

Horse Riding – Jace Zhang

JZ: I can smell them before I see them - a humid mix of excrement('ekskrɪmənt), earth, and sweat.

JZ: This is the first time I've been so close to horses.

JZ: I'm at the Jamaica Bay Riding Academy in Brooklyn. I have never ridden a horse before. And already made my first rookie mistake.

JZ: I'll get a helmet sorry

JZ: Yes, I forgot my helmet.

JZ: Isabelle is my coach today. She's leading me to my horse, Malcon. He's a 20ish year-old male. Old for a horse.

[Sound of opening Malcon's stable]

JZ: Isabelle is dressing up Malcon, he resists

JZ: He turns away and makes a noise. it's like he's whispering he doesn't want to work today. Isabelle shouts and tries to calm him down.

[Sound of Isabelle shouting at Malcon]

JZ: I feel nervous. I hope Malcon won't take his anger out on me.

JZ: I'm also surprised by Malcon's size. He's more than 17 hands tall, a hand is about 4 inches. He's one of the biggest horses at this stable.

JZ: GOD, this is big

JZ: A horse is measured from the bottom of the foot all the way to where his back meets his neck, the withers. I'm around 5'11, Malcon is definitely way taller than me.

JZ: After all the preparations. I step up the stairs.

JZ: I get ready to swing my leg to the other side of Malcon's body. It's time to get on Malcon.

[Sound of me stepping on stairs and a sigh while swing my leg]

JZ: And then something happens.

Malcon starts to shake as I try to put my feet in the stirrups.

[Sound of Isabelle slapping Malcon and made him stop]

JZ: Well Malcon calms down, but not me. Isabelle asks me if my feet feel balanced on both sides of the saddle,

[Sound of me hesitating with a long "Ahhhhh"]

JZ: Finally we start our 30 minute walk.

JZ: But then Malcon gives me another surprise.

[Sound of Malcon sneezing]

JZ: Is he sneezing?

JZ: His head drops rapidly as he sneezes, dragging my body down for the drop in a panic.

JZ: I can tell Isabelle knows that I'm nervous.

I hold the reins too tight in my hand. She asks me to loosen the reins a bit, and give some pats to Malcon.

[Sound of patting]

JZ: Well somehow I feel like, it's not just me patting Malcon, but also Malcon "patting" me to calm me down.

JZ: I get familiar with Malcon really quickly, and even learn how to steer.

JZ: If I want to turn left, I loosen my left hand from the reins, and push the horse's body with my right leg in the direction where I want him to go.

[JZ: Ohh I like this feeling!]

[MUSIC IN]

JZ: The reason for my decision to ride a horse is quite simple.

JZ: I'm a huge fan of the video game Red Dead Redemption II. It's a game that takes place during the Wild West in a fictionalized United States. The main character is Arthur Morgan. And he rides his horse from small towns to big cities, from hills to plains, from rivers to sands. The horse magically shows up whenever he whistles and needs him somehow.

JZ: What attracts me most to the game is the Wild West. It's about possibility, about the dreams of cowboys, about creating a world of freedom and self-reliance.

Arthur Morgan:

“More and more civilization... what a mess we are making of things.”

“We are thieves in a world that don't want us no more.”

JZ: Eventually the footsteps of horses are gradually crushed by the wheels of the Steam Train, aka civilization.

[Sound of horse's footsteps and the sound of steam train]

[Music out]

JZ: My 30-minute ride with Malcon comes to an end. The ride felt a little magical like time and distance disappeared. For a little while I got to be in Arthur's world.

[Sound of me hopping off Malcon]

JZ: Thank you, Malcon

[Sound of Malcon's footsteps fading away]

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