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Get Up, Shiloh

Juniper ran in the front door. “Shiloh’s down on his side, with his back legs in the hay barn, and he can’t get up.”

I grabbed jacket, hat and gloves, threw tools and rope into the back of the truck, jumped in, and sped through camp. A stuck horse can be a serious problem, because many horses will panic, fight what they’re stuck in, and injure themselves.

I left the truck a hundred feet from the barn and walked down. Juniper had run the shorter way back. She and Laura and Amanda knelt by Shiloh’s head and talked to him and petted him.

Shiloh had lain down close to the barn and rolled over, and his back legs broke wire fencing around the open barn and stopped on the floor, a foot above the ground. He had nothing but loose hay to push against to try to right himself. His front legs were outside, around the corner of the barn.

Laura said, “He was quivering all over when we got here, but we’ve talked to him and petted him, and he’s calmed down. He’s been down for a while. He’s melted the snow away under him.”

I cut wire and pulled fence away from his back legs. Juniper said, “You’re right where he could kick you.”

“I have to get this wire out of the way. You keep him calm and tell him I’m back here because he needs help. We’ll have to trust him.” I pulled staples and fence out of the way.

Juniper said, “There’s room enough. Let’s try it.”

I looped a rope around his front legs and another around his back legs. Four of us pulled for all we were worth. A thousand pounds of horse doesn’t roll over easily. We pulled his feet almost straight up. My feet slipped on ice and then Juniper’s slipped, and Shiloh crashed down, with his back legs in the barn again.

Juniper said, “Don’t give up, Shiloh. Don’t give up.”

I said, “I could bring the truck closer and pull him over with the truck.”

“He got really nervous when you drove that close. I think he’d panic if you brought the truck any closer. If we can keep our feet from slipping, we can pull him over.”

Shiloh had admirable patience. We looped the ropes again and pulled. Shiloh kicked, and the combination of efforts scooted him away from the barn. I said, “That gives us clearance to get him up without rolling him over. Let’s get him up.”

The sheep and the goats came around the barn looking for food and jumped over Shiloh’s neck. The other horses crowded around too close. Laura said, “I’ll feed them on the other side of the barn,” and she took all the other animals away.

We coaxed Shiloh with grain, talked to him, and pulled on his halter, but he wouldn’t move. Juniper clipped a rope to his halter, and we both pulled on the rope and got his head up. Amanda pushed on his neck, and

his front legs started to come under him. We all yelled at him, “Get up, Shiloh, get up, you’re doing it. Get up” He believed us and gathered his front legs under him.

We pulled hard. Shiloh lurched forward, gathered his hindquarters and staggered up, nearly fell again, stayed up, and kicked in every direction.

I yelled, “Get away from him. He’s kicking.” Juniper and Amanda backed away. I pulled hard on the lead rope and forced him to move forward. His right rear leg almost didn’t work, but I kept him moving, and he took a step and another and several more.

We cheered. “Yay, Shiloh. You did it. You’re up. Keep moving. Hooray.”

I led him around the barn and up past the tack shed and back, and his walking smoothed out. I stopped so we could wipe him dry, but he kicked in all directions again. I walked him some more, and then we did brush and dry him.

Juniper led him up to the gate and down to the water tank. He drank, and she led him back. He walked normally by then, so she unclipped the rope, and he joined the other hoses eating hay.

After he ate for a while, Juniper and Amanda tried to walk Shiloh some more, just to be sure, but he said he’d had enough of that for now, and if he kept at it, the other animals would eat all that good alfalfa hay, so he’d stay where he was and keep eating, thanks. We went home, and all of us wrote about our experience in journals, essays, and letters.

When we walked out in the pasture the next day, Shiloh followed us around and nuzzled each of us. Amanda said, “Animals aren’t dumb. He’s telling us he’s grateful to us for helping him. He’s glad to be alive and up on his feet today.”

Shiloh snorted and nuzzled Amanda to show her how much he agreed with her and then walked over and joined the other animals. We watched them a while and then scattered out to go on with our day.