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The Horse's Complaint

Mary Graham Bonner

Today, the farmer put a new check rein on me. It held my head way up — much too high — and kept it there the whole long drive to town and back. My neck ached terribly. I would have given anything to lower my head, even for a moment. But the rein held firm.

The farmer didn't seem to notice. He drove along cheerfully, calling to a neighbour we passed.

A woman stopped us near the market. She looked at me carefully.

"That check rein is very tight," she said.

"Not at all," said the farmer. "He's used to it. A fine, well-bred horse like this always carries his head that way."

"He may be well-bred," said the woman, "but that's no reason to make him suffer."

"He's not suffering," said the farmer.

But I was. My neck throbbed with every step.

Then the woman reached out and loosened the rein. I put my head down at once. I turned it this way and that. I shook it. The relief was extraordinary.

"There," said the woman. "See how he likes his head down? That rein was forcing it to a position no horse would naturally choose."

"You know nothing about horses," said the farmer. And as we drove away, he put the check rein back.

The drive home seemed very long. I hold no ill will toward my master — I truly don't. But how I wish, just once, that he could be driven along this road with his own head held back and up and unable to move, for the length of a single afternoon. Then he would understand what a too-tight check rein feels like.

"Then he would know," the other horses neighed, when I told them later.



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