PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Free Spirit the Mustang





PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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'That's it, Magic! Good boy!'

Tilly Redbrow rose in the saddle as her horse, Magic Spirit, performed a smart extended trot. She wanted this movement to be perfect. Top marks. No errors. She pictured the faces of the judges, the scoreboards, and the crowds. She imagined wearing an elegant dressage tailcoat and long, polished riding boots.

'And now into halt,' came a distant voice. 'Halt, please!'

Tilly pulled Magic to a muddled stop. She took the reins in one hand and saluted.



'Tilly, didn't you hear me asking you to halt?' asked Angela, her trainer.

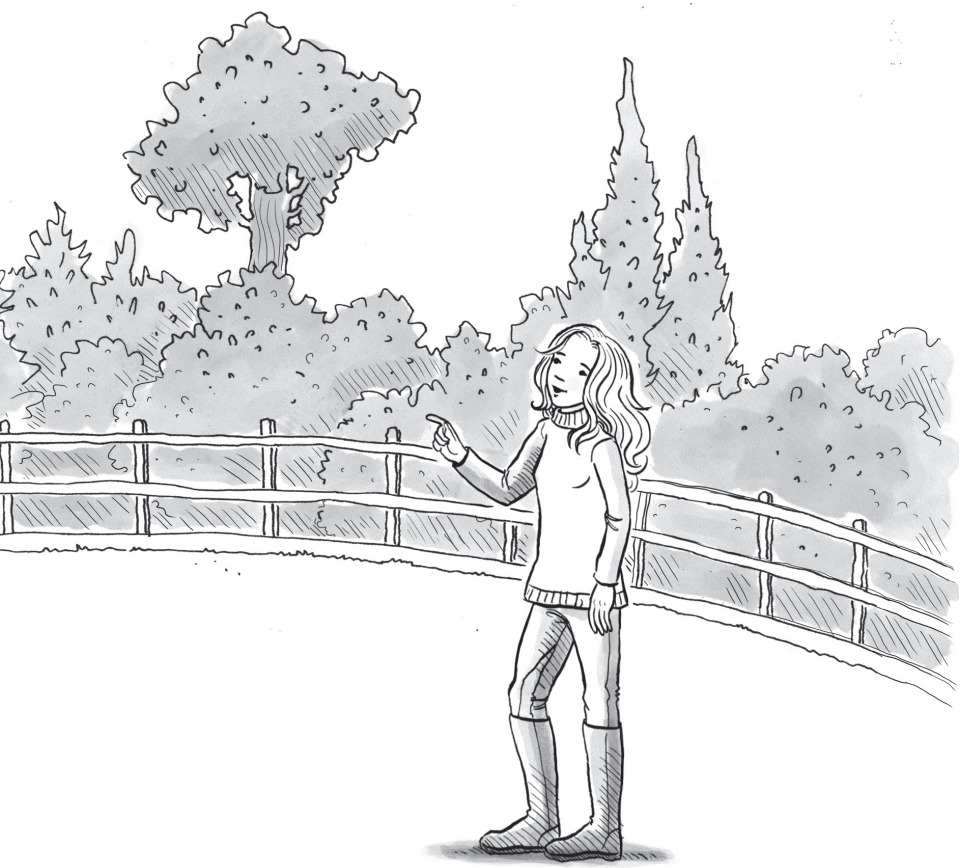
'Yes. Er, I mean, no. I was, I guess I was day-dreaming,' Tilly said, blushing.

'I could see that,' said Angela. 'Where were you this time? At the Olympics? Or Badminton?'

'The Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event,' said Tilly. 'The top event in America.'



'Of course,' said Angela. 'I should have known. I guess Silver Shoe can't compete with that sort of excitement, a real five star event. Not long now. You and Brook must be so excited. I am, but I'm starting to get a tiny bit nervous now that it's a matter of days before we leave.'



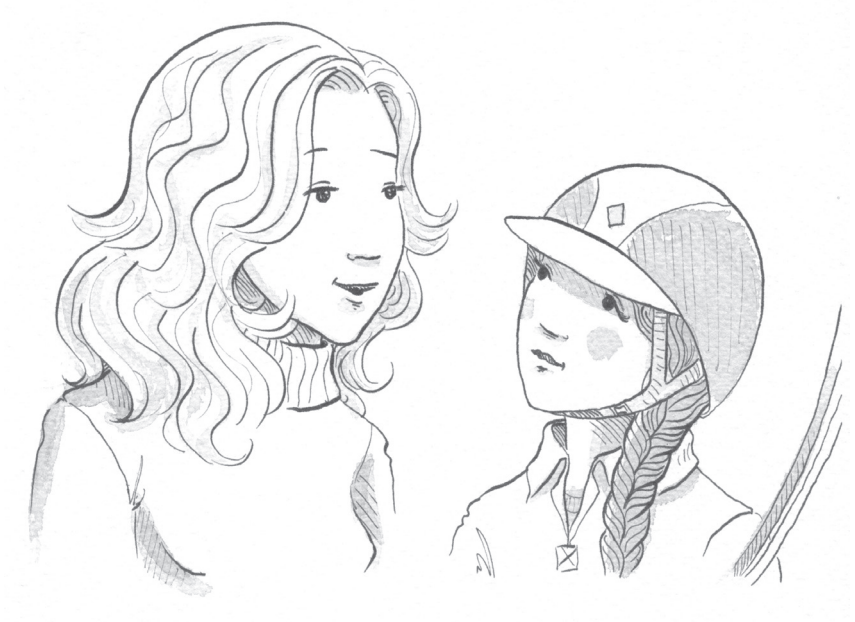
Tilly understood. As the day of their departure approached, Angela had been putting endless hours of work into preparing her beloved event horse, Pride and Joy, for the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event. Ever since Tilly and the girls at Silver Shoe had begged Angela to bring Pride and Joy out of retirement and give him another chance at competing, their partnership had never looked back. Having had so many years off, it was remarkable that there had been no sign of Pride's old injury, and just as remarkable that Angela had been able to step back into the highest level of the sport.



To her delight, Angela had asked Tilly to be her groom for the week, and Tilly's brother, Brook, was also joining them on the trip. He had persuaded his parents to let him go for the experience of seeing top riders at their very best.

'I never realised how much extra work had to be done to get horses fit enough for a three day,' said Tilly. 'I hope it all works out.'

'So do I,' said Angela. 'It's a big challenge after so many years, and we'll be competing with some of the best riders in the world. It takes a very special horse to do well at a three day event. In the dressage, they have to be responsive, supple and elegant, and with so many people watching, it creates an electric atmosphere.'



'It must be so distracting for horses and riders,' said Tilly.

'Yes, it really tests the concentration. That's why in training, we work to teach our horses to respond to us, despite distractions. For the cross-country, horses need to be brave, athletic and fit. And for the show jumping on the final day they need to be able to jump a clear round.'

It sounded thrilling, but extremely tough. Tilly had already been to Badminton and she'd seen clips of Kentucky on the internet, so she knew it was going to be demanding. The cross-country course covered four miles, with forty to forty-five jumping efforts, and the show jumping required horses to clear a height of one metre thirty.

'Wow. I can see why you've been working so hard over the past few months,' said Tilly.

'Yes, but remember it's a

team effort, and grooming is an invaluable role. I know I can trust you to look after Pride and Joy.'

Tilly grinned. The idea of grooming at such a major event was daunting, as well as thrilling, so she appreciated Angela's words of encouragement.



After her dressage lesson, Tilly led Magic back to the yard and tied him up.

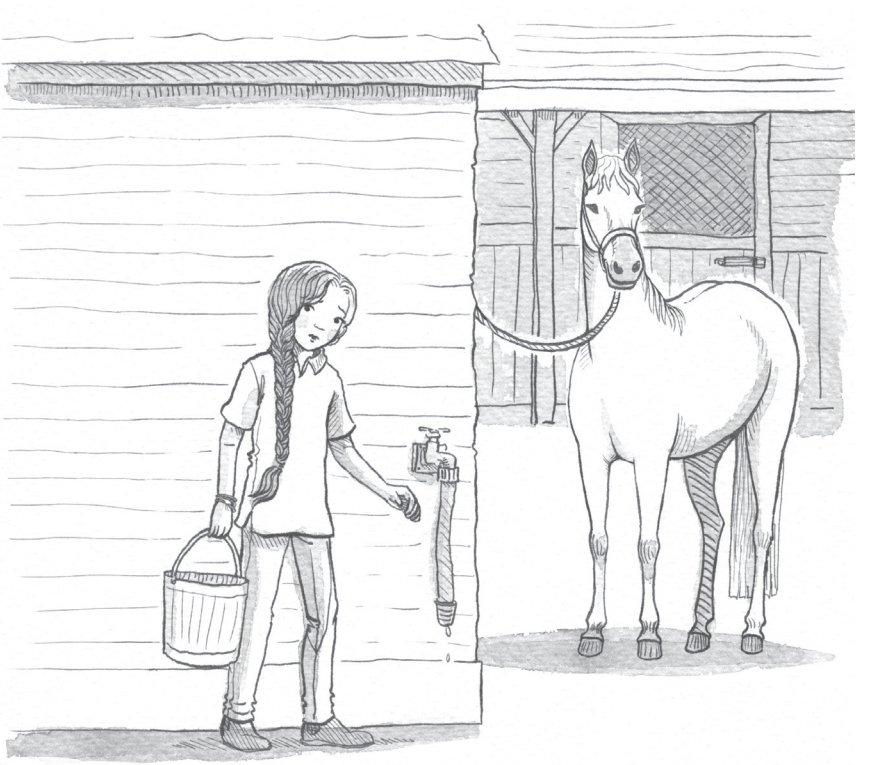
'Let me get you a drink,' she said. 'You must be thirsty after that. Who knows? Maybe some day it'll be you and me competing at Kentucky. I suppose we'd better work on our halts, I use too much hand into them. I apologise, boy, for pulling backwards.'

Magic shook his head. Tilly gave him a pat then carried his bucket to the water tap and filled it. As she did, she noticed one of her horsehair bracelets had come loose. Some of

the hairs had frayed and didn't look as if they'd last much longer.

'Oh, no! I must have caught it on something!'

The bracelets were important to Tilly. They were made from the tail-hairs of the special horses in her life. She wore three on her wrist.



One was from Magic's tail. Another was from the tail-hairs of Stripy, a zebra foal she'd helped rescue while on safari in Africa with Brook. And the other, the one that was coming loose, she'd had since she was born. She and Brook had each been given a bracelet by their birth mother, before she died.

Tilly and Brook believed their bracelets were Native American and that, years ago, their mother had spent some time living in America. They'd been in contact with Chief Flying Eagle, whose people wore similar bracelets and watched over free-roaming mustangs.

Tilly inspected the damage. The bracelet was only just secure and she hated the thought that it might fall off without her noticing.

'I can't lose it, Magic,' she said. 'It's almost the only link I have to my past. How on earth am I going to repair it? I don't think there are many mustangs roaming the streets of North Cosford!'

Before she could think about what to do, her phone rang. It was Brook.

'Hi,' she said. 'How are you?'

'Busy,' he replied. 'I've been trying to sort out a programme for Solo while we're away. I've managed to persuade a friend to ride him for me.' Tilly knew that Brook had ambitions of his own with Solo – he was hoping to get selected later in the season for the Junior British team. 'I can't believe we're really going to the USA! Are you looking forward to it?'

'Are you kidding?' said Tilly. 'I can't wait!'