PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Nimrod the Circus Pony



PIPPA FUNNELL
OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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Head of Zeus Ltd
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WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM



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Tilly Redbrow loved anything and everything to do with horses. She spent every spare minute at Silver Shoe Farm, where her dream horse, Magic Spirit, was stabled. Tilly and Magic had a special bond. Angela, Silver Shoe's owner, said it was rare to see such an affinity between a horse and a rider. Her father, Jack Fisher, was sure that one day Tilly and Magic would achieve amazing things together.

Tilly and Magic had joined Silver Shoe after Tilly helped to rescue him from a busy roadside in the town.

Magic had been malnourished and neglected, and Tilly, who had always adored horses, had never had the chance to ride. Now everything



had changed. Magic was a stunning 16hh grey with top class potential. And Tilly was a dedicated and talented young rider.

This was how, on a wintery day, Tilly came to be riding Magic Spirit through the local countryside tracks, with her friends, Mia and Cally.



Mia still hadn't got a horse of her own since growing out of her pony, Rosie, but she was exercising one of the riding school horses, a chestnut called Watson. Cally was on her dun Connemara, Mr Fudge.

They were working on their paces, getting their horses to trot and canter with a little more expression. Magic was wearing a new bit and was being responsive to Tilly's aids. She made sure her hands stayed very still so that the bit didn't move around. The more her hands moved, the more sensitive and fussy he became in his mouth.

'Watch out for that signpost ahead,' warned Cally, as they turned the corner on to Cobbin's End Lane. 'That wasn't there last time I rode this way.'

Tilly looked up and saw a large rectangular sign in the ground.

She knew unexpected or unfamiliar objects could sometimes spook horses, so she made

sure Magic walked calmly, by nudging him gently with her heel and reassuring him in a soft voice. Even though she understood him well, his difficult past meant he could be cautious.

Luckily, neither Magic, Watson nor Mr Fudge seemed bothered by the sign. As they passed it, the girls took a closer look. It showed silhouettes of clowns, trapeze artists and performing horses, against a bright candy-striped background.

'Lyons' Circus Has Arrived,' read Tilly. 'Cool. We should go and see it.'

'Oh no,' said Mia. 'We're probably too late. Look what it says…'

A sticker across the bottom read: 'Last ever show tonight. Don't miss out!'

'Shame,' said Tilly.



'That sticker could be days old. I would've liked to have seen their horses. Never mind. I suppose there's always next year.'

'Doesn't sound as though there'll *be* a next year,' said Cally. 'Last ever show. It must be closing down.'

Tilly thought of the horses she'd seen at a circus when she was little. Beautiful Palominos flying round the ring, their manes and tails flowing, and plumes of feathers attached to their saddles. She was disappointed she'd missed the chance to see more of them.

Suddenly through the trees, in the field beyond, she caught a glimpse of colour. Red and yellow stripes.

'What's that?' she said, slowing so as not to alarm Magic. Cally and Mia slowed with her.

'Looks like a tent,' said Cally.

'Not just a tent,' said Mia. 'That's the Big Top! Which means the circus is still in town!'

Tilly gasped. Magic felt the tension in her



muscles and began to side-step, as though he was excited too.

'What do you think?' said Tilly, patting his neck. 'Shall we go to the circus and see those clever performing horses? I wish you could see them too. Maybe they could teach you a few tricks!'

Magic stamped his front hoof.

'We have a plan for tonight then,' said Mia. 'Last chance ever, remember?'

'Good idea,' said Tilly. 'I'll check with my mum. We could make it a Silver Shoe Farm outing!'

'Plus me,' said Cally. 'I can be an honorary member, can't I?'

Cally had shared Rosie at Silver Shoe Farm with Mia, until her parents had moved to Dubai, and Tilly had taken over. Now Cally went to Cavendish Hall, the local boarding school Tilly's brother, Brook, also attended. Cally visited Silver Shoe as often as she could because, like Tilly and Mia, it was the place she felt happiest.

'Do you think they'll have acrobats? And performing dogs? And people on stilts? I love the circus!' said Mia gleefully.

The girls turned their horses and headed back towards the stables. They talked for the

entire journey, non-stop chatter about Lyons' performing horses.

'What tricks do you think they do?' asked Tilly.

'Amazing stuff,' said Mia. 'I once saw a circus horse jump through a flaming hoop!'

'I bet they have fancy bridles,' said Cally. 'I can't wait to see them.'