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Opening extract from

Pony Club Weekend

Written by

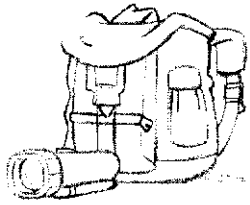
Katie Price

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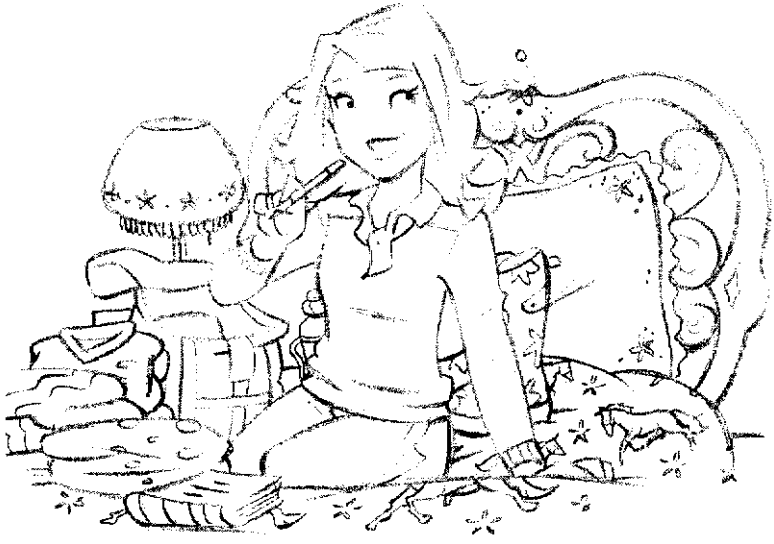
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Chapter 1

Cara sat on her bed with its pretty pink pony duvet. Holding a piece of paper in one hand and a pencil in the other, she ticked off each item on her list.



"Jodhpurs, jeans, pink hoodie with sparkly pony on the front, blue hoodie with sparkly pony on the front, three T-shirts, vest, knickers, socks and pyjamas. Wellies, cagoule, body protector, hot-water bottle, sleeping bag." Suddenly she stopped reading out loud and jumped up. "Hah! Forgot my trainers!"

Pulling back her long blonde hair so that it didn't fall into her eyes, Cara rooted around under the bed. Smiling with relief, she pulled out the trainers, wrapped them in a plastic bag and dropped them into her bulging rucksack. As she tried to fasten it, her eyes fell on two photographs by her bed.

One was a picture of Taffy, a beautiful palomino Welsh pony with a creamy blond mane and tail.



The other was of Cara with her dad, taken before the terrible car crash that killed him. Cara's eyes stayed on the photograph of Dad laughing and cuddling her. Even after a year she still couldn't believe that he was really gone.

After Dad's accident she and her mum had totally relied on each other and it felt like their whole world had been destroyed. Ever since his death they'd hardly been apart. The pony club weekend was going to be Cara's first time away from home and she was feeling really nervous.

Cara had never ridden when her dad was alive. She'd always loved animals, especially little ponies, but she'd been afraid of riding. However, it was during those horrible months just after her dad's death, when Cara hardly left the house, that her mum had suggested she do something new and had taken her to Vicki's stables. Cara

had been so nervous she'd cried in the car and her mum had pulled over to give her a hug.

"You can't mope around for ever, sweetheart. You know your dad wouldn't have liked that," Mum had said gently. "Life has to go on. You've got to start living. That's what Dad would have wanted."



Tears had filled Cara's big blue eyes but she'd nodded in agreement. "You're right, Mum. It's totally what Dad would have wanted."

So Cara had got over her fear and gone to Vicki's Riding School, and after just one visit life had already seemed better. She

loved all the ponies there – pretty Rose, a grey Connemara; gentle Stella, a black Highland pony with a white blaze; crazy Beanz, a skewbald New Forest cross; and a stunning little chestnut Arab called Candice, who was nicknamed Candy.

But Cara's favourite pony was Taffy. When she first saw the cute palomino, her heart had just melted. Taffy had whinnied softly and moved towards her but Cara was nervous and stepped away. Taffy wasn't taking no for an answer though. Sensing her fear, he'd gently rubbed his velvety soft nose against her arm and blown softly into her hair. When Cara had looked into his big dark brown eyes she'd known that here was a new friend she could trust.

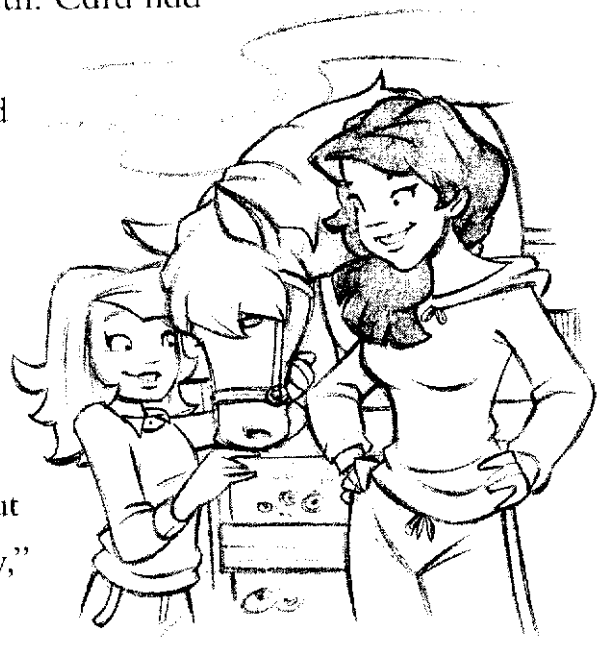
"Hey, babe," she'd whispered as she ran a hand along his beautiful silky neck.

Vicki, who was standing next to Cara, had smiled as she made friends with Taffy.

"Good choice. Taffy's the kindest and sturdiest pony in my yard," she'd said.

Cara had giggled as cheeky Taffy nudged her gently in the tummy. "That's his way of telling you he wants a treat," Vicki had explained.

Putting a mint on the flat of her palm, she'd held out her hand to Taffy, who lifted his lips and carefully took the mint between his front teeth. Cara had laughed as he crunched it loudly. Then Vicki put a mint on Cara's palm.



"You hold one out to him now," she'd said.

Cara's big blue eyes had opened wide.

"He won't hurt you, honestly," Vicki had told her.

Cara had nervously held out her hand and Taffy had helped himself to a second mint, tickling Cara's palm as he took it.

"You're gorgeous," she'd said with a giggle.

After that, Cara rode Taffy every Saturday. But because she loved him so much she visited him all the other days as well, even in the winter after school, when it was horrible and wet. Seeing how dedicated she was, Vicki had given Cara jobs to do for Taffy: grooming him, cleaning his tack, mucking out his stable, mixing his feeds and filling his hay-net. Cara loved doing all these jobs, but most of all she just loved being close to Taffy.

Eventually Vicki had made Cara a yard girl. This meant she was in charge of one pony – Taffy – but had to help out generally

around the stables too. In return, Vicki gave her a free riding lesson every Saturday. Cara was now learning to jump on Taffy, and Vicki said that she was making good progress.

Through Taffy, Cara had got to know the other yard girls. Pretty Jess with her long brown hair and twinkling green eyes, who looked after Rose; clever Amber, who was in charge of Stella; Sam, the joker of the group, who looked after Beanz; and tough Mel, who was a brilliant show-jumper already and looked after Candy.

Cara had been shy with the girls to start with, but they were all so friendly it hadn't taken her long to become one of their gang. After all, they all had one massive thing in common: they were pony mad!

Cara and her new friends also totally hero-worshipped Vicki, who ran a good yard and kept her horses and ponies in

great condition. She was really pretty, with thick dark hair, tanned skin and big silver-grey eyes. Vicki was living proof that you could be glam and still be a brilliant horsewoman!

There were other girls at the stables but they owned their ponies, which they kept at livery. Cara and her friends got on really well with one of the livery girls: Darcy was good fun to hang around with. She had a long dark plait that dangled down her back and ended just below her bottom. Her pony, Duke, was a dark bay show-jumper with a stable full of rosettes.

Darcy wasn't like the other snooty livery girls. She went to a posh school like they did and her parents weren't short of cash but she was different. Darcy enjoyed having a laugh with the yard girls, and when she had time, she always mucked out Duke's stable, mixed his feeds and filled his hay-net.

Henrietta Reece-Thomas and Camilla Worthington couldn't have been more different though. They were also livery girls, but neither of them would ever sink so low as to muck out a pony's stable or mix a feed! Their parents paid Vicki to do that and the yard girls had a weekly livery rota, which meant that two of them were responsible for feeding, grooming and mucking out the livery ponies. Cara was scared stiff of Henrietta and Camilla and dreaded her weeks on the rota. Luckily she was always on livery duty with Mel who wasn't frightened of anybody, not even moody Henrietta.

So thanks to Taffy and all her friends at Vicki's stables, Cara had got over many of her fears, and here she was now, packing her bag for her first pony club weekend. There was no way she could have done that a year ago.

Cara's daydreaming was interrupted by her mum calling from downstairs, "Are you all right, love?"

Cara jumped off the bed and ran to her open bedroom door. "I can't do up my rucksack," she called back.

Cara's mum came hurrying upstairs, and between them they managed to close the rucksack after repacking it a couple of times.



"There you are, all ready to go," said her mum.

Cara looked at her smiling face and started to nibble her nails, something she did when she was nervous.

Mum smiled knowingly. "What is it, sweetie? Come on, spit it out."

So Cara blurted out what was worrying her. "I want to go to the pony club weekend, I really do," she cried. "But we haven't been apart since Dad died and I'll feel weird going away without you."

"Come here," said her mum, and she sat down on the bed beside Cara and gave her a hug.

Cara sniffed in the warm smell of her mum's hair and perfume. "I love you, Mum," she muttered tearfully.

Her mum squeezed her even harder. "And I love you too, gorgeous, but I'm glad you're going away. You need to get out there and

have some fun. You'll have a brilliant time and Taffy will too – and don't forget I'm coming to watch you at the gymkhana tomorrow afternoon," she said.

Cara smiled and kissed her mum on both cheeks. "Well, if you're sure. I promise I won't let you down," she said.

"That's my girl!"

A ring on the doorbell made them both jump.

"That'll be Mel," said Cara.

As Mum ran downstairs to open the front door, Cara picked up her rucksack, kissed the photograph of her dad, then legged it out of the room.



Mel was waiting in the hall with a big grin on her face. Cara thought Mel was really pretty. She had a mass of curly black hair, big dark eyes, soft brown skin and a cute little turned-up nose.

"Ready to go? Got everything?" Mel asked.



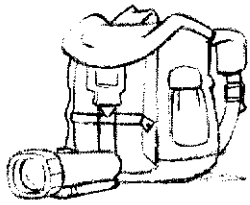
Cara nodded. "I've even packed a hot-water bottle," she laughed. "It might get cold camping out in that barn."

"Did you remember stuff for the midnight feast?" Mel asked her.

Cara put a hand to her mouth. "No way! I can't believe I nearly forgot!"

As she went into the kitchen to pick up the bag of sweets and biscuits, her mum turned to Mel. "It's really kind of your dad to give Cara a lift," she said. "Thanks a lot."

Mel grinned. "No worries. But if she's got as much stuff as me, we're gonna need a forklift truck to unload the car!" she said with a laugh.



Chapter 2

It was the August bank holiday weekend so the roads were busy with holidaymakers getting the last of the summer sun. As Mel's dad drove them to Vicki's yard, the girls chatted excitedly. Vicki had told them that there were five groups coming to the pony club weekend and competing in the games. Each group had six people in it and had been given a different colour. Cara, Mel and their friends were in the pink group. Henrietta, Camilla and four other girls from Henrietta's posh school were in the purple group. The three other groups, made up of boys and girls from riding schools

nearby, were red, blue and green.

Mel gave a long whistle. "Vicki's yard's gonna be packed with thirty riders charging around," she said.

Keeping his eyes on the busy road, Mel's dad, who was a policeman, gave a deep chuckle. "I hope there'll be enough toilets for you all," he teased.

Mel sighed. "Trust you to think of something like that, Dad," she said.

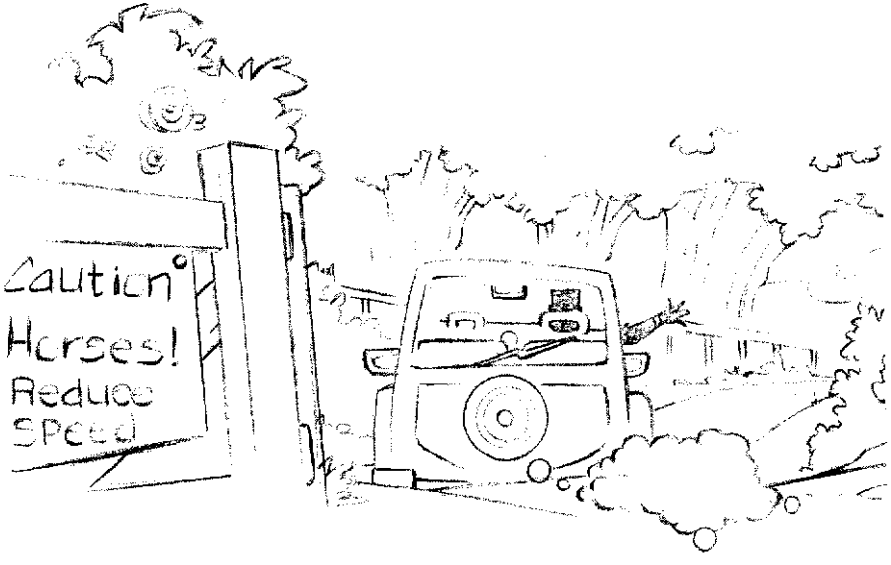
Behind Mel's dad's back, Cara gave her friend a nudge. "But he's right though – no way will there be enough loos for us all," she whispered.



Mel giggled. "We'll have to go behind hedges or dig a hole or something!" she said.

The thought of all thirty of them squatting behind a hedge made Cara burst out laughing. "You're an idiot, Mel!" she said, and chuckled all the way to the yard.

They couldn't get up the driveway because of all the horseboxes parked there so Mel's dad dropped them off at the gate.



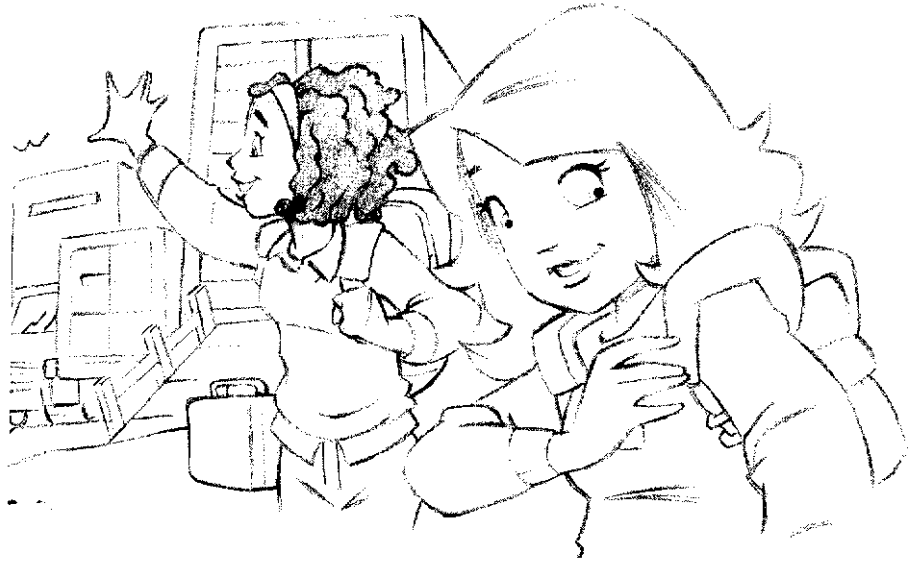
"Have fun and be good," he called as he drove off.

Mel grinned. "We will, Dad," she replied.

Both girls lifted their heavy rucksacks onto their backs and Mel picked up a suitcase she'd brought too.

"What you got in there?" Cara asked as they struggled up the drive.

Mel shrugged. "I couldn't make my mind up what to wear so I just dumped all my clothes in the case!" she laughed.



They found Jess, Amber, Darcy and Sam in the empty tack room.

"Quick, come in and shut the door," said Jess as they stumbled in with their heavy bags.

Mel slammed the door shut and Sam groaned as she tried to lift Mel's suitcase. "Phew! You got bricks in there?" she asked.

Amber pointed to the piece of card that was pinned up on the notice board. "Look at this," she told them.

Vicki had stuck up the timetable for the weekend, and the six of them got in each other's way as they all tried to look at it at the same time. Sunday was the big gymkhana day, when all five teams would be competing, but today looked pretty busy too. Jess read out loud from the board.

"Ten o'clock, arrive, and groom and tack up your ponies. Eleven o'clock, jumping

class in the outdoor school. Twelve o'clock, lunch. Two o'clock, practise gymkhana team-games. Four o'clock, turn ponies out into the meadow for the night. Five o'clock, campfire supper. Six o'clock, prepare tack. Seven o'clock, cocoa and pony quiz competition. Nine o'clock, lights out."



When Jess stopped reading, the girls reacted in their very different ways.

"Wow! This is going to be wicked!" Mel said excitedly.

Jess wound a strand of her thick brown hair round her fingers, thinking hard. "The ponies are going to get so over-excited when they're surrounded by a load of new ponies they've never seen before," she said.

And Sam, who was hyper all the time, just spun round in a circle. "Beanz is gonna love making friends with them all!" she giggled.

Darcy, organized as usual, checked out where they were sleeping. "Says here we're in the oat barn so we should dump our stuff over there now, I reckon," she said.

But Cara looked worried. All she could think about was the jumping class at eleven o'clock. "Is it compulsory?" she asked nervously.