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opening extract from

Princess Ellie Saves the Day

written by

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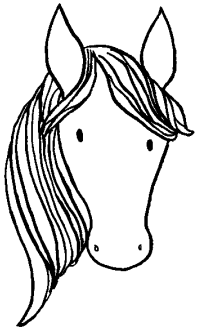
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Chapter 1



"Eighteen to me – seventeen to you," announced Princess Ellie, as she wrote the scores on the blackboard in the tack room. "I'm winning."

"Only for a bit," said her best friend, Kate. "I haven't had my turn yet."

"Here's your question," said Meg, the palace groom. "What's the name of the soft

part on the bottom of a horse's foot?"

Kate grinned. "That's easy. It's the frog."

Ellie changed the score. "Eighteen all. We're level now."



Meg peered out of the window. "The rain's stopped and it's getting late. We'd better make this the last round of the quiz."

"Make it a hard one," said Ellie.

"I'll have to," Meg replied. "You've both got all the questions right so far." She paused thoughtfully for a moment. Then she asked, "Suppose you found a pony kicking at

his stomach and looking round at his sides with a worried expression. What would be the matter?"

"Colic," cried Ellie.

Meg nodded. "And for an extra mark, what should you do?" she asked.

Ellie hesitated. She'd never seen a pony with colic and she hoped she never would. If she did, she knew she'd ask Meg for help, but that obviously wasn't the answer to the question. "I think I'd call the vet," she suggested.

"That's very sensible," replied Meg. "Colic can be serious – you don't want to take any chances."

This time Kate updated the score. "You've got twenty now. If I get both parts of my question right, it'll be a draw."

Meg handed her a few small pieces of something grey. "Do you know what this is?"



Kate stared at the pieces carefully. She rolled them between her fingers and held them up to her nose to smell them. "Is it sugar beet?" she asked.

"That's right," said Meg. "Now for that extra mark, can you tell me what you must always do to sugar beet before you feed it to a pony."

"I know, I know," squealed Ellie. She could hardly resist blurting out the answer.

"Don't tell me!" ordered Kate. She

tapped thoughtfully on her teeth with a fingernail. She stared at her feet and then at the ceiling. She stared at the blackboard, as if she was hoping the answer would miraculously appear on it. Eventually she admitted, "It's on the tip of my tongue, but I can't remember."

"Don't worry," said Meg. "Let's see if Ellie really knows."

Ellie felt very pleased with herself. "The sugar beet's been dried, so you have to soak it for a long time before you feed it to ponies."

"Of course," cried Kate. "How could I forget *that*! If you don't soak sugar beet, it might swell up inside a pony's throat and choke it."

"Well done, both of you," said Meg.



"You're the winner, Ellie, and I'm really impressed by how much you've both learned since I came to the stables."

"That's because you've taught us loads of stuff about pony care," laughed Ellie. "George never did that." George was the palace groom before Meg and Kate came. He had lots of rules, most of which began "Princesses don't…" and he never allowed Ellie to help around the stables.

"I'm glad you're here now, Meg," said Kate. "It can't have been much fun when George was around."

"And it won't be much fun if I'm told off for making you both late," added Meg. "Have you got time to check the ponies'

water before you go?"

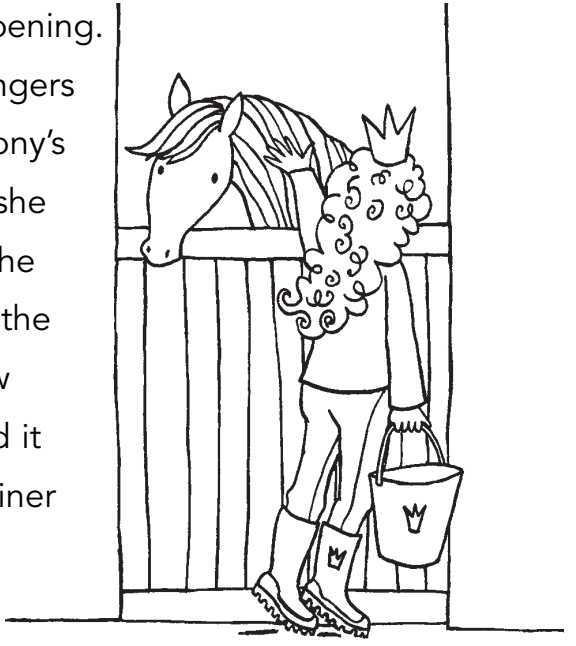
"Of course we have," said Kate. "Gran won't have my tea ready yet." Kate's gran was the palace cook.

The yard was still wet from the rain that had sent the three of them scurrying into the tack room earlier. Ellie was glad of her wellington boots as she splashed through the puddles to the tap. She filled a bucket



and used it to top up the water container in Sundance's stable. The chestnut pony nuzzled her shoulder as she worked. Ellie paused and stroked his glossy neck, delighting in the warm smell of horse mingled with the scent of fresh straw.

Rainbow looked out of her stable to see what was happening. Ellie ran her fingers through the pony's grey mane as she peeped over the door to check the water. Rainbow hadn't touched it yet. The container was still full to the brim.



Moonbeam's wasn't. It was half empty. Ellie had to fetch another bucket to fill it up. As soon as she'd finished, the palomino pony plunged her creamy coloured nose into the water and blew bubbles. Ellie laughed and Moonbeam shook her head, tossing her snow-white mane in all directions.

When Ellie went back outside, she saw Kate coming out of the large stable shared by Starlight and her foal, Angel. The other ponies were all Ellie's, but Angel wasn't – she belonged to Kate. "Have you checked Shadow yet?" Ellie asked.

Kate nodded. "The silly old thing had knocked his water over. But I've filled it up again."

"Thanks both of you," said Meg, as she

stepped out of Gipsy's stable. She patted her grey thoroughbred on the neck and added, "You've saved me some work. Do you fancy a jumping lesson tomorrow?"

"That would be brilliant!" cried Ellie.

"I'll be waiting for you in the yard after school," Meg promised.

But when Ellie and Kate ran down to the stables for their lesson the next day, there was no sign of Meg at all. She had completely disappeared.

