



ALIZÉE FROMENT

From FEI 5*
to Liberty
Performances
Around the
World

THE HORSES WHO MADE ME

A Journey to a
Horsemanship
Philosophy

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“ Here you will meet the horses and ponies who first shared with me the scent of a freedom that would later guide my entire life. These were golden years, filled with love, games, discoveries guided by instinct, and friendship.

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- Bengal, *the one who taught me to never give up* 17
- Shapati, *the one who set me free* 21
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“ Entering another world—these were the horses who taught me obstinacy and abnegation, and how to persevere. This was the era when technique took over, leaving behind the joyful and light world of childhood for the harder, heavier world of high-level equestrian sport, with its rules and responsibilities.

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“ Welcome to the dressage world, where I discovered new sensations, new movements, and learned further to control my own body in order to be able to *pretend* to control the balance of my dancing partners.

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“ The birth of a philosophy that finds its roots in the magic of childhood sensations and feelings, but has evolved through an endless quest for discoveries and the many life lessons encountered along the way.

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PROLOGUE

Being with horses and being a rider means you never stop questioning yourself.

With each horse who becomes part of your journey, you have to be ready to start from square one.

With Mistral, my soulmate.

Hermès

Of course, each horse will make you grow, learn, improve...but in order for that to happen, you will have to be ready to face different challenges, understand new things, find other solutions, and search for parallel paths.

There are no two identical horses. The key to a trusting and successful relationship with each horse in your life is to adapt yourself. Just like humans, horses have their own personalities, mindsets, moods, and strengths and weaknesses. They will also evolve along the journeys they take with you in different ways. The answer that worked yesterday might not be the one that works today and could be even less so tomorrow. This is where your responsibility starts, because it's how you can help horses grow into the best version of themselves, or be a human of no help—or even bring out their worst.

In this journey, doubt is your worst enemy as well as your best friend. When a mentor can doubt himself openly *without* betraying the trust of those counting on him, it guides him toward always questioning himself and his choices—a step that is mandatory to give his horses the opportunity to truly shine from inside, as well as from outside. And that's what makes all the difference.

In my now more than 30 years of life, from a child in a “pony club” to my days as a professional rider, I've had the chance to meet





With Sultan, in pirouette.

many amazing ponies and horses, each of them deeply different. Each of them “made me” into the human and horseman I am today. And the most difficult stories always ended up being the ones that made me grow the most.

Of course, I would fill 10 books if I wrote about every horse I have known, so I had to make difficult choices to determine the stories I would share here and now. In these pages, you will meet Pil-Pil, Bengal, Shapati, Kazan, Betty-Boop, Goliat, Foy, Clyde, Ice, Lambrusco, Donatello, Joeris, the one and only Mistral, Sultan, Pirate, and Hermès. But my heart will never forget Kataclop, Mandarine, Champion, Bella, Gibraltar, Gaufrette, Germanicus, Naxos, Di Magic, Sir Rubinstein, Walkuere, Ehrendorf, Aslan, J'Adore, Ballerine, Rigoletto, and all the others who crossed my path and helped me grow in one way or another.

The biggest difficulty of the equestrian art in each of its forms is that humans don't speak the horse's language. That's where all our problems begin. With this in mind, we need to always remember that being good to a horse means being fair to him, above all. One of the most important things I have learned about being fair is that horses need a leader or a mentor by their side in order to feel safe. That's how they were created. Wild, they would choose the strongest of their herd to trust and follow. Alone, the horse knows instinctively he must become the strong one to protect himself...or die. *Your horse needs you to become his “safety*



With Pirate.

place” before you become his best friend. This doesn’t mean you have to be tough; it means you have to be trustworthy. Respecting and loving him is giving him this mentorship because that’s how he will learn to feel safe, which will lead him to become self-confident and empowered.

But being a good mentor is not that simple. It’s all about finding the right balance. You need to listen to your horse in order to understand him. You need to leave him some space in order to let his true personality grow and shine. You need to give him your trust in order to earn his. But, as you would do with your own child, you have to give the horse straight lines to follow, help him understand and acknowledge his reactions to different situations in order to give him the keys to overcome them, and determine boundaries to respect, because that’s also what will help him be able to become the best version of himself. It is this that you have to learn every day, because it is clearly the most difficult thing to do. Being fair. Being right. Knowing how and when to say no. Knowing how to react in an appropriate way and how to handle your own emotions, fears, and doubts. We all have to face these challenges when working with horses, and we all make mistakes. Mistakes can happen. What can’t happen is to not learn from them.

In these pages, you will find no miracle secret, but you will discover, step by step, how I grew with each of my horses, the perpetual questions I found and still find every single day along my way, and some of the answers my horses have given me. Because the truth is, there are no better teachers than our horses.



With Lambrusco.

Lambrusco

*The one who
made it all possible*

I was presenting Ice at a stallion show during a horse fair in November of 2004, accompanied by my friend Camille, when she and I saw a beautiful horse pass by. As I stared, quite amazed by his special beauty, Camille told me she knew his rider, and motioned for me to follow her toward the pair. After greeting the horse's rider, Mustapha, and introducing me, Camille rather jokingly said, "Do you happen to have a horse to lend Alizée, by chance? The trainer of the Junior Team has scouted her and wants her to come to the Christmas camp in Saumur, but she doesn't have a horse."

Although it started just as a joke, in true fairytale fashion, Mustapha jumped down, and asked me to go ahead, get on, and show him what I could do.

The chance to train with Mus and Lambrusco for a few weeks made it possible for me to go to Saumur.



The sculptural bay had a double bridle on. I had only ridden two or three times in my life with one but pretended I was used to it. *The show must go on.* Lambrusco was the horse's name, and he was a pure beauty, but he was extremely stiff, and I struggled to keep my seat in the saddle. After my short ride on him, I felt pain in every single part of my body, especially in my abdominals and adductors, but I was very grateful and happy to have had the chance to live such an experience—to have been able to ride a “real” dressage horse, in a real dressage saddle, and to have been able to feel amazing new sensations. When I got off, I was hurting all over, but I was smiling ear to ear. I was very curious to hear what Mus, who had let me ride his horse on my own for a good half hour, might recommend for finding a horse. To my extreme surprise, then and there he offered me the opportunity to come to his house three days a week and continue to ride Lambrusco in preparation for the training camp in Saumur, which was to take place in five weeks' time. My family did not have a lot of money to pay him, but Mus wanted to dream along with us. It was an unlikely encounter—one that you usually only see in movies.

During the weeks that followed, I spent half my time at his family's bed and breakfast, which was closed to customers at that time of the year, so I had a place to stay. I helped Mus and his wife in the barn in the morning, then I rode Lambrusco (“Coco”) and also Gibraltar, a giant gray with a big heart, who was more advanced in his dressage work but whose gaits weren't good enough to ride him in the clinic. Mus gave me as much information and advice as he could in such a short time. It was an accelerated training. He was as passionate as he was impatient. He wanted me to *get there*. The project had become his pet. He put his whole heart into it.

I owe Mus a lot for this time—beyond the loan of his horse, his saddle, his bridle, and his horse trailer. I haven't had enough opportunities to thank him publicly for what he did for me, when I was nothing and nobody, coming out of nowhere. On a November day when we were chilled by the cold mistral blowing through the Montpellier exhibition center, he decided not only to believe in me, but also to give everything he had to make my dream happen, without ever asking anything else in return other than for me to fight for the chance to wear the French colors in the international dressage arena. He also had this dream, for himself, but he knew he would not achieve it for various reasons. “Live my dream—that's my biggest reward.” That's what Mus always told me whenever I said I didn't know how to thank him for all he was doing. He was by our side when we went to Saumur for our first team training



where we got a chilly welcome from the other riders and their parents because I came from the jumping world. He was with us during our first Junior Team test, which was an absolute disaster.

Unfortunately, Lambrusco's health wasn't perfect, and we were too short in time. The wonderful dark bay had been treated for back weakness several times before I met him, and after a few months, he started to seem a bit uncomfortable again. Together with Mus we decided it was better for Coco to return to the South of France, where I know he lived happily until his last breath.

But I owe Coco my first pirouettes, my first “real” extended trot, my first true dressage journey. He was the first horse to allow me to feel that with the proper work, aids, and energy, I could modify the rhythm, the cadence, and the amplitude of the trot, and that a seemingly “ordinary” horse could become extraordinary.



Mus was there when I rode at the Junior Team camp at Saumur, and at my first "real" dressage competitions.



He opened the doors to a world that I had not yet imagined. It was only the very beginning. I was still far from understanding to what extent dressage could be a quest for the Holy Grail, for surpassing ourselves, for aiming for the same perfection of movement as a dancer at the barre.

Coco and I hadn't really the time to build a true relationship—we only had about five months together, during which I had to learn so much technique in such a short time that I was primarily focused on just trying to understand everything well enough so as not to disturb him. But we both gave our best to each other.

In the end, Mus and I did not achieve our shared dream together; life had other plans. But I started to compete internationally the following year, and I would never have done it without him... and sweet Coco.



Then, about three years ago, this behavior disappeared entirely, probably because it no longer affected me in the same way. I knew my gray; I knew that whatever we had “lost” would come back the day after; I knew that it was all going to be okay...so the little “drama game” between us wasn’t worth it anymore.

Sultan helped me gain confidence in our work and in who we are together. And without realizing it, this horse, who I had at first refused a place by my side, became my closest partner—even more so than his father. It is hard for me to write such a thing because Mistral will always remain my one and only, and my heart will always belong to him, but the trust I have in Sultan is beyond words. The struggles we went through during our journey and the fact neither of us gave up on the other brought us together in an unbreakable way. We are linked by the strongest bond. One we worked and fought for. He has become my second half, and I couldn’t choose between the father and the son anymore.

Little by little, my gray has become my White Angel, albeit an angel who can have some very moody periods. The good news is that he never takes me by surprise. When he is having a bad day, you see it clearly on his face. He puts his “grumpy mask” on, and everybody is aware that Sultan is not available for the time being! During these episodes—which can last a few days, sometimes—every single thing, from cleaning his hooves to brushing his mane, from giving him a meal to working on an exercise, is a cause for grumbling. But here again, I now know that it’s okay, that it’s just who he is, and we—my team and I—have to accept his moods and let him be. The best answer I have found is to basically ignore it, just go easy for a couple of days and play outside, only doing things he usually likes, until he is back in a happier place. I used to try to “bring him to his senses” and asked him to deal with his emotions. That was a mistake. Once I started leaving him to his moods when they showed up,



respecting them without letting them “take up too much space,” they no longer came between us. I can now even see sometimes that he makes an effort on his own to overcome his bad temper—acknowledging it on his own, now that I don’t ask him to do it anymore. It took all the time we spent together and the trials we went through together for us to reach the level of understanding, inner peace, and mutual unfailing trust we now enjoy. We know each other by heart. Like an old married couple, I learned to love his flaws, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities, and I think I can say that he learned to love mine too. This is what makes our partnership indestructible today.

As I wrote earlier, during the summer of 2018, Sultan experienced a major colic episode, which necessitated a trip to the veterinary clinic. There he contracted a bacterium that attacked his entire nervous system. (It is impossible for me now to remember the name of the bacterium—my brain has erased it.) He couldn’t stand. He’d fall against the walls, he’d fall to the ground, and he couldn’t get up. The vet told me Sultan might not survive, and if he did survive, the long-lasting effects from his illness could be severe. This didn’t matter to me. I couldn’t let him go. I wanted to save him, no matter what.

Sultan fought, and he won. His recovery took months, but even more incredible, not only did he become himself again, but he continued grow in beauty

*With Louise, in my belly and then
in the saddle, and Sultan.*



and ability. He now had an intolerance to the cold and to any sudden changes of temperatures. This aftereffect causes colic symptoms and strains his liver. So my team and I are all very vigilant about any signs he gives us that he is feeling uncomfortable in his belly, and we immediately help him with natural supplements, herbal remedies, and massage.

For a number of years, but even more recently, and especially because of Sultan, I have adapted my training work to adjust according to the information related to the horses' physical and mental well-being that my team gives me every single day, before and after each practice time. We all work very closely with our horses as I believe that this is the only way to know and understand them as completely as possible. This helps me avoid doing exercises that may not fit on a certain day due to soreness or other concerns, but which won't be a problem at all the day after, with the appropriate support given to the horse in between.

It is thanks to Sultan that my research for improving the welfare of my horses has gone in new directions. It is because of him that I have started to examine and better understand the composition of their diet compared to their needs, and that I have learned the properties of herbs, essential oils, Bach flowers, and other natural remedies. My team and I then learned how to use them in the most efficient way, taking into account each horse's physical and mental characteristics, as well as their ongoing growth and development. I have met fascinating and incredible people, all of whom pursue the same goal as I do: better understanding of our horses in order to give them better lives and care for them in the most natural way. I have always taken into account the well-being of my horse companions and been interested in natural

Sultan, taking care of Louise.

medicine, but recently, it has become an obsession—a duty. I am always trying products, developing others, or creating new ones. And it started with him. It started *for* him. Sultan made me look at the bigger picture.

During this time, my golden-haired princess, my Louise, was born, and unlike Mistral, who was jealous of her, Sultan immediately took care of her with infinite precaution. As for Louise, as soon as she was old enough to hold his rope in her tiny hands while he was grazing, she couldn't let him go. Her heart chose him among all the others. Watching them grow together has completed the puzzle. Sultan belongs to her even more than to me. The love and trust my daughter and my White Angel share is something I've never seen before between such a big horse and a very young lady. She can ask him anything, and he will always try his heart out for her, while taking care to keep her safe. Together, they are my sunshine. Every time I see them with one another, my heart melts.

I still had one regret left: not having been able to show the true Sultan to the world—the one *I* know...the very special one. Under the spotlights, on a stage, even though he had made great progress, he had never been able to show his true self—he always hung back, always became smaller. I felt I hadn't yet done justice to who he had become, because in his own way, Sultan had become as extraordinary as his father.

Earlier in these pages I wrote about March of 2022, when we were all together—father and son, mother and daughter—at

