PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Solo the Super Star



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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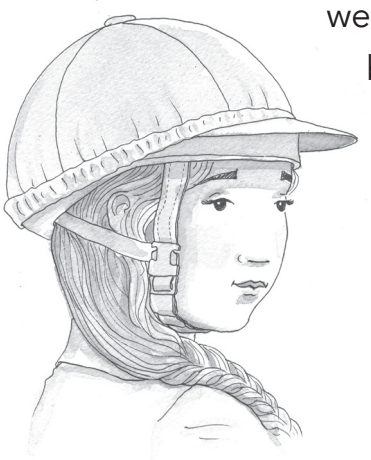
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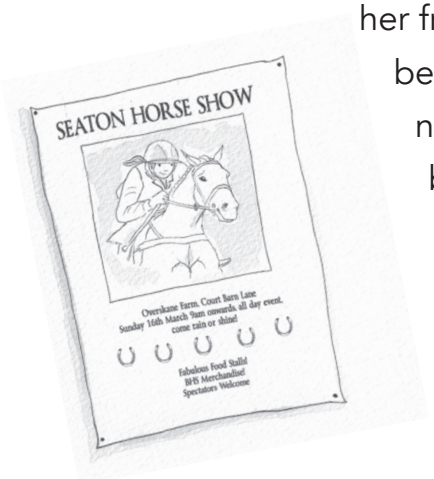
Tilly Redbrow was pleased that summer had arrived. She didn't mind getting up early to go to Silver Shoe Farm to feed and muck out the horses, but it was always easier when it was light outside and the weather was warm. She'd been helping at the farm for almost a year and had learned lots about looking after ponies and riding.



She loved every bit of it.

The thing she was most looking forward to, though, was her first ever Pony Club competition. Shows and rallies were being arranged throughout the holidays. Every weekend, horseboxes were being loaded up in the yard; and in the club room, everyone was busy chatting about where they were taking their horses and ponies to compete.

With only a few days to go before the Seaton Show, Tilly was keen to get as much practice in as possible. She would be jumping her strawberry roan, Rosie, in the class for beginners. Tilly shared Rosie with her friend Mia. Mia would be riding Rosie in the next class, with slightly bigger jumps, so it was going to be a busy day for the little pony!



Angela, the owner of Silver Shoe

Farm, was certain Tilly was ready for her first competition. After years of dreaming about riding and competing, it was thrilling for Tilly to be able to do it for real. Angela had seen how much Tilly's confidence had grown and the enormous improvement she had made. She'd been giving her riding lessons ever since she'd joined Silver Shoe Farm after helping to rescue Magic Spirit, an abandoned horse, who had quickly become Tilly's favourite.

'Come on then, Tilly. Now you're warmed up, let's start popping over the cross pole,' she called, pointing towards a single cross pole in the middle of the large sand school.

'Remember to interfere as little as possible.



Keep your heels down, hands quiet, and and sit as still as you can. I don't want to see any driving with your bottom,' said Angela.

Tilly always found this difficult. Rosie could be on the lazy side, so Tilly had developed a habit of pushing with her seat, rather than using her legs, which Angela had quickly spotted and corrected.

'That's it,' encouraged Angela. 'You've got plenty of room, get nice and straight on your approach.'

Tilly and Rosie moved towards the jump. Tilly made sure she stayed calm, so as not to disturb Rosie's concentration. Then they took off together, and as Rosie popped over the cross pole, Tilly looked straight ahead and rode away from the fence. Angela had explained to her before that the first landing stride after a jump was also the first approach stride to the next fence.

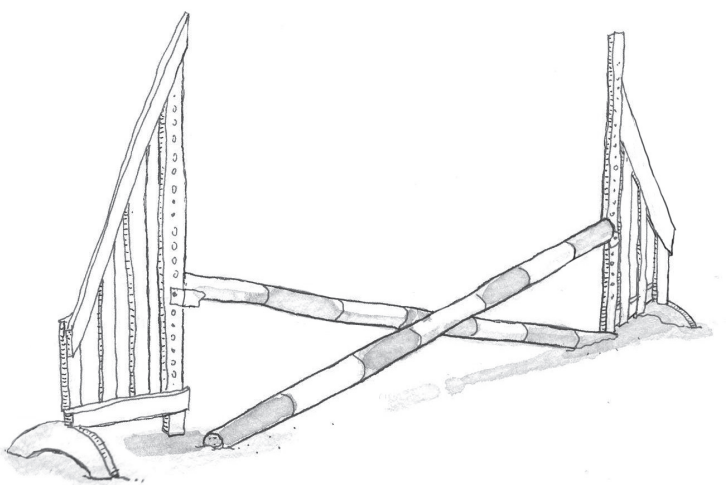
'Make sure you follow enough with your



arms over the top of the jump, and be careful not to thud into that saddle,' said Angela. 'The impact of the landing needs to be absorbed through your knees and ankles.'

Tilly repeated the simple exercise several times until she really found her rhythm.

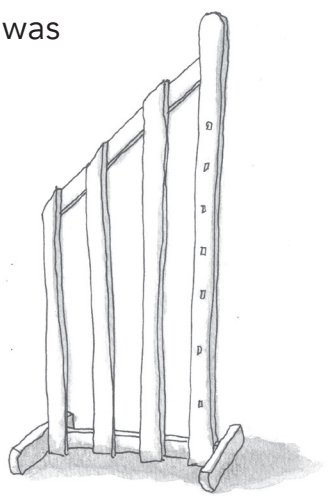
'I'm impressed,' Angela told her. 'Remember to keep your hands as still as possible. If you watch top show jumpers you'll see that their hands barely move. Do you think you're ready



to try again? This time I'll add a small vertical four strides from the cross pole and you can jump both of them.'

Tilly drew a deep breath and nudged Rosie back into a canter towards the jumps. She knew that practice was important – no time to waste. She also knew there was no room for negativity. Duncan, who was Angela's head boy and a talented rider, always said that riders needed to 'commit' to the jump; once they'd started there should be no indecision, just positive forward thinking.

Negative thoughts were never a problem for Tilly. Even when she was nervous about something, she was determined to conquer her fears and go for it.



Following Angela and Duncan's advice, she took a moment to think about how she could improve her

approach, and then cantered towards the cross pole. She was rewarded when Rosie popped over it very neatly. There was just enough time for Tilly to regain her balance and for Rosie to adjust her canter, before they were up and jumping the vertical. Perfect!

'Thank you, girl,' said Tilly, patting Rosie's neck. As brave as Tilly had been, she realised that most of the effort had been Rosie's. Nevertheless, Tilly did feel exhilarated about the forthcoming competition – she hoped they could jump as well as they had done today.



After her lesson, Tilly went to the stables to see the most important horse in her life – Magic Spirit. Tilly and Magic had been through a lot together. She had been the only person he'd felt confident around when he arrived at the stables. She'd groomed

and cared for him. She'd helped Duncan break him in, and seen him grow from an unpredictable, nervous animal into a calm and cooperative ride. When Magic had had colic, she'd stayed by his side and helped nurse him back to health. They were best friends.



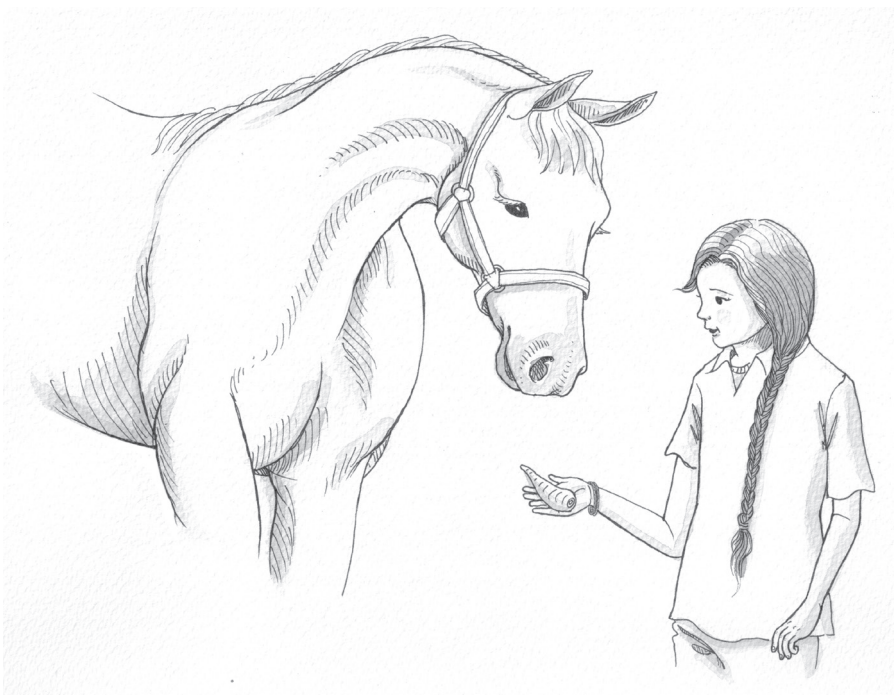
As she entered the stall, Tilly adjusted the horsehair bracelet her mum had made her. It contained hairs from Magic's tail and matched the one she had worn all her life. When she was little she'd had to loop this bracelet round her wrist several times, but as she grew it fitted better. Tilly had never known her birth mother and father. Her mother had died soon after Tilly was born, and for as long as she could remember, Tilly had happily been a member of the Redbrow family.

The only link Tilly had to her past was an old photograph and the bracelet. There was

something special about it – it was like a lucky talisman. Tilly never took it off.

'Hello, boy!' she said, as Magic came towards her. He fussed over her, sniffing her hair and nuzzling her cheeks. It didn't matter that he couldn't say how much he adored Tilly – it was obvious from the way he reacted.

Tilly took a carrot from her pocket, which he munched eagerly, while she stroked his neck.



They were alone together for several minutes, until Duncan appeared, lugging a bucket of water.

'Hi, Tilly. How's Magic?'

'He's in a chirpy mood. He likes the sun.'

'We'll turn him out in a minute – so he can graze in the long field with the others. I've been thinking, Tilly…'

Duncan sounded as though he was going to say something interesting.

'I've got a few hours spare tomorrow morning. Maybe it's time I got you in the saddle. Time for your first ride on Magic Spirit.'

Tilly gasped. She had wanted to ride Magic since she'd first set eyes on him. Duncan hadn't wanted to rush into it though, because he had to make sure it was totally safe.

'I believe he's ready. He's had enough experience with Jack

Fisher and me now. And *you're* definitely ready – Angela tells me you're doing well with your lessons.'

Tilly grinned and blushed.

'Let's meet here tomorrow morning then. About ten o'clock. Is that okay with you?'

'Yeah!' said Tilly, eyes wide with excitement.

'And is it also okay with *you*?' Duncan smiled at Magic. Magic lifted his head and shook it gleefully.

'That's a yes, then!'