to dance when your body keeps flinching and shying away from things! Ginger stood grumpily next to Buttons.

“Go dance,” Buttons ordered. Ginger grunted in response but didn’t move. Buttons moved closer, and nuzzled Ginger’s shoulder. “Come on old girl. Come dance with me?” She said softly. Ginger looked at her out of the corner of her eye, then gave her a playful squeal. They trotted side by side onto the dance floor.

And where was Willy in all this? Willy was hastily eating every scrap of grass he could! Poor Willy was too hungry to dance. It is very, very hard to think about anything but grass when you’re a hungry haflinger!

The celebrations lasted well through the night, until the first glow of morning began to dissolve the darkness in the eastern sky. Little Black was so tired he swayed where he stood on the dance floor, and only kept from crashing to the ground by falling into Homer, who had also fallen asleep.

Buttons called an end to the party, and they crept sleepily back past Kam’s house and down the aisle way. When Annie came in the morning to feed, all the horses were sound asleep in their pastures, dreaming happily of moonlit dances, spring flowers by the creek, and good friends. All except for Wall*E, who was only pretending to be asleep, and was already dreaming of the next night’s adventure...

