PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Royal Flame the Police Horse



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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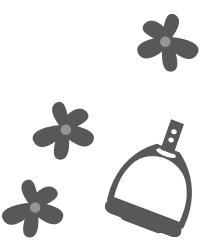
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One

It was chilly for a summer day. Tilly Redbrow was glad of her riding gloves and sat up straight in the saddle. She was having an early morning lesson at Silver Shoe Farm with her trainer, Angela. Tilly and her horse, Magic Spirit, were working on different types of trot.

'That's good, Tilly. Now move into a medium trot. Remember, the rhythm and tempo remain the same as the working trot, but Magic has to cover more ground and lengthen his strides. Longer, bigger steps, without increasing the speed.'



Tilly allowed Magic to extend his head and neck slightly. She kept a good contact with his mouth as she softened her arms forward. Gradually, the length of Magic's steps increased as Tilly put more leg on.

'Great,' said Angela approvingly.

They extended the trot across the diagonal



of the sand school and were about to go again when, in the distance, Tilly caught sight of a magnificent bay horse being led towards the yard. It wasn't a horse she knew, not a Silver Shoe regular. He was tall and sturdy, with a dark copper coat and black points.



'Stay focused, Tilly! You've lost the rhythm. The steps are irregular now. Magic's lost his balance.'

Tilly had felt Magic speed up. They'd both lost concentration. Closing her legs and letting her seat sink deeper into the saddle, Tilly made a transition to halt.

Magic stopped immediately and Tilly walked him back to Angela.

'You were going so well. What happened?' said Angela, shaking her head and smiling.

'I got distracted,' said Tilly. 'It was my fault. Sorry, Magic.'

She leaned forward and patted his neck.

'You'll both have to learn to ignore distractions – think of all the things going on at a competition,' said Angela. 'I know you'd probably prefer to be jumping or out hacking, but flatwork is the best way to improve your riding. It helps horses strengthen up so they become better educated, balanced and

well-mannered. It's important to keep practising.'



'I know,' said Tilly. 'And I will practise, as much as I can. I want us both to be the best we can be.'

'That's the right attitude. Well, I think we've done enough this morning, Tilly. It's cold. Put a turn-out rug on Magic and take him down to the long field. Then I suggest you go and get a drink from the club room. Looks as though you could do with warming up.'

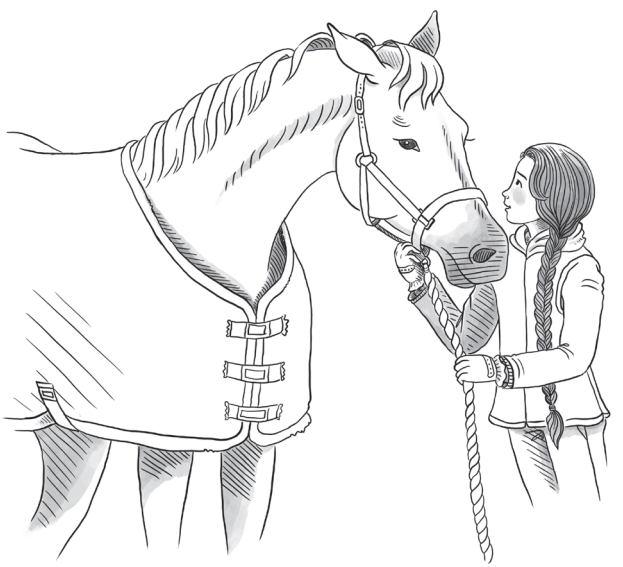
'Okay,' she said. 'Thanks for the lesson.'

'You're welcome,' said Angela. 'We'll have another next week and work on your canter a bit more. See you later.'

As Tilly led Magic away from the sand school, she thought about the bay horse she'd seen. Who was he? She hoped she would find out when she got to the yard.

Tilly untacked Magic. He hadn't sweated while they'd been working, so she didn't have to wash him off, but she did brush him before putting his turn-out rug on.

She'd bought it for him a couple of Christmases ago and it had lasted well, although it was looking a bit shabby now.



Magic had a habit of rolling in the muddiest parts of the field.

'Maybe it's time to get you a new one,' she said. 'A horse as smart as you should have smart rugs to match.'

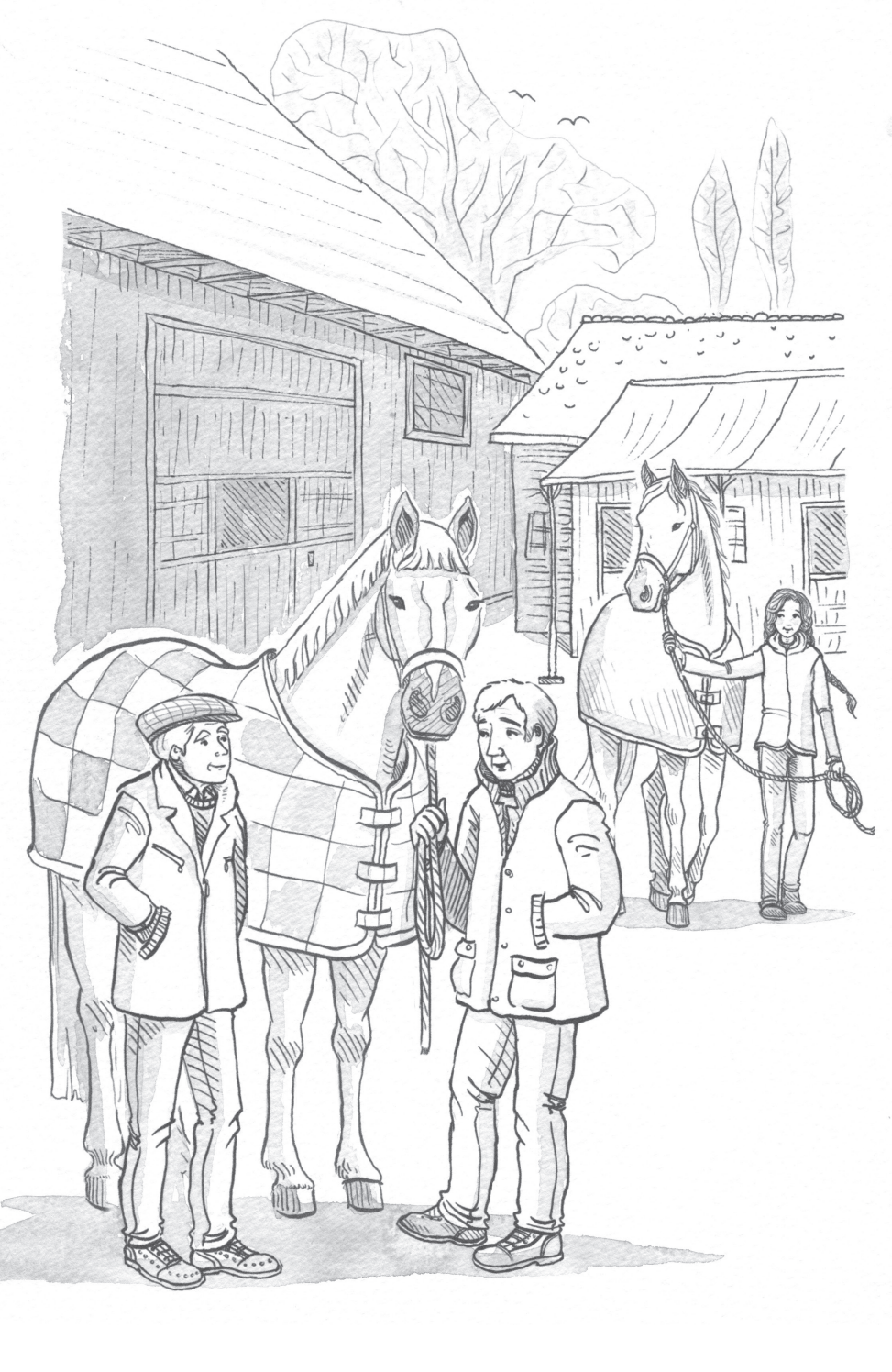
Magic gave a small nicker. She led him across to the feed room and gave him a handful of nuts, then headed down to the long field. On the way, they passed Angela's dad, Jack Fisher. He was talking to a man Tilly didn't recognise. Beside them was the magnificent bay.

'Morning, Tilly,' Jack called.

'Hi.'

'Good to see Magic's rugged up. Martin here says the forecast is for storms and heavy downpours this week. What is going on with the weather these days?'

'Is he yours?' said Tilly, unable to take her eyes off the beautiful horse. He was slightly bigger than Magic, about 16.2hh,



Tilly guessed, and his coat was like satin. He stood proudly. Tilly thought he had a wise expression. She wondered what sort of things he'd done in his life. His ears were pricked forward and alert.

'Ah, sorry, Tilly,' said Jack. 'I haven't introduced you. This is Royal Flame. And this is Martin, an old friend of mine. Martin's off to Greece for a holiday.'

Martin smiled.

'Yes, I'm escaping for a few months. Luckily, Jack's agreed to help me out.'

'We're looking after Royal Flame while he's away,' explained Jack. 'So you'll have plenty of time to get to know him. He's a very special horse.'

'I hope he doesn't mind a change of scene!' said Tilly.

'Oh, Royal Flame isn't fazed by anything,' said Jack.

'He's an ex-police horse,' said Martin proudly.

'He's the bravest animal I know. We worked together in the Mounted Police for years. He's certainly earned his retirement.'

Tilly smiled. The thought of an ex-police horse coming to stay at Silver Shoe was exciting. She remembered the amazing stunts she'd seen at the London International Horse Show – twelve police horses jumping through flaming hoops and performing a musical ride.

Tilly looked at Royal Flame. He stared back, his black eyes shining. She couldn't wait to get to know him properly.