‘Powerful, wise and gripping’
ANNELISE GRAY

‘A poignant and tender story
of love, loss, friendship and hope’
TANYA LANDMAN

I’d never been to the top of the island or even slept out on my own before, but I had everything planned: pop-up tent, sleeping bag, food.
‘See?’ I told Tooth, showing him the map.
‘We just go north. Easy.’

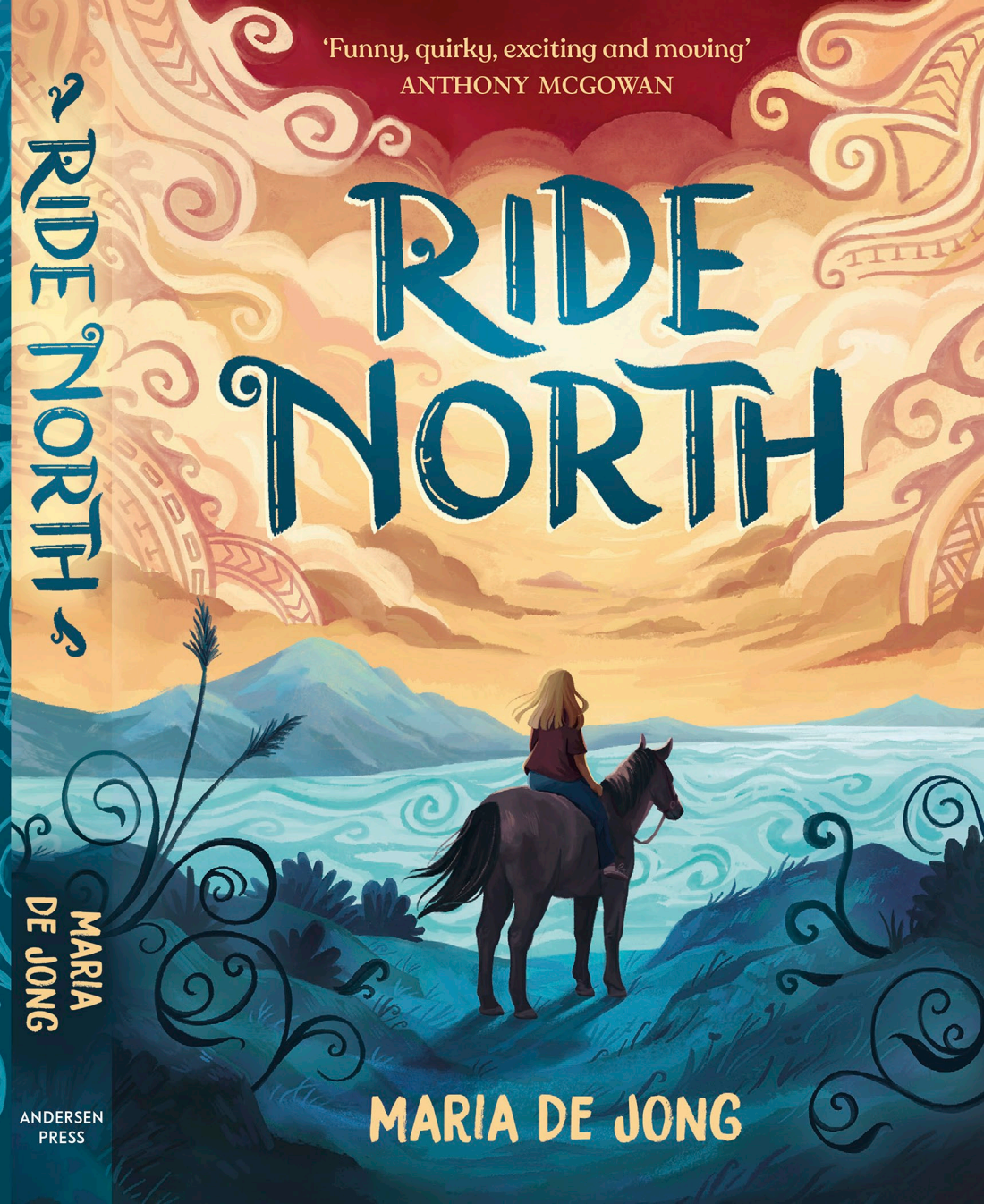
Tooth’s a pony. Not my pony – he’s his own horse. We understand each other. So when he grumbled, I should have listened. Because maps don’t show being cold and hungry and lost, or getting into big trouble. I thought I was on a mission with my best friend, an adventure. Not a fast track to danger. Not a ride for our lives . . .

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RIDE NORTH
MARIA DE JONG
ANDERSEN PRESS

‘Funny, quirky, exciting and moving’
ANTHONY MCGOWAN

RIDE NORTH



MARIA DE JONG

PRAISE FOR *RIDE NORTH*

'I loved this: funny, quirky, exciting and moving. Folly and Tooth are a great double-act. If you're a horse person you'll adore it; if you're not a horse person, it'll turn you into one'
ANTHONY MCGOWAN

'*Ride North* is a quirky adventure with a distinctive voice that explores grief, family, love and connection, especially with friends of the four-legged variety'
FRANCES MOLONEY

'A poignant and tender story of love, loss, friendship and hope. Tooth is quite possibly the most engaging "talking pony" I've ever encountered in fiction. The ending was perfect – made me laugh and cry simultaneously'
TANYA LANDMAN

'A powerful, wise and gripping story from a wonderful new voice in children's literature. *Ride North* is a beautiful tale of love, courage and the unique bond between a girl and her horse. It deserves a place alongside the classic horse and pony stories'
ANNELISE GRAY

‘Maria de Jong weaves a beautiful tale of adventure, survival and hope, exploring the deep bond between a girl and her pony. With vivid prose that brings every scene to life, de Jong makes the reader feel they’re right there alongside Folly and Tooth on their exhilarating, sometimes perilous journey. Through evocative descriptions and compelling narrative, balancing humour, sadness and wonder, de Jong’s skilful storytelling creates a rich, unforgettable experience’

J. P. Rose

‘Maria de Jong’s gorgeously lyrical debut is wry, funny and at times heart-achingly sad. Folly is an engaging young hero: gnarly and determined to ride north with beloved horse Tooth to Cape Rēinga, where Tasman Sea meets Pacific Ocean. Their unique bond allows them to outwit pursuers and overcome obstacles on a vividly painted journey through the beautiful New Zealand landscape’

Gita Ralleigh

‘A surreal, poignant and punchy MG novel, that lovers of adventure, horses and family dramas will devour. The magical elements – occasional sightings of her mother’s ghost, and in particular her relationship with Tooth, who is ally, mentor and wise counsel – are really well done. Tooth brings heaps of humour and warmth to the book. I love the adventure and the magic, but in the end it’s the emotional heart and punch and – no spoilers – family resolution, that lift this great MG adventure’

Chris Vick

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RIDE NORTH

MARIA DE JONG



ANDERSEN PRESS

In Māori culture, Cape Rēinga is a sacred site where spirits take their final leave from the world of the living. It is not a cemetery or a place to scatter human ashes.

This is a made-up story. Any similarity to actual events or to horses or people you may know is pure chance.



For Mum, who loved children and books.
For Dad, who took me to the horses.
For Mauro, who said, 'Dream on!'
and meant it the right way.


Folly & Tooth's Journey
Cape Rēinga
Te Paki dunes
Ninety Mile Beach
Awanui
Kaitaia
Kohukohu
Rawene
Waima
Mataraua Forest
Mamaranui
Dargaville
To Auckland
New Zealand

1

It was my first time skipping school, and even though I'd biked to Tooth's paddock a million times before, it felt strange to be going there so early on a weekday. Down at the river road I hid behind a bush, changed out of my uniform and stuffed it into my backpack. I didn't want some nosy grown-up asking why I wasn't in class.

The Wairoa was still churned up after the bad weather, shining like a pinky-brown highway in the morning sun. Ducks rode fast on the current. A skiff that had broken its mooring bobbed along with them.

I had everything figured out. Once I reached the paddock the only thing left to do was sort the gear. Tooth would

grumble again about having to carry it, I'd promise him extra oats and we'd be on our way. Easy.

That truck driver must have been flooring it. The engine noise shook the air. I glanced back and saw a metal grille coming at me like bared teeth, and as I did, my front wheel hit a pothole. The bike wobbled. The truck clipped the back wheel and then for the strangest moment everything warped: I was fast-floating and the bike was slow-bouncing and somewhere a dog was yowling like a sick violin.

I hit the ground. The truck roared off. The road was empty. No one saw a thing.

2

I woke staring up Tooth's left nostril, his whiskers tickling my face.

'You look terrible, what happened?'

'A truck hit me.' I sat up, woozy. 'How did I get here?'

'Walked. I whinnied but you didn't notice. And you forgot to close the gate.'

I groaned. The truck . . . the mangled bike lying beside me on the river bank . . . it all came back. I could have been killed! A memory of my own plodding footsteps flashed through my head. I'd been in shock. The same part of my brain that had set me on autopilot to the paddock must have told me the shelter would be a good place to rest.

I groaned again. Tooth gave me a friendly nudge, shying

away at my '*Ow!*' of pain. My arm throbbed where I'd landed on it. When I pulled up my T-shirt sleeve there was a dark swirly bruise, though amazingly nothing seemed broken.

'Impressive.' He drew closer again for a better look. 'So it's off, then.'

'What's off?'

'The trip.'

I knew I'd been forgetting something.

'No!' I clambered to my feet. 'We're going!'

He snorted. 'My big mouth. To be honest, you don't look up to much.'

'I'm fine.' Truth was I felt awful, but making it to the paddock after getting sideswiped by a truck seemed like a sign that the trip was meant to be.

Tooth gave me an 'Oh?' look and worked his jaw, considering.

'All right,' he said at last, 'but I want a decent feed first. Call me when you're ready.' He ambled off to graze.

I had to do most of the packing one-handed because my arm hurt, so the backpack came out pretty lumpy, but everything fit. The pop-up tent was a problem. Tooth and I had to look normal. Who took a neon-green pancake bag on an ordinary afternoon ride? In the end I rolled it up, rammed it down one side of the pack and covered the part poking out with a T-shirt. Not great, but better.

Tooth trotted back over when I whistled. I gave him a carrot and a peppermint to put him in a good mood, then brushed and saddled him.

'Cushy,' he said when I'd arranged the sleeping bag under the saddle blanket. I went over his hooves one last time before mounting. 'You did that yesterday,' he pointed out. I checked them anyway. A lame pony would ruin everything.

My arm screamed when I slung the backpack on, but it was better once I had it in position. I climbed into the saddle from the fence.

'Well, here goes.'

Tooth was playing it cool, but I could tell he was eager too. He didn't complain about the load and there was a spring in his step as we left the paddock. It was pretty quiet on the road, mostly farm trucks, a car or two, one tour bus. Things would really get going when the holidaymakers started heading north next day. By then we planned to be in the back country.

My heart was fluttering. We were on our way! When we came to a wide stretch, Tooth broke into a canter without a touch from me. As his hooves drummed the grass verge I gave a whoop of joy. He put on a final burst, then slowed back down to a jog.

'This pad thing's hot,' he said, meaning the sleeping bag. 'My back's sweating already.'

'I'll take it off at the dirt road.'



Soon the bungalows and lawn pools and double carports became farm country where the fence lines disappeared into

the hills and a smell of hay mixed in with the heat. The land seemed to stretch out properly and breathe. There were cows, sheep, horses – even deer. Through Tooth's pricked ears the road unwound ahead as simple as the line I'd drawn on the map tucked in my pack.

'See – told you it wasn't hard,' I said, swinging my legs and feeling smug.

He blew through his nose. 'My hooves will decide that.'

We passed a farmhouse with a car just like Dad's parked in the driveway.

'What do you think he'll do when he figures out I'm gone?'

'Call the police. And when they see *I'm* missing they'll put two and two together and start looking for a girl on a horse. Trust me – you'll be sleeping in your own bed tonight.'

I stuck my chin out. 'No I won't.' Who would notice his empty paddock? It was back from the road and hidden by a belt of trees. Apart from Dad, who'd dropped by in winter to

bring hay bales, the last people I'd seen go near it had been some council workers marking land boundaries. That had been weeks ago. Tooth was wrong. We were going to do this thing. We had the map and the pop-up and easily enough supplies. 'Best Food,' I said quickly, before he could bring down the mood. It was a game we had, telling each other our best this or that.

'Stud farm oats,' he answered after a moment. 'Stolen.'

'Huh?'

Before he came to Dargaville Tooth was a track pony on a stud farm. Track ponies calm the racehorses down. The grazing had been great, but overall he hadn't enjoyed his time there much. Thoroughbreds can be uppity.

'All the horses on the farm except me were on fancy training diets. Oats, corn, barley, molasses – you name it. Always bragging about who had the best deal. It got so I had to even things up.'

'How?'

He whinny-chuckled. 'I figured out how to open the catch on the feed room door. It drove those blowhards crazy. "You don't earn it like we do," ' he said, mimicking a whiny racehorse. 'I got fatter than a summer tick.'

'Did the owner ever find out?'

He nodded. 'Caught me with my face in a feed bin. I did time in starvation.'

'What's that?'

'A paddock that cows are grazing out. Imagine: me, with cows!'

'What's wrong with cows?'

'They fart.'

'So do you!'

'Not like a cow.'

Secretly I was thinking the stud farm had left him with some uppity ideas of his own, but all I said was, 'Chips are my

BF today.' I didn't mention the fish that went with them. Tooth thinks eating other animals is gross.

Even though I didn't let on, his words about the police had set me worrying. We had to leave the main road.

'Come on, let's get moving.'

I urged him into a trot.