Rosie the Perfect Pony

PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Rosie the Perfect Pony

PIPPA FUNNELL

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ZEPHYR

An imprint of Head of Zeus

This is a Zephyr book, first published in the UK by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Plc

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (PB): 9781804542903
ISBN (E): 9781804542880

Designed by Nicky Borowiec

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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5–8 Hardwick Street
London EC1R 4RG

WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM

For my good friend,
Antoinette McKeowen

Hello Everyone,

The idea for my stories grew while I was out on long rides and driving to various competitions. I found my imagination full of characters and storylines. So Tilly and her horsehair bracelets, based around a simple bracelet that was made out of the tail hairs of a wonderful horse I once rode, were created.

I wrote the series to help us all understand the responsibilities we have when involved with horses and ponies, whether looking after them, riding them or even dreaming about them – building those partnerships based on trust and mutual respect.

I love the saying *'If you want to have a good friend, you need to be a good friend'*. This is how we should all be to both horses and humans!

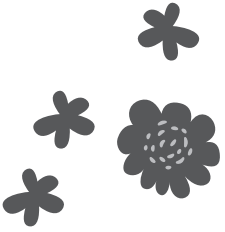
More than anything, I want you to realise how wonderfully special our four legged friends are. I have been so very lucky and privileged to have had many, many great moments with them. They are absolutely my whole life and it's thanks to them these stories about Tilly following her passions came into being.

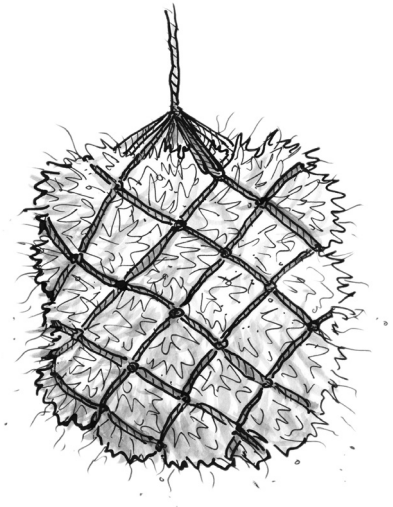
I hope you enjoy them –

One

Tilly Redbrow thought she was the luckiest girl alive. Ever since she was tiny, she had wanted to ride horses. Now her dreams were coming true. She spent every minute she could at Silver Shoe Farm, grooming, feeding and caring for the horses there. Tilly had been part of the Silver Shoe team ever since she'd rescued an abandoned horse from a busy roadside.

She'd named him Magic Spirit and was his number one fan. She loved being with him and she also loved her weekly riding lessons with Angela, who ran the stables.





The one thing that would make it perfect, she thought, as she hurried down the lane to meet her friends, Mia and Cally – *the one thing that would make it all absolutely perfect would be to have a pony of my own*.

Magic Spirit was her dream horse, but he was a bit too big and still a bit too wild for her. A patient pony was what she needed.

Tilly found Mia standing outside the stables, struggling to undo a hay net.

'Hiya, Tilly,' she said. 'Do you fancy watching me jump today? Duncan has set up a course in the outdoor arena.'

'Yeah, I'll come along,' said Tilly. 'But I've got my lesson with Angela first.'

Tilly was learning to ride on Bunny, a quiet

pony who belonged to a girl called Zoe. She spent a lot of time with her mum in America, and needed people to exercise and care for Bunny while she was away.

'Oh dear,' said Mia, sounding worried. 'Didn't Angela tell you? Zoe got back last night. She's already taken Bunny hacking.'

Tilly's heart sank. Now she'd have no pony for her lesson.

'I tell you what,' said Mia. 'Why don't you take Rosie? I won't be jumping her for a while yet.'

Rosie was the pretty strawberry roan that Mia and Cally shared. She was a lovely pony with a gentle temperament.

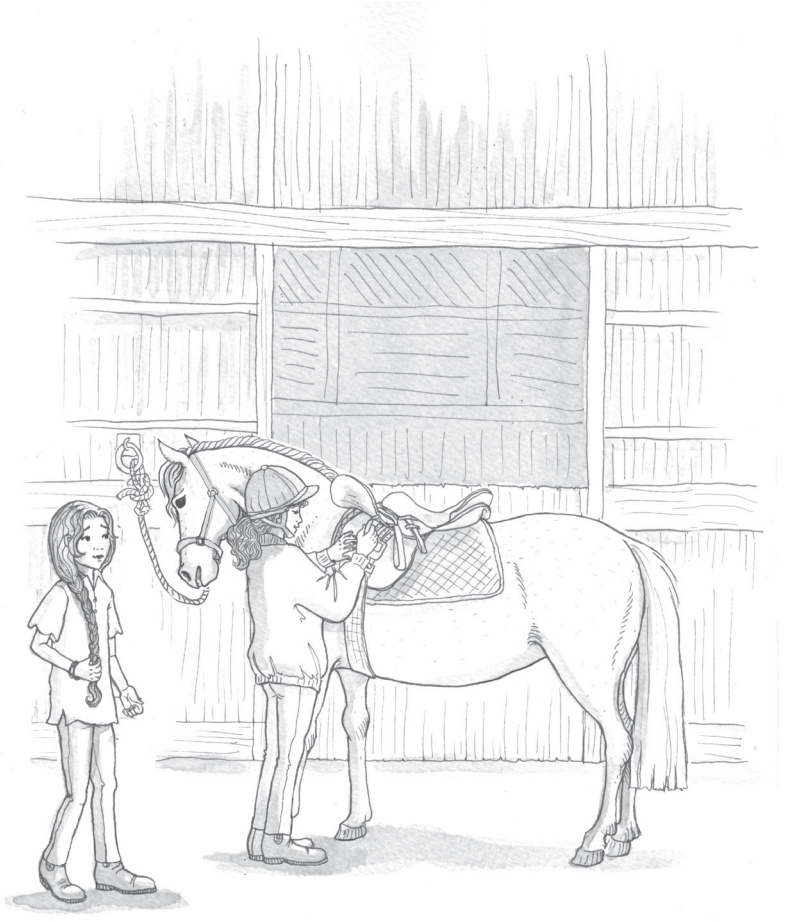
'Could I?' said Tilly. 'That would be great.'

'No worries. You'll enjoy riding her. Come on, I'll help you tack up.'

Without hesitation, Tilly and Mia collected Rosie and tied her in the yard. Tilly used a quick-release knot that Duncan, Angela's head boy, had taught her, while Mia fetched Rosie's

bridle and saddle from the tack room.

While they were waiting, Tilly stroked Rosie's face and explained: 'I'm going to ride you today, girl. I hope that's okay. I can't wait – Mia and Cally always tell me how lovely you are.'



Rosie gently nudged Tilly as if she understood every word.

'Since Rosie's so polite, she only needs a simple eggbutt snaffle,' said Mia. 'It attaches to this plain leather bridle with a cavesson noseband, and the reins have a rubber grip to stop them slipping through your fingers,' she continued.

'Now I need to stand on her left side, called "the nearside", and put a polypad on her back, which is basically just a numnah with slightly more padding than a plain saddle cloth.'

Mia worked steadily as Tilly watched in awe. There was so much to remember! Mia placed the saddle on top of the polypad, taking care to make sure everything was central and that the saddle was correctly placed just behind Rosie's wither. She slid her thumb under the numnah at the front of the saddle and pulled it up, so that there was a gap between Rosie's

wither and the numnah.

'Why are you doing that?' asked Tilly.

'To make sure she's comfortable and stop any rubbing on her wither,' Mia explained. 'Okay, now I'm going over to Rosie's right side, the offside, to attach the girth.'

Mia attached the webbing girth to the girth straps under the saddle flap, then moved back to the nearside and gently slid the girth up, trying not to pull too hard.

'It's really important the saddle doesn't slip back, but if it does, you might need a breastplate to keep it in place. Luckily for us, Rosie has quite a tubby tummy, which helps the saddle stay in the correct position!'

Carefully, Mia began to fit the bridle. First, she slipped the reins over Rosie's head, and then placed Rosie's head collar around her neck, in case she tried to get away. While she was doing this, Tilly noticed Mia was holding the bridle in her left hand.

She watched Mia gently place her right arm under Rosie's chin. The pony lowered her head obediently and allowed Mia to hold her head halfway between her eyes and nose. Then Mia passed the bridle to her other hand, so that she was holding both Rosie's head and bridle in her right hand. She rested the bit in the palm of her left hand and gently slid it towards the corner of the pony's mouth. Rosie opened her mouth obligingly, and as she took the bit into her mouth, Mia used her left hand to pull the head piece over Rosie's ears. Then she freed them with her fingers so they sat comfortably between the head piece and browband, helping to keep the bridle secure.

'Finally we buckle up the throat lash – there should be space to fit four fingers between it

and Rosie's chin, and next, the cavesson so it fits snugly just below her cheekbones. Check that the bit isn't too low or too high, and then we're ready!' said Mia.

Phew, thought Tilly, *I'm never going to remember all that.*

Angela was waiting for them in the yard. She thought Rosie would be a good ride for Tilly too.

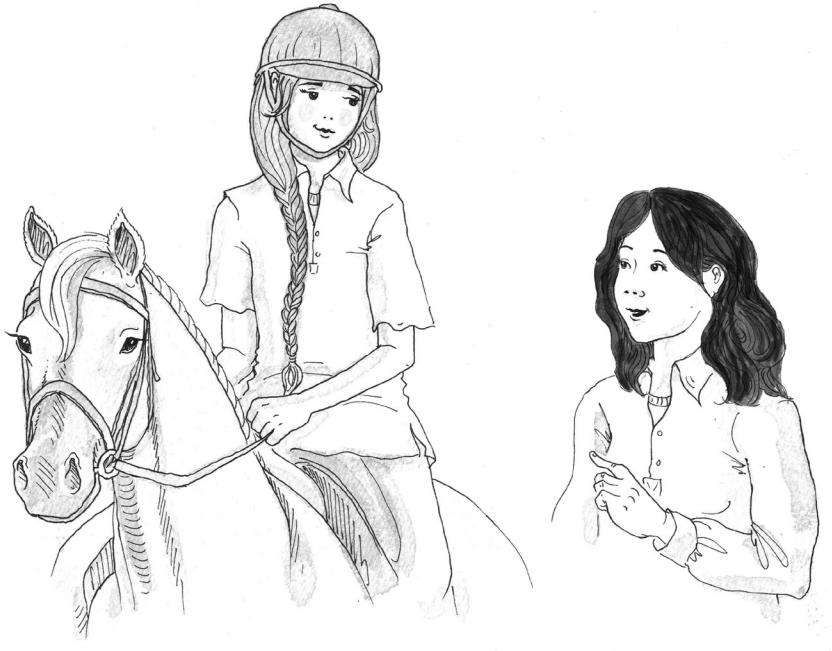
'Let's get going then,' she said. 'You can warm Rosie up for Mia. We're going to do some more work on your trot today, Tilly. Rosie should make it easy for you.'

Tilly mounted and adjusted her position until she found her balance. She sat into the lowest part of the saddle with her hips square. It felt great – Rosie was the perfect size for her.

'Be clear with your leg aid as you ask her to move forward,' Angela instructed. 'Use

your legs and allow her to move forward by softening your arm. I don't want to see too much bouncing today – remember what we said about rising in rhythm to the trot.' Tilly started with a walk, so that she could get used to Rosie's movement.

'That's it. Don't tense and tighten up. Try to stay as relaxed as possible.' Tilly took a deep breath, allowing herself to sink deeper into



the saddle.

'Now, when you're ready, give her the cue. Shorten the reins slightly and with a nudge of your legs, ask her to trot. Sit normally for a couple of strides then let her movement send you into a rising trot.'

The start of the trot always felt awkward to Tilly. It was as if she was asking different parts of her body to do too many different things. How did Mia and Cally manage to make it look so effortless?

'Feel for the bumps,' instructed Angela. 'And remember, it's not about strength. Keep your shoulders down and back, heels down, knees soft.'

As Rosie started to move, Tilly could feel that she had a very easy trot. She was naturally balanced, and was able to trot at a constant speed – not surprising, given what a

sweet creature she was. This meant Tilly could rise out of the saddle easily. Suddenly, it all came together and felt very natural.

'Eureka!' cried Angela. 'I knew she'd be good for you. Keep rising and sitting with her movement. You've found your rhythm!'

Tilly beamed. It was great to have Angela's encouragement, but already she was thinking about the next challenges. When could she try a canter? When could she try jumping? When could she ride Magic Spirit?

After her lesson, Tilly led Rosie over to the outdoor arena where Mia and Cally were going to be jumping.

'How did it go?' asked Mia, as she took Rosie's reins.

'Good. I've got the hang of my trot – thanks to Rosie.'

'She's a fab girl!' grinned Mia, cuddling her

pony's shoulder. 'She's a mean jumper too. Watch this!'

Mia got started, fearlessly going for the smaller jumps, and building up to the bigger ones. It looked as though she was having the time of her life.

Cally, on the other hand, leaned against the fence, looking unusually glum.

'Are you jumping today?' asked Tilly cheerily. 'Rosie's so keen!'

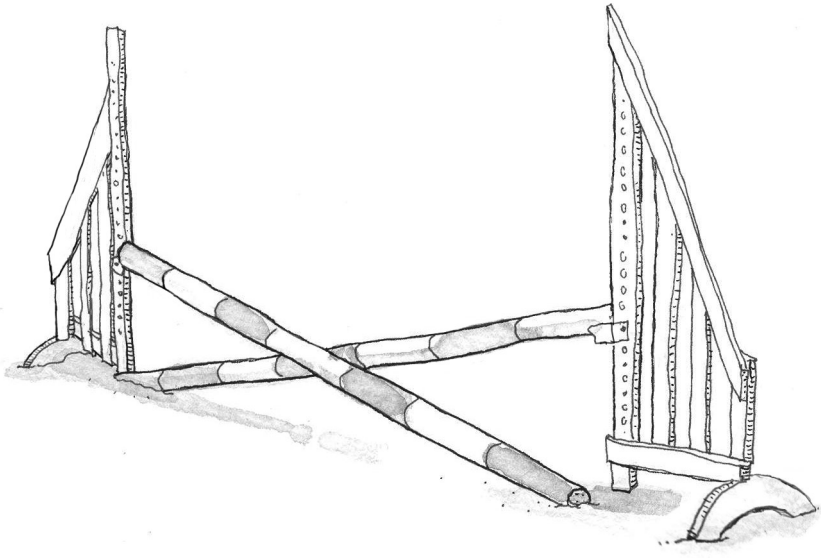
'I suppose so,' said Cally reluctantly, as though she wasn't particularly interested. She sounded unhappy. Recently, she'd been missing her sessions at the stables, and she'd taken some days off school as well.

'What's up?' asked Tilly.

'Nothing. Don't worry about me,' she muttered, and looked the other way, making it clear that she didn't want to talk.

After popping over several cross-poles and a little vertical, Mia and Rosie rode over and joined them at the fence.

'I love it when it's like this,' Mia enthused, patting Rosie's neck and staring up at the blue sky. 'Perfect!'

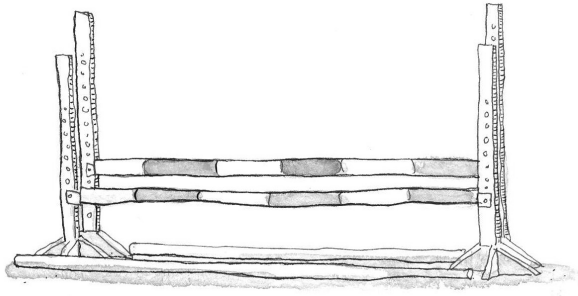


It was one of those brilliant autumn days, when the air is crisp and the sun is bright.

'Are you going to try the oxer?' asked Tilly, glancing over at the biggest obstacle on the far side of the arena. 'I can't wait to see you jump it.'

'Can't wait to see me crash into it, more like!' chuckled Mia.

Normally Cally laughed at the silly things Mia said, but today there was no response. Tilly could see a sadness in her eyes. They were dull, like Magic Spirit's had been when he'd first arrived at Silver Shoe Farm. Tilly had managed to cheer up Magic Spirit, so maybe she could cheer up Cally too. She



scooped her arm around Cally's shoulders and gave her a quick hug.

'I bet you'll jump really well today, Cally. Go for it!'

'Thanks,' said Cally, barely moving her lips.

Duncan had arranged five jumps around the arena: two cross-poles, two verticals and an ascending oxer. Tilly stared at it and gulped.

'Who's going for it, then?' Duncan asked.

'Me!' said Mia eagerly, waving her hand.

'The fearless Mia!' said Duncan, beckoning her forward.

Mia cantered a few circuits of the arena, and when she was ready, approached the smallest vertical and flew over it.

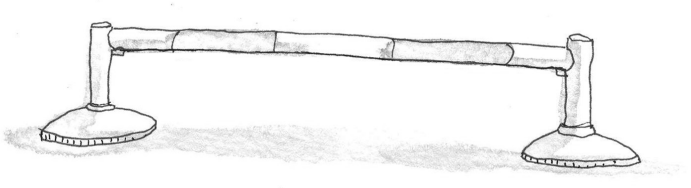
'Easy!' said Duncan.

The next jump Mia tried was the bigger vertical. She cleared it but made a mess of the approach.

'You're panicking too much about Rosie's stride. Try not to interfere. She'll lose her balance if you push her on too fast,' explained Duncan.

'But what if she doesn't take off at the right time. I'm worried she'll miss completely!'

'Trust her to work it out for herself,' said Duncan firmly. 'She knows what she's doing.'



Mia and Rosie approached again. Tilly watched closely. She knew she could learn a lot from Duncan, and Rosie was such a great pony. She was as clever as a cat with her footwork.

This time, Mia relaxed and let Rosie judge her own stride. They sailed over the vertical.

'That's the way,' said Duncan approvingly.

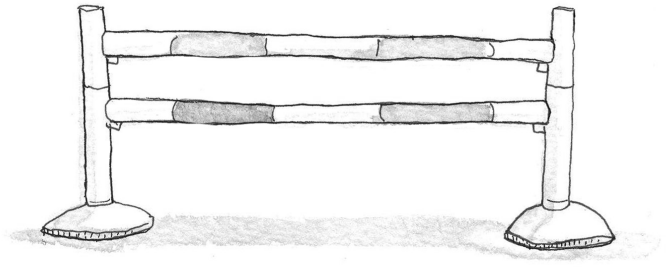
'Why not give the oxer a go now?'

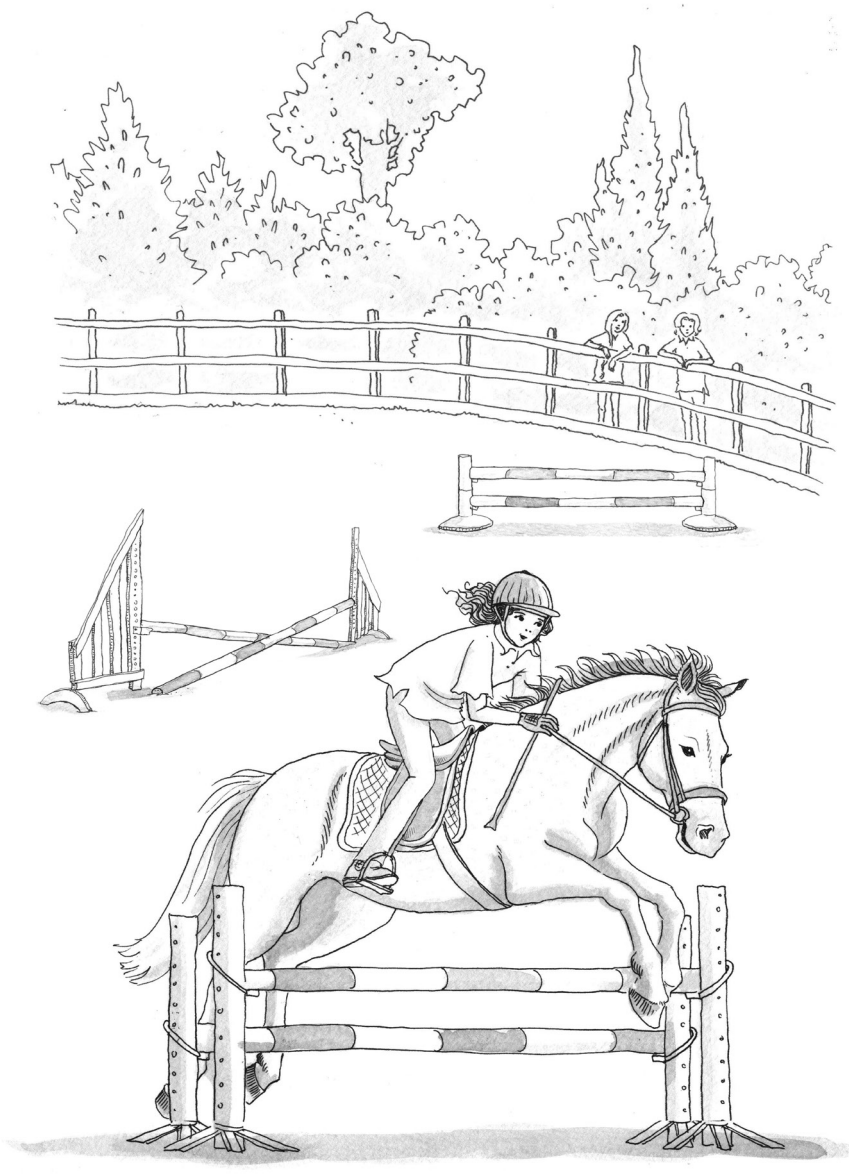
On Mia's first attempt the front pole came down. Duncan put it back up, and she tried again. On the second attempt, the pole wobbled but stayed up, and on the third, she cleared it.

Tilly cheered. Cally, who was standing next to her, clapped limply, as though her wrists had no strength. She had hardly said a word since Tilly arrived.

'Wow! I can't believe I did that,' grinned Mia, as she walked Rosie off to cool her down.

'It felt as though I was flying! Do you want a turn, Cal?'





'No, thanks. I don't really feel like it,' whispered Cally, reaching a hand towards Rosie and stroking her nose.

'Something's wrong,' said Tilly. 'You're not yourself today.'

'Oh, it's nothing,' sighed Cally.

'I guess you'll tell us when you're ready,' said Mia. 'I know what you're like.'

Cally just shrugged.