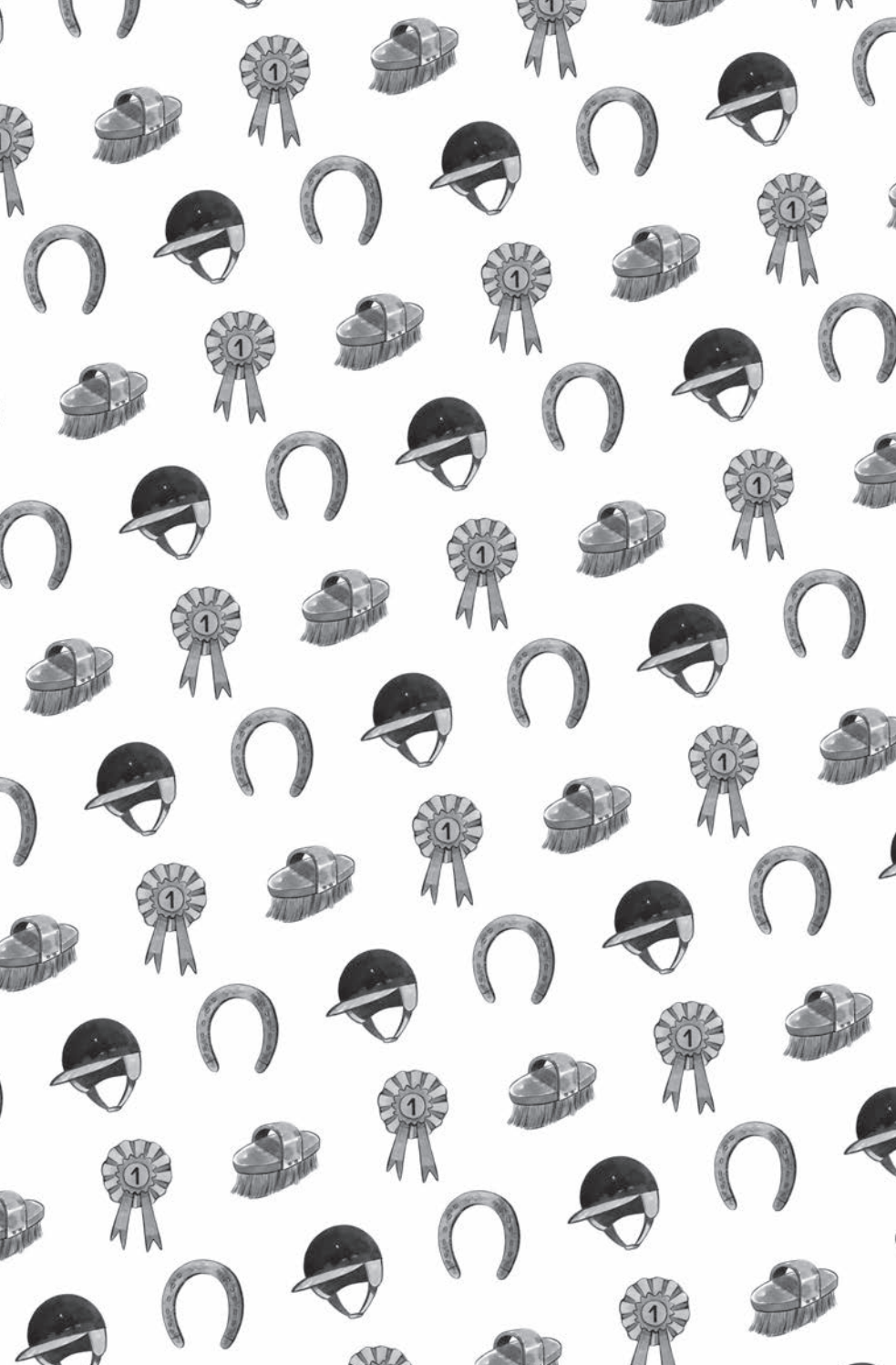


Meg and Merlin

Making Friends

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To Tabitha

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CHAPTER 1

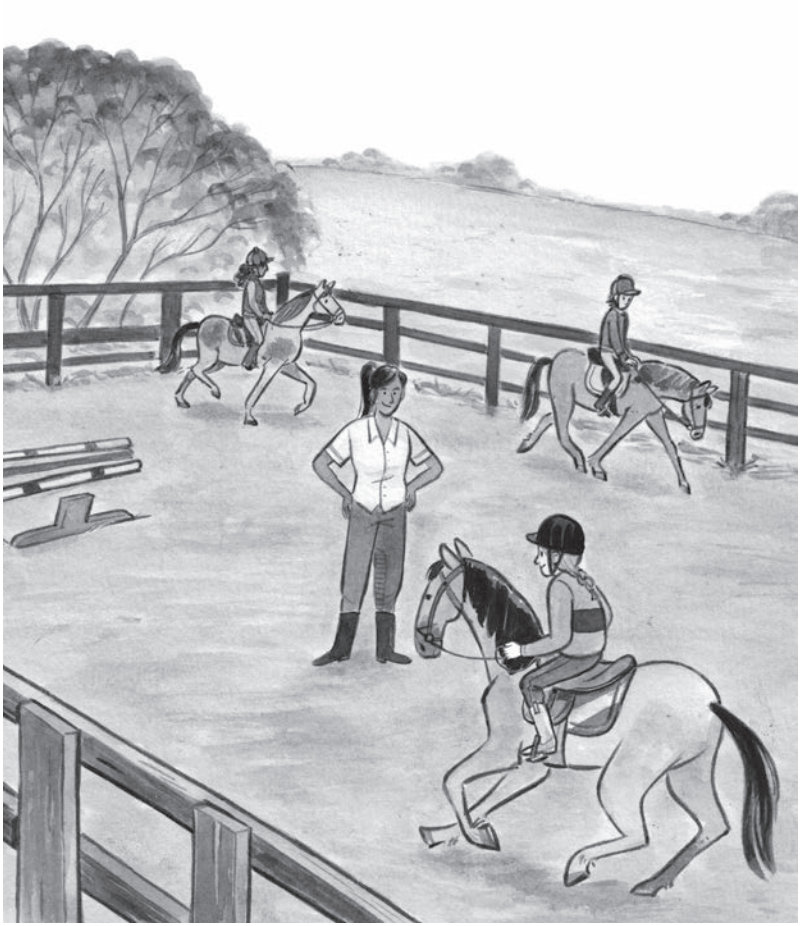
Wishing and Wanting

Meg wanted a pony. She wanted a pony so badly that it hurt.

Every night Meg pulled the duvet over her head and curled into a tight ball. She shut her eyes and wished and wished and wished for a pony.

Meg went riding once a week. Every Saturday afternoon Mum and Dad drove her to the local riding school.

Sometimes the teacher gave Meg's group a lesson. Sometimes she took them for a ride into the countryside.



Whatever they did, Meg looked forward to her ride all week and then it would pass in the blink of an eye. After that, Meg would have another six long days with no ponies. No rides.

And then, five months ago, Dad had his work hours reduced and Meg's riding had to be cut back to once a fortnight. When the same thing happened to Mum a few weeks later, Meg could only ride once a month. Even that was tricky for her parents to afford.

Meg knew she couldn't complain. But it was so hard! The days and weeks between rides felt like years.

Meg had always longed to have a pony of her own. She dreamed about ponies at night, and when she was awake ponies filled her head.



At home she drew pictures of ponies. At school, instead of doing her sums or her writing, she thought about galloping across a sandy beach on a wild white stallion or riding over mountains on a dark bay mare.

Every single Christmas Meg wrote to Santa: "Please, please, please can I have a pony? If you could bring me a pony, I'd never, ever ask for anything else ever again."

Every year Mum and Dad asked if there was anything special she wanted for her birthday and Meg always said "a pony". So she got presents that were odd shapes and sizes and had china or plastic or wooden ponies inside.

Meg had a herd of them crowded together on her windowsill. There were so many she couldn't pull the curtains shut any more.



Once she'd even written to the tooth fairy: "I don't want any money. Please, please, please could I have a pony instead?"

And it worked. In a way.

The tooth fairy left a tiny silvery horse under her pillow. Meg wore it on a chain around her neck.

The presents were all lovely things to have and Meg knew she should feel grateful. But pretty necklaces and herds of toy ponies just weren't enough to fill the great big hole in her life. She longed to love a real, live pony of her own.

