Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

opening extract from

Sparkle

written by

Poppy Shire

illustrated by

Strawberrie Donnelly

published by

Macmillan

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.



1. A Fairground Surprise

"Roll up, roll up for the most exciting ride of your lives! Choose your favourite pony and let Barker's Magic Pony Carousel whisk you away on an amazing adventure!"



Megan felt tingly all over when she heard the voice booming across the fairground. A Magic Pony Carousel? She couldn't think of anything better!

"*That's* the ride I'd like to go on next!" she told her mum. "Can I, please?"



"I thought you'd gone off ponies," her mum teased. "That's what you said when you fell off in your riding lesson last week."

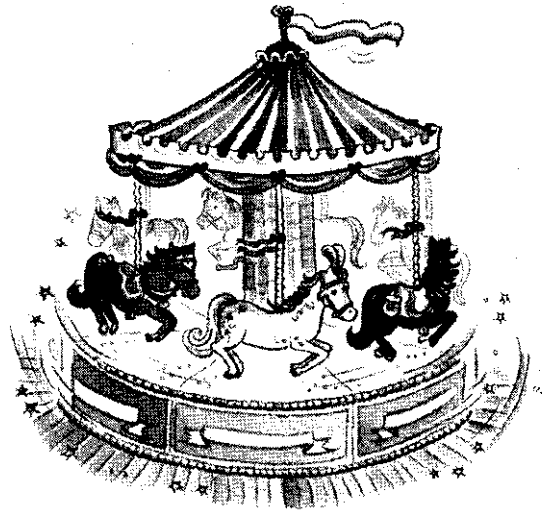
Megan thought for a moment. It was true that falling off had made her a bit nervous about *real* ponies. "But carousel ponies will be a lot safer," she said.

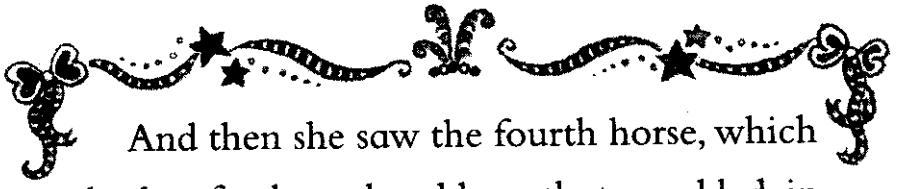
"Yes, they will," her mum agreed. "Though I'm not sure why you're worried about ponies when you're so crazy about gymnastics. That's just as dangerous, if you ask me!"

Megan laughed. "Oh no," she said. "In gymnastics there are nice thick mats to land on!"

The Magic Pony Carousel stood in a far corner of the field, next to a candyfloss stall. The base was painted in swirling patterns of red, gold and silver, and the roof

had twinkling coloured lights hanging from it and a scarlet flag fluttering from its golden point. The ponies were fixed to twisty golden poles, rising up and down in time with the music. Megan thought she'd never be able to decide which one to ride. They all looked lovely. There was a beautiful cream Arabian pony with a flowing mane and tail . . . a pretty princess's pony with a proudly arched neck . . . a chestnut pony with a Western-style saddle and bridle . . .





And then she saw the fourth horse, which had a feathery headdress that sparkled in the twinkling lights. He had no saddle or reins at all, and his dappled back looked smooth and comfortable. His neck was proudly arched but his big brown eyes were warm and friendly, and his snow-white tail streamed out behind him.

"It's a circus pony!" Megan breathed. She could already imagine herself under the bright lights of the circus ring, wearing a spangly sequinned costume.

She left her mum and ran over for a closer look. There was a name written on a scroll hanging from the twisty pole.

"*Sparkle*," Megan read. "Perfect."

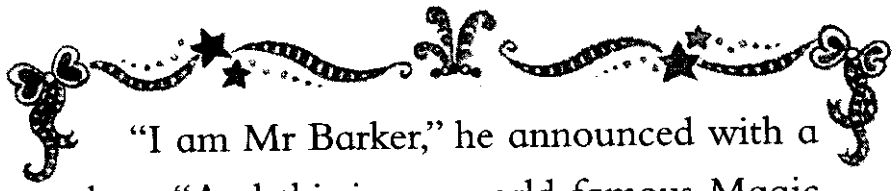
As she gazed up at the pony, she felt a tickle in her nose. It grew and grew and

grew until Megan couldn't stop it. "Ahhh-tchoo!" she sneezed.

"Bless you!" cried a voice.

Megan spun around. A tall man was smiling down at her. He looked very different from the other fairground people. He was wearing a red velvet suit with a bright green lining and a stripy green and red top hat, with wisps of white hair peeping from underneath.





"I am Mr Barker," he announced with a bow. "And this is my world-famous Magic Pony Carousel. Here, take a hanky." He pulled a whole string of coloured handkerchiefs out of his pocket.

"Wow!" gasped Megan. "Thank you!" She picked out a pink hanky covered with yellow flowers.

"Have you chosen which pony you're going to ride?" Mr Barker went on, his blue eyes twinkling merrily.

"Oh yes," Megan nodded. "I—"

Mr Barker held up his hand. "Don't tell me!" he warned. "Just close your eyes and think very hard about the pony you want."

"Go on, Megan," her mum encouraged her.

Megan squeezed her eyes tight shut and pictured Sparkle's shiny grey coat and gorgeous sparkly headdress.

"Are you thinking hard?" asked Mr Barker.

"*Very* hard," Megan replied.

"Then open your eyes and take a ticket."

To Megan's astonishment, an old-fashioned ticket machine had appeared in front of her on a little red stand. She was *sure* it hadn't been there before. She glanced at her mum to see if she'd noticed it, but she was busy rummaging in her bag. Megan turned back to Mr Barker, who smiled and turned a wooden handle on the side of the machine. A little pink ticket popped out.



"Is that for me?" Megan exclaimed.

"It most certainly is," said Mr Barker. "Go on, see

which pony the Magic Carousel has chosen for you!"

Megan took the ticket and looked down at the swirly silver writing. Then she gave a little cry of joy. The ticket said *Sparkle*.

She was going to ride the circus pony!

Megan climbed eagerly on to Sparkle's back. She felt very daring, riding bareback, but she was sure she wouldn't fall off, because she could hold on to the twisty



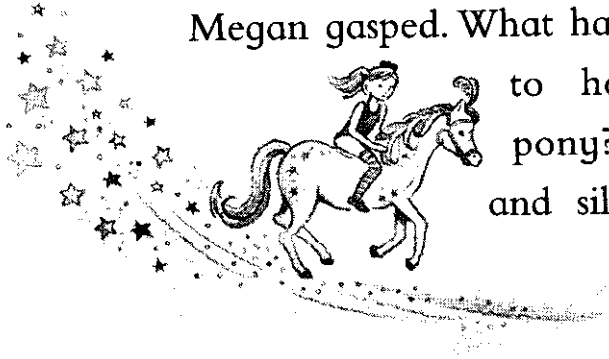
golden pole. She waved to her mum with one hand as the carousel began to turn . . .

The carousel ponies rose and fell in time to the tinkling music. It felt wonderful, like flying gently through the air. Megan held on more tightly as the carousel spun faster. She caught one more glimpse of her mum's smiling face, then all she could see were the dazzling colours of the carousel. The fairground seemed to vanish in a blur of pink and silver glitter. Was she imagining it, or had the carousel lights got brighter? She could even see twinkling stars in her pony's headdress!

This was the most amazing ride Megan had ever been on! She tried to grip the pole tighter, then stared in surprise. She wasn't holding the pole. She was holding Sparkle's mane, and there was silky hair between her



fingers, as if it was a *real* mane. She let go with one hand and stroked Sparkle's neck. It felt soft and warm. And then she heard the rhythm of horses' hoofs . . .



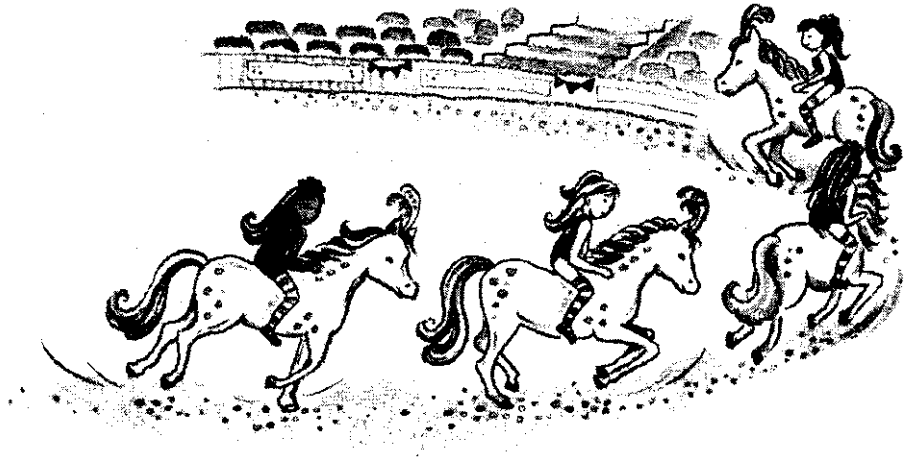
Megan gasped. What had happened to her carousel pony? The pink and silver sparkles began to fade away, and Megan thought she could see another grey pony just like Sparkle in front of her. Before she could be sure, she felt herself wobble. She grabbed on to the mane again and looked down.

Sparkle's hoofs were thudding on pale yellow sawdust, around a ring enclosed by scarlet-painted wood. Puzzled, Megan looked around. A dark blue canvas roof

stretched above them, decorated with tiny silver stars.

She was riding a real pony in a circus ring!

The last of the glitter vanished, and Megan could see everything clearly. Sparkle was following five other grey ponies around the ring, all wearing twinkling blue headdresses. Megan thought Sparkle was by far the prettiest. The other riders were



wearing brightly coloured leotards and leggings, with soft dance shoes on their feet. Megan looked down, and her eyes almost popped out of her head. She was wearing the same things!

Before she could wonder where her jeans and jacket had gone, she realized that the other riders weren't sitting on their ponies any more. One by one, they had tucked up their feet and crouched on their ponies' backs. After cantering a few strides to get their balance, they stood up with their arms held out to the sides.

Megan gulped. Was she supposed to copy them? She'd done hardly any riding before. But she was cantering around the ring on a circus pony, so she guessed she had to try! At least she was good at balancing from all her gymnastics, and luckily no one was

watching. The seats in the circus ring were empty and the other riders weren't looking back.

Slowly, carefully, she lifted her feet up one at a time until she was crouching, as she'd seen the other riders do. So far, so good! Then she let go of Sparkle's mane, and began to straighten her legs, so that she was rising up, up, up . . .

She wobbled one way, then the other.

"Oh!" Megan gasped, stretching out her arms.

That made it a bit easier to balance. Feeling safer, she straightened her legs the rest of the way. She was standing on the back of a real live circus pony!

But then she glanced down at Sparkle's ears. They didn't seem quite straight. Not at all straight. In a split second, Megan realized



she'd lost her balance after all. She was falling, falling . . .

Thump.

She was off!