PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Pride and Joy the Event Horse



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

This is a Zephyr book, first published in the UK in 2023 by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Plc

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Illustrations © Jennifer Miles, 2023

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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): 9781804543023
ISBN (E): 9781804543009

Designed by Nicky Borowiec

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



Head of Zeus Ltd
5–8 Hardwick Street
London EC1R 4RG



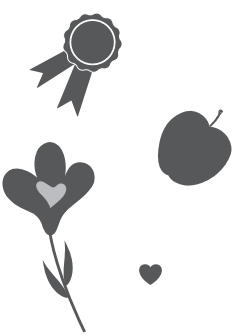
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One

It was early summer and the stable yard at Silver Shoe Farm was busy as usual. People trooped to and fro, carrying saddles and bridles. The sound of happy chatter filled the air as riders and their horses looked forward to hacking in the country lanes and fields, or a lesson in the sand school. Tilly Redbrow loved Silver Shoe Farm at this time of year.

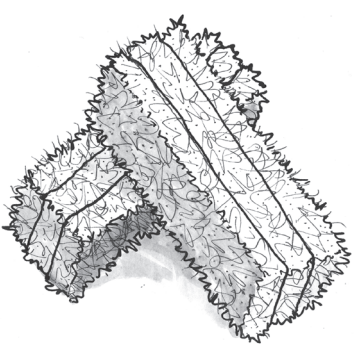
In fact, Tilly loved everything about Silver Shoe Farm, come rain or shine. She'd learned so much there, not only about caring for horses, but stable



management and riding too. She knew the basics of how to work a horse on the flat, and her jumping was improving with every lesson.

The only thing Silver Shoe couldn't teach her, though, was how to use her special gift for communicating with horses. This came to Tilly naturally. Ever since the dramatic rescue of her favourite horse, Magic Spirit, from the middle of the town, she'd known she had an unusual talent for calming horses. It had puzzled her at first, but gradually Tilly realised she could make use of it. From great racehorses, like Red Admiral, to gentle ponies, like Rosie, the strawberry roan she shared with her friend Mia, all had been helped by Tilly's instinctive understanding.

Today, Tilly had no need to use her gift because Magic Spirit was completely relaxed. He stood, tied up outside his stable, enjoying a thorough grooming.

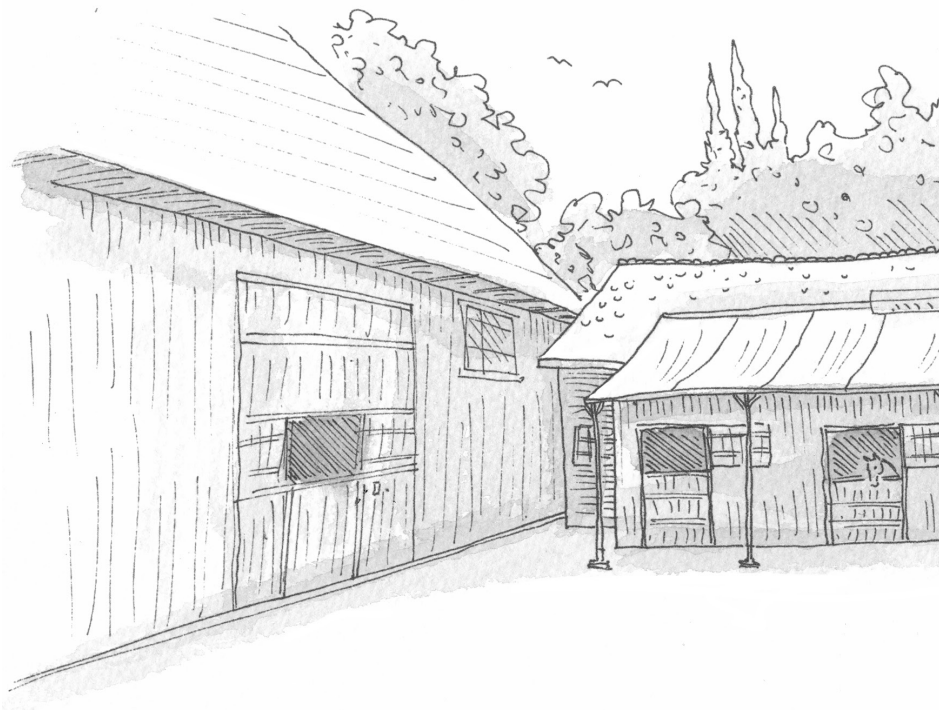


His grey coat gleamed from Tilly's endless brushing. He'd come a long way since his arrival at Silver Shoe, when he'd been a neglected horse in terrible condition.



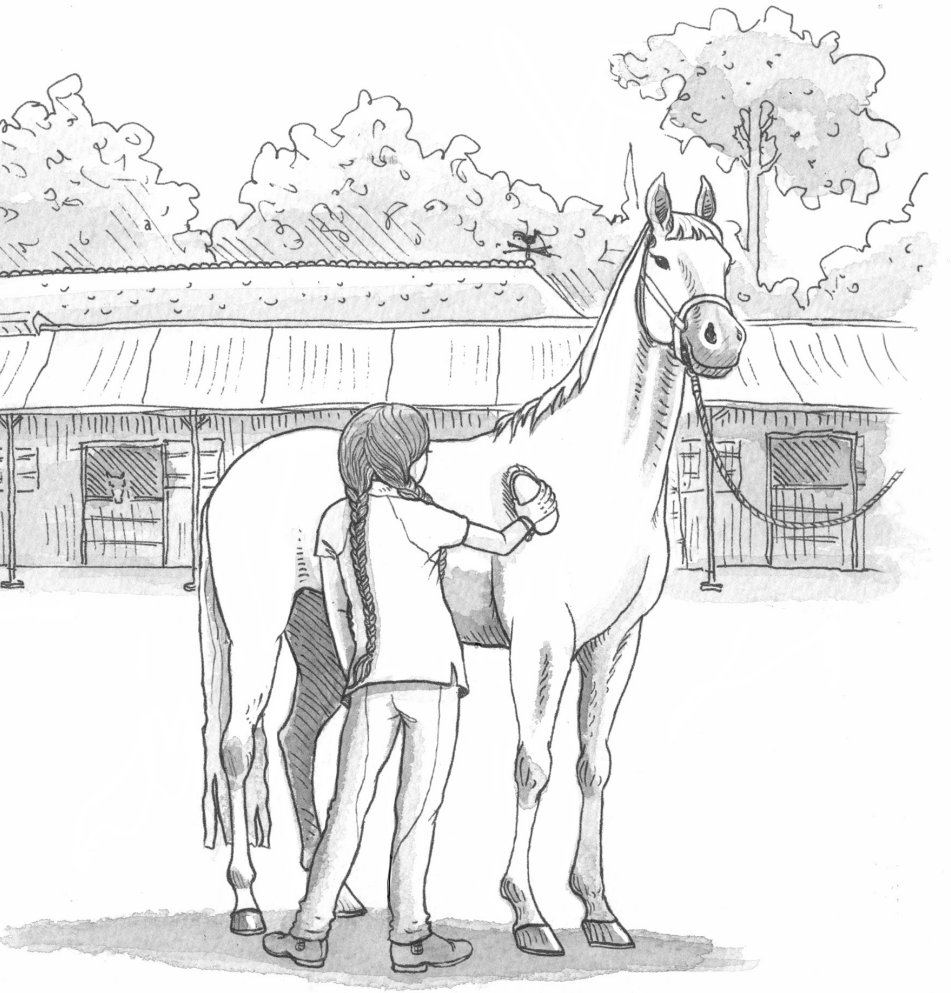
Now he was a picture of health and everyone talked about how one day he could be a serious competition horse. He had good conformation and looked like the sort of horse many top riders would choose. The only problem was that he didn't have the easiest of temperaments. Or rather, if anyone other than Tilly was trying to ride him, he didn't always cooperate.

So if Magic really was going to aim for the top level, there was no alternative: Tilly would have to be the rider who took him there! She thought about this as she painted his feet with hoof oil. When she'd finished, she let him nuzzle her hair and neck. As his warm breath and whiskers tickled her ears, she stroked his neck and gazed dreamily across the yard.



'Hey, Tilly, keeping busy?' came a friendly voice.

Tilly was definitely busy, but that's how she liked to be. She looked up and saw Angela, Silver Shoe Farm's owner. Angela was standing in the doorway of the club room. She'd been clearing it out and stacks



of overflowing storage boxes and bags of old rosettes were beginning to pile up in the yard.

'Hi, Angela. That's a lot of stuff!' said Tilly.

'I know. I've been meaning to do this for ages. Some of it goes back to when I was doing my first big eventing competitions. Brings back a few memories…'



'Those were the days, eh?' called Duncan, from across the yard.

Duncan was Angela's head boy. He and Angela had known each other for a long time. Tilly had always thought they'd make a nice couple, and her friends, Mia and Cally, had recently convinced themselves the pair were dating. Tilly wasn't so sure. It would be nice if it were true, but she knew better than to believe rumours.

Duncan was doing some cleaning out of his own, forking bedding from the stable opposite Magic's. The stable's previous occupant, a small chestnut gelding called Archie, had moved with his owner to another county, so there was a space at Silver Shoe Farm. It was a relief for Angela, as she was always glad to have a spare stable, just in case, rather like Magic Spirit, there was a horse in trouble that needed a home.



Tilly briefly wondered what kind of horse or pony would eventually fill it.

'Did you win any events?' she asked, watching Angela put down the last of the boxes.

'Oh, a few,' said Angela, smiling.

'She won loads,' said Duncan. 'Especially when she rode an amazing bay gelding called Pride and Joy. They had an incredible partnership.'

'Do you think you'll compete again? I'd love to see you.'

'I doubt it,' said Angela. 'I haven't competed for years. Unfortunately, Pride's competition days were cut short by injury. And after that, other rides just didn't feel the same. There was no other horse as special as him. I know that he's happy, but it makes me sad to see him retired when I remember all the incredible days we had together. He's stabled in Long Bloxton, the other side of North Cosford, at his owners' place.'

Her voice shook slightly. Tilly could see that thinking about Pride made Angela wistful.

'Long Bloxton's not far away,' she said helpfully. 'You could still visit him, couldn't you?'

'I do, Tilly, from time to time… anyway, how's Magic doing?' said Angela, abruptly changing the subject.

'He's great, aren't you, boy?' said Tilly, as she reached and patted Magic's neck.



'You've done a really good job with his coat. You're always so meticulous and thorough, Tilly. If every horse at Silver Shoe Farm was groomed by you, we would have to buy new brushes every week,' joked Angela. 'I'd like to think we have the best yard in Cosford.'

As Tilly continued grooming, her mind drifted; jumping Magic Spirit over the biggest combination fence at Badminton Horse Trials, the lake, where hundreds of spectators were watching. She imagined all the important people in her life standing in the crowd cheering her on. Mia, Cally and Becky were there. And Angela and Duncan, and of course, her mum and dad and younger brother, Adam. Then she pictured Brook Ashton-Smith. He would be at the front, cheering the loudest.



Not only had Silver Shoe Farm brought Tilly and Magic Spirit together, it had led her to find her long-lost brother, Brook, thanks to the matching horsehair bracelets their birth mother had given them before she died. Brook was a talented rider too and, like Tilly, his world revolved around horses.

Tilly and Brook didn't know much about their birth mother, but one thing was certain, she'd given them both a love of horses. As Tilly stroked Magic's nose, she knew Brook also understood what it was like to have a special bond with a horse. He had Solo, his black thoroughbred.



Someone else

who understood was Angela. Tilly thought about how upset she'd seemed when she talked about Pride and Joy. He obviously meant a lot to her. Why didn't she see him more often? Why was she so keen to change the subject?

'Mia!' she called, spotting her friend outside the tack room. 'We've got some investigating to do…'

