PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Neptune the Heroic Horse



PIPPA FUNNELL
OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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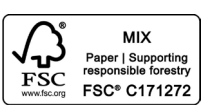
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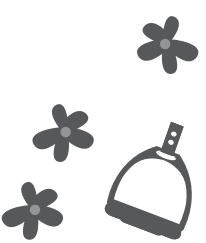
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One

The start of the school summer holidays always made Tilly Redbrow happy. She couldn't wait to have six weeks of uninterrupted time at Silver Shoe Farm. She planned to be there every morning, afternoon and evening. For a pony-mad girl like her it was great!

Silver Shoe Farm was very important to Tilly. Not only was her special horse, Magic Spirit, stabled there, but it was where she hung out with her friends, Mia and Cally, and had riding lessons with the farm's owner, Angela.



Tilly and Magic Spirit had come a long way since they'd joined the Silver Shoe gang. When Tilly looked back she could hardly remember how neglected and nervous Magic had been when he'd first arrived. Thanks to everyone's care and attention, he was now a picture of health. Tilly's dream had come true too. Once she'd only ever fantasised about the horses in her books and magazines, now she was a keen rider. She listened and looked and learned everything she could from other riders, particularly talented ones like Angela, who taught her, and Duncan, the head boy at Silver Shoe Farm. And Brook, of course, her new-found, horse-crazy brother.



Magic Spirit would always be important to Tilly. They had an incredible bond.

With other people Magic could be tricky and nervous. He sometimes played up for Duncan, or made it hard for Angela to catch him. But with Tilly, he *always* behaved. When she rode him, he responded to everything she asked. It was as if they were destined to be together. Whenever Tilly was with him, the trust in Magic's eyes was clear.

Tilly was riding Magic often now she'd grown out of Rosie, the pony she'd shared with Mia. She still loved Rosie dearly and saw her every day. Mia was also getting too tall to ride her, and the girls' parents had discussed finding a new owner for Rosie. Tilly dreaded the idea that the little pony might have to leave Silver Shoe.

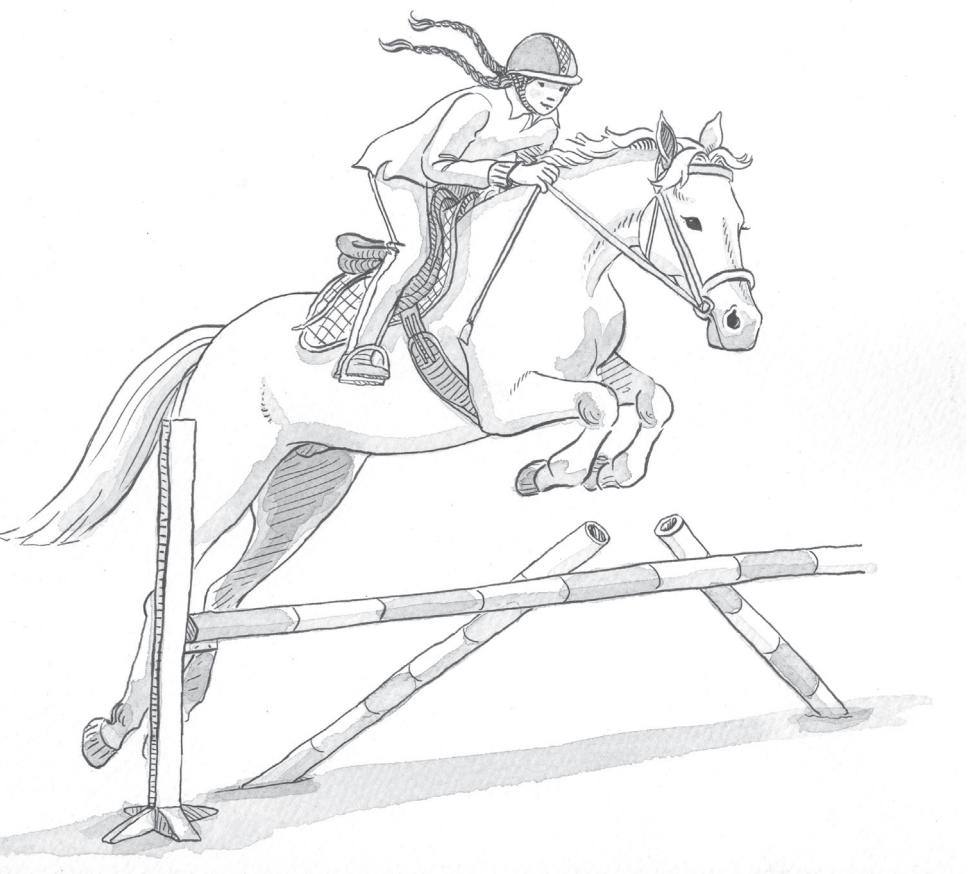


On Saturday morning, Tilly was working Magic in the sand school. She'd started doing some jumping with him, and she'd been having trouble because he was drifting to the left over the fences. With Duncan's help, she was trying to teach Magic to keep to the middle. They had set up a low upright with two poles placed in an upside-down V shape. The poles rested on the top bar like an arrow pointer, helping Magic to keep straight.



'Nice work,' said Duncan. 'It's really helping him. It's important to sort this out now, before he gets into the habit of jumping left. If we don't, the problem will become exaggerated the more we ask him to do. This way, when we build in more complex jumps and cross-country training, he'll have a solid base to work from.'

Tilly agreed. She knew it was vital to concentrate on attention to detail, because a horse like Magic deserved the best training, and she was determined to take him to the top.



'It's good that you'll be around for the whole summer,' Duncan added. 'With you on board, Magic's bound to make progress. Hopefully, he'll be ready to jump some solid cross-country fences by September. Right, that's enough for today.'

Tilly pulled up at the fence Duncan was leaning on. She hopped off Magic and gave him a rewarding pat.

'I'll come every day,' she said. 'There's nowhere I'd rather be.'

Just then, Tilly's phone buzzed. She pulled it out of the pocket of her navy jodhpurs. There was a message from Brook:



HEY! SORRY IT'S SHORT NOTICE BUT FANCY JOINING ME AND MY FAMILY ON HOLS IN CORNWALL NEXT WEEK? HOPE YOU CAN. MY MUM WILL SPEAK TO YOURS. BROOK X

'Well, almost nowhere,' said Tilly. 'Oh dear.

Brook's invited me to go on holiday with him. I'd LOVE to but…'



'Sounds too good to miss,' said Duncan. 'Don't worry. Magic will cope. Go and enjoy yourself. I expect you and your brother have lots of catching up to do.'

Tilly smiled. She and Brook definitely had lots of catching up to do. They'd first met on a visit to Cavendish Hall, the exclusive boarding school that Brook, and Tilly's friend Cally, attended. It had been obvious then that there was a connection between them. Now they knew why. Thanks to their matching horsehair bracelets they had discovered they were brother and sister, separated when they were tiny and adopted by different families.



Going on holiday with Brook was possibly the only thing Tilly would sacrifice a week with Magic Spirit for. She looked into Magic's eyes. She knew he'd understand,

although the thought of being apart from him made her feel sad.

'It'll only be for a little while, boy. I'll miss you. Maybe one day, I'll take you on holiday with me.'

An image popped into Tilly's head, of her and Magic galloping on a long sandy beach, waves lapping along the shore. It was wonderful.

