PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Team Training



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MEDALLIST

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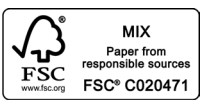
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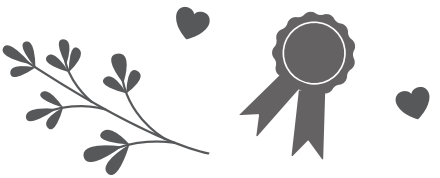
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Chapter One

Tilly Redbrow knew that not everyone's dreams came true. She was determined that her dreams would though. She'd known since she was little that she wanted to work with horses. And from the moment she'd first sat in the saddle, she'd known she wanted to be a champion. Above all, she'd known that the horse she wanted to win with was her beloved grey, Magic Spirit. She couldn't believe that today she was a step closer to that dream coming true. She was on her way to Junior Squad training.

She leaned across the passenger seat of Mrs Ashton-Smith's horsebox and peered at the sat nav.

'It's not far now,' she said, checking the distance it showed they still had to travel.

'Just a few miles,' said Mrs Ashton-Smith. 'Look out for a turning on the left. What's the name of the farm again?'

'Hancocks,' said Tilly proudly. 'Hancocks Farm and Event Yard.'

She sat back, twiddled her horsehair bracelets, and watched as they sped past woods and fields, keen to catch her first glimpse of the yard. She was thrilled that she was about to spend a week living and training with Livvy James, an international event rider she'd always admired. When Tilly was younger, she'd watched Livvy on television, unable to tear herself away as Livvy had simply sailed

over the most terrifying-looking obstacles Tilly had ever seen at the Badminton and Burghley Horse Trials. Livvy was known for being brilliant in all three phases: dressage, show jumping and cross-country. Tilly had posters of her all over her bedroom walls – Livvy and her amazing thoroughbred, Evening Star. The biggest poster still hung above her bed, an image of Evening Star, a rich dark chestnut with a white blaze, staring out with big bold eyes. Tilly had gazed at it a thousand times, had dreamed of what it would be like to ride a horse that incredible.

That was before she'd met Magic though. Things had changed. Her success riding Magic, rising through the area competitions, then impressing at the Pony Club championships, had earned her a place on the Junior Squad. The week's training with Livvy was her first squad requirement. As if that wasn't brilliant enough, Tilly's brother, Brook,

also a talented rider, would be joining them, with his horse, Solo.

Brook gave Tilly a nudge.

'Do you think Livvy James will be there to meet us in person?'

'I hope so,' said Tilly. 'I'm worried I'll be stupidly star-struck though.'

Brook smiled. 'I bet she's really nice. She always sounds so friendly when she's being interviewed at events. Anyway, I'm not sure it's Livvy James you need to worry about...'

Tilly pulled a face. She knew exactly who Brook was referring to. Kya Mackenzie. Even though Tilly and Kya were members of the squad and had been teammates at the Pony Club championships, they were also rivals. Tilly felt wary of Kya. She couldn't forget that she'd betrayed her trust, spreading gossip about Tilly being too poor to afford a horse like Magic, about Magic being a 'stolen' ride – and if there was one thing Tilly was sensitive

about, it was Magic. True, he wasn't officially hers, but it wasn't because she'd stolen him. It was because she'd rescued him.

Suddenly, Tilly felt anxious. She hated the thought that Magic's real owner, the cruel person who'd abandoned him on a dangerous roadside, could one day come marching into the yard at Silver Shoe Farm and claim him. The worry that Magic could be taken from her and that there'd be nothing she could do about it often kept her awake at night. Quickly, she searched for a distraction.

'Look,' said Brook. 'Did you see that?'

'What?'

'A sign with a horse logo.'

Tilly turned. There it was, an elegant wooden board, saying, 'Hancocks Farm and Event Yard' above a silhouette of a galloping horse. Brook's mum turned the wheel of the horsebox and skilfully manoeuvred into the lane.

At first, all Tilly could see were hedgerows. The lane seemed to go on forever, winding and curving, like a road to nowhere. Then, through a gap in the foliage, she spotted a huge sunlit stretch of grass and, beyond it, an array of red brick barns and stables. These were the only buildings in the entire valley, surrounded by woods and hills. There were horses grazing everywhere. The familiar scent of hay and manure wafted through the open window. She breathed it in and smiled.

'I promise I won't worry about Kya Mackenzie,' she said, giving Brook a nod. 'I'm not going to let *anything* spoil this week.'

'Good for you,' said Brook. 'Hey, I think we're the first to get here.'

Brook's mum parked and the three of them hopped out of the cab.

'Such a long drive,' said Tilly, yawning and stretching. 'I hope Magic and Solo are okay.'

She glanced around the yard.

She desperately wanted to see Livvy James, but at the same time, the prospect filled her with nerves. Just as she was looking at the farmhouse, the back door swung open. A young man waved.

'Hey! You're juniors that have come for training, right? Welcome to Hancocks!'

'Hi,' said Brook. 'Thanks. I'm Brook Ashton-Smith and this is my sister, Tilly Redbrow. And this is my mum. She's dropping us off.'

Brook's mum beamed. The man came and shook their hands.

'I'm Nick,' he said. 'You'll be seeing a lot of me this week. I'm Livvy's right-hand man. I manage the yard for her.'

Tilly wanted to ask him where Livvy was, but didn't.

'You've had quite a journey, I expect,' Nick said. 'Let's get your horses settled. I'll get a couple of our girls to help you. Then you can relax while you wait for the others.'

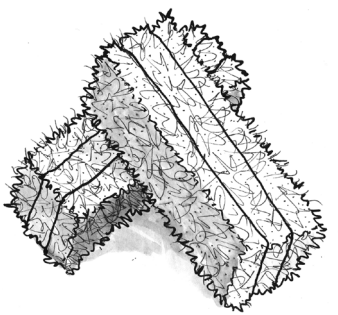
Brook and Tilly went round to the back of the lorry and let the ramp down. Magic and Solo both whickered on hearing their familiar voices.

'I think they're looking forward to some fresh air,' said Tilly.

Brook led Solo down the ramp, while Tilly attended to Magic. She opened his partition and gave him a huge hug.

'Hello, boy. Haven't you been patient? Guess what? We're here!'

Magic pricked his ears and whinnied. She untied his rope, gave him a reassuring pat, then led him carefully down the ramp. As they got to the bottom, one of Nick's stable hands, a young girl with spiky red hair, stepped forward to introduce herself. Magic immediately threw up his head and flattened his ears.



'Whoa!' said Tilly. 'It's okay, boy!'

Magic snorted. The red-haired girl moved away, but his mood continued.

'Do you need a hand?' said Nick. 'Perhaps he'll be happier once he's stabled.'

He offered to take Magic from Tilly.

'Best not to,' she said. 'He can be a bit funny with people he doesn't know. Don't worry, I'll get him calm.'

She held Magic, touched his face, got him to look at her rather than worry about the strange people and buildings around him. Then she whispered in a firm, low voice, 'Good boy. That's it, good boy, Magic. You know I'm here. So behave yourself.'

Eventually, he lowered his head and settled.

'Nice work,' said Nick. 'You've got a hypnotic touch, Tilly.'

'Thanks,' she replied.

For the next half an hour, she walked Magic around and gave him a pick of grass, thinking

it was the best way to get him used to the new environment. She led him past the stable blocks and around the big barns, then alongside the indoor and outdoor arenas. Everything was immaculate. It was the tidiest yard she'd ever seen. It was pretty too. The paths were lined with terracotta planters full of colourful flowers. The pastures were lush and the sand school was perfectly harrowed and the corners hand-raked. Grooms and horses came and went, looking busy and purposeful.

Eventually, Tilly came to a fence and what looked like the end of Livvy James' land. After lingering for a while, she realised it was time to head back. Brook would be wondering where she and Magic had got to, and Magic needed to be stabled. She tugged on his lead rope and was about to walk away, when she heard the clip-clopping of hooves. Beyond the fence, Livvy James emerged over the crest of the hill, against a blazing blue sky, riding

an all too familiar horse – the magnificent Evening Star.

Tilly stopped in her tracks. Magic also stood to attention, as though he knew what this moment meant to her. All Tilly could think was that there, in front of her – breathing, living, real – were the horse and rider who were her inspiration. And now, *now* they were coming towards her.

