PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Moonshadow the Derby Winner



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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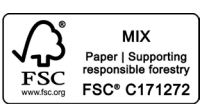
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One

It was a chilly winter morning. A layer of sparkly frost covered the yard at Silver Shoe Farm, but Tilly Redbrow didn't mind how cold it was. She was always happy to be up early, mucking out and feeding Magic Spirit.

Tilly knew how lucky she was to be helping at Silver Shoe. Not everyone got the opportunity to spend so much time with their favourite horse, to ride every day, and have lessons with a teacher as good as Angela, Silver Shoe Farm's owner.



Tilly made her way carefully across the icy ground towards Magic's stable. As she opened the door, he came to greet her.

Tilly was pleased to see him looking snug in his fleece-lined winter rug. She was also glad of her own Toggi gloves and woolly hat, which had been a Christmas present from her friends, Mia and Cally.

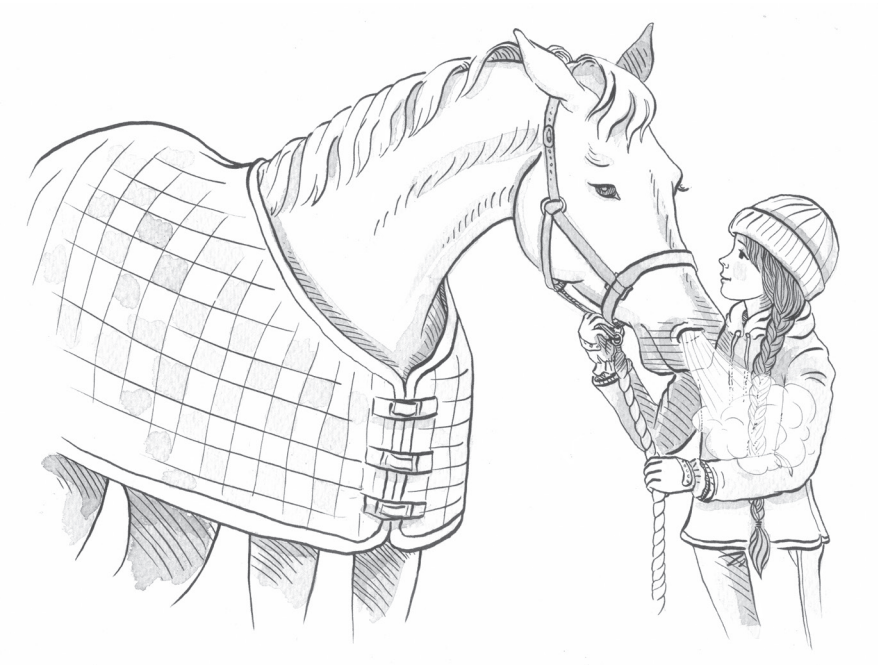
'Good morning, Magic. How are you today? It's freezing out here, but beautiful too – like a winter wonderland!'

Magic snorted, which looked like two puffs of smoke coming from his nostrils in the cold air.

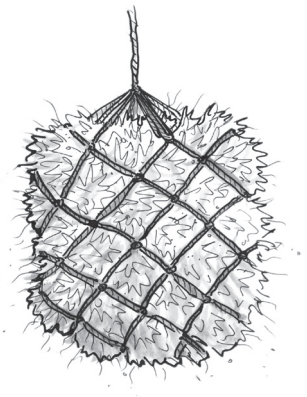
'Is that your impression of a dragon?'

He stared at her for a moment, then came close and nuzzled her shoulder. Tilly stroked his neck, whispering softly and telling him how fantastic he was.

It wasn't long ago that Tilly had never even been on a horse. She'd always loved them. She'd read lots of pony magazines, books and



annuals. She'd watched hours of Badminton and Burghley on television. Her bedroom walls were covered with posters of ponies and horses. And every night she would go to bed dreaming about riding a horse of her own. She'd hoped that one day it would happen, but she'd never imagined it actually would.



Then, when she'd helped rescue Magic Spirit from a busy roadside, her life had changed completely.

Tilly refreshed Magic's bedding and gave him water and hay, then headed for the Silver Shoe club room. Her toes were frozen and she wanted to warm up with a mug of hot chocolate. The club room was a nice place to be at any time of year, but it was particularly welcoming in the winter. It was always warm and cosy, with old leather sofas to sink into.

Mia was there, struggling to undo her purple padded gilet with numb fingers. Mia was one of Tilly's closest friends, along with Cally, and Becky, of course, her best friend from school. Cally was at Cavendish Hall, the same boarding school that Tilly's brother, Brook,

attended. Tilly, Mia and Cally had all shared a pony, called Rosie, before they'd grown too big for her. Happily, Rosie was still at Silver Shoe, the perfect pony for beginners to have their lessons on. Now Tilly rode Magic, and Cally had her dun Connemara, Mr Fudge. Mia was hoping she'd find her perfect horse soon.

'I can't grip the zip. My fingers are soooo cold!' said Mia.





'Let me help you,' said Tilly, as she took off her gloves.

'I hope it's not this cold on Friday for my birthday sleepover,' said Mia.

'We'll have to bring extra thick sleeping bags,' said Tilly. 'I'm going to wear thermals and two big fleeces to sleep in.'

'You won't be doing much sleeping,' said Mia, with a giggle. 'We'll be up all night telling spooky stories and having midnight feasts.'

'Not too spooky. It might be quite scary in the stables after dark.'

'The horses will look after us,' said Mia.

'True.'

The girls had been planning the sleepover for weeks. A group of them were going to stay overnight at Silver Shoe, as near to their favourite horses as they could be. Their parents hadn't been sure at first, but when Angela said that she and Duncan, her head boy,

and some of the other stable hands would be close by in the farm house and could keep an eye on them, everyone had agreed. Tilly and Mia were very excited.

'Here, have this,' said Mia, passing Tilly a hot chocolate. 'Extra marshmallows.'



Just as the girls were getting comfy on the sofas, the club room door swung open. It was Duncan, carrying two large boxes of Polos, which he'd bought the day before from the Cash and Carry.

'Hi, girls. Frosty start, eh? This supply of Polos should last us, so long as you don't spoil our four-legged friends too often.'

He put the boxes on the worktop. 'Do you mind if I put the television on? I want to check the weather. If it's going to stay cold like this I'll need to get some extra grit down in the yard. I don't want anyone slipping.'

The television screen came to life. It was the local morning news. The girls barely glanced at it before turning back to each other to discuss what they were going to get up to on their sleepover.

'We should play the chocolate game, you know, where you have to eat a bar of chocolate with a knife and fork and wear gloves and a hat?'

'Or what about the one where everyone has to write the next line of a silly story?'

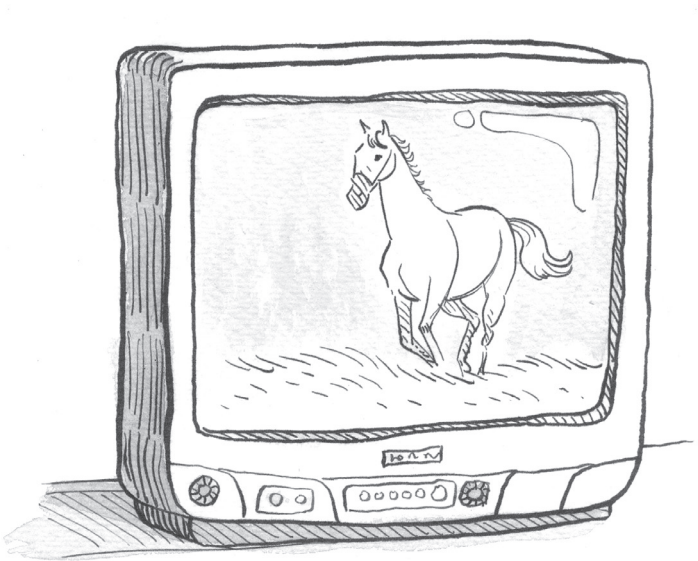
'Yeah. That's good. What else?'

Suddenly, from the corner of her eye, Tilly caught an image on the screen. It was familiar: a silvery grey horse galloping across a field. *Just like Magic Spirit!* She blinked and looked more closely.

'Who's that?' she asked.

'That's Moonshadow,' said Duncan. 'Do you remember? He won the Derby last year. He's so fast. Look at the speed he's going. He's extra special.'

Duncan turned up the volume. The three of them were glued to the screen now.



'Local residents can see this outstanding racehorse, owned by the Archer's Engineering Racing Team, at Cosford County Winter Classic Flat Race this weekend. Good luck, Moonshadow. Good luck, Archer's Engineering. Let's hope he wins again on what will be his first race on an all-weather surface.'

'Won't the ground be too hard for flat racing?' asked Tilly. 'It's so cold.'

'Good point,' said Duncan. 'Actually, these special surfaces are specifically made so they don't freeze.'

'Cool,' said Mia. 'And Moonshadow's coming *here*!'

'Not here,' corrected Tilly. 'He's not actually coming to Silver Shoe.'

'No, I mean, he's coming to our area. He's probably going to stay in some really fancy stable somewhere.'

'You mean Silver Shoe isn't fancy?' said Duncan.

'No, I mean… I didn't… oh…'

'Don't worry,' said Duncan, laughing. 'You're right. A horse like Moonshadow is worth so much money. They'll put him in a top yard, the equivalent of a five star hotel. It'll have to have tight security though.





There've been a couple of problems recently with a criminal gang who have realised these horses are worth several million pounds and are an easy target.'

'Really?' said Tilly. 'That's awful.'

'When there's big money involved, people get greedy.'

'I can't imagine what I'd do if someone stole Magic Spirit,' she said. She thought about it for a moment, then couldn't bear it. It was too upsetting.

