PIPPA'S PONY TALES

Team Magic



PIPPA FUNNELL

OLYMPIC MED

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Team Magic

Hi Everyone

I've been busy with all my horses this year but I'm delighted to share these stories about Tilly and her beloved horse, Magic Spirit. Still part of my *Pippa's Pony Tales* series, they focus on Tilly and Magic's partnership as they work together and compete at a higher level. Tilly's way of riding reflects my way of riding. The advice that Tilly is given is what I would teach, and it's how I've been taught. Over my career it's what I have found has worked for me as I've competed with my horses, so I hope you find it useful. Most of all I hope you enjoy reading Tilly and Magic's adventures as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

Keep reading, keep riding and follow your dreams!

See you soon,





One

'She makes it look easy,' said Tilly, sounding agitated. 'How *does* she do it?'

Her eyes were glued to the small television that sat on top of the trophy cabinet in Silver Shoe Farm's clubhouse. She was watching her eventing heroine, Livvy James, riding her chestnut gelding, sail over a trakehner at last year's Bramham Horse Trials.

The jump was a real rider-frightener – a huge log suspended over a deep, wide ditch. The fence was intimidating enough, with the enormous ditch, but it was made worse by

the fact it was positioned at the entry to a wood with a big drop on the landing side. Tilly could understand why riders might be tempted to override these fences, because they look so intimidating, but for a horse they were really straightforward jumps.

Tillly felt she was making too much of an issue of it in her head. Her imagination made the ditches wider and deeper, but she knew this was a mindset she had to overcome.

She rewound the footage and played it again. Just as she leaned closer to the screen, determined to spot her heroine's secrets to success, Angela, Silver Shoe Farm's owner, came in with two mugs of hot chocolate.

'Trakehners, again?'

Tilly frowned.

'I need to study the speed Livvy approaches at. There's bound to be a trakehner at the event this weekend and I don't want to have a problem if I'm to have any chance of being

selected for the Regional Team.'

'Oh, yes, the Under 18 Championships at Weston Park,' said Angela. 'They're coming up soon, aren't they? I completely forgot that it includes the Regional Team Championships.'



'At the end of the month,' said Tilly. 'They'll be picking the team based on this weekend's competition. I know Magic and I are more than capable of getting selected if all goes well.'

'If it's the trakehner you're worried about, we'll go out and practise as soon as you're ready.'

Duncan had made one recently. A tree had come down in a storm earlier in the year and with help from Angela's father he'd placed it over the ditch that ran along the bottom of the long field.

'Thanks,' said Tilly.

She sipped her hot chocolate and tried to think positively. She appreciated Angela's offer. Angela had plenty of competition experience and always gave the best advice. Nonetheless, Tilly's unease about the Weston Park selection was bothering her. In her heart, she knew she could overcome her anxiety with trakehners. What she couldn't conquer, however, was the terrifying prospect that any day now, her horse, Magic Spirit, might be taken away from her.



It had been a while since Tilly had received the first threatening email from Fred Webb, a farmer, who claimed Magic belonged to him and that he had the paperwork to prove it. Tilly had tried to ignore his messages at first, hoping Fred Webb would just go away.

But he didn't.

He wanted Magic back – despite the fact that he'd abandoned the poor grey at a roadside some years before. Tilly feared he was only interested because he'd realised Magic was worth something now, having been featured in local papers and riding magazines as a potentially top-class event horse, a novice to watch out for. Fred didn't care about Magic's welfare. He just wanted to make money.

It was Tilly who'd nursed Magic back to health, Tilly and the team at Silver Shoe Farm who'd had the patience and passion to train him. And it was Tilly who'd formed the intense bond with him. The thought of that being broken was like someone slowly breaking her heart in two. The worry stayed with her constantly: morning, noon and night. Even so, she did her best to stay strong, to believe that it would all work out for them.

She took a deep breath, switched off the television and placed her unfinished hot chocolate on the table.

'Okay, Angela, bring on the trakehner!' she said, casting her anxieties aside. 'Let's practise right now.'

'That's the spirit!' said Angela.

The trakehner Duncan had built wasn't nearly as large as the one Livvy James had tackled, but it was still daunting for a young rider like Tilly. Magic was only hesitant because Tilly took her legs off and allowed him to look down into the ditch.

'He's only bothered because he can sense that you are,' Angela explained. 'Over-riding it from too far out will make him suspicious. Show him you're confident, then he'll trust you. I know trakehners look frightening, but

really they are one of the more straightforward fences. Don't focus on the ditch. Focus on the timber, just as you would with a normal fence. Sit up, eyes up, ride forward and take it in your stride.'

Tilly shortened her reins, gave Magic a nudge with her heels, and picked up a good energetic canter. When they approached the jump, they added a little speed and went at it straight. Despite Angela's advice, as the ditch loomed Tilly felt her gaze drawn to the hollow beneath the log. As soon as she looked down, so did Magic, which made him put in a rather awkward jump.

Tilly groaned with frustration.

'I told you not to drop your focus!' insisted Angela. 'When you look down, you simply pitch your weight forward. You have to sit up and keep him more forward without over-riding and chasing him at the fence.'

'Okay,' said Tilly. 'Okay.'

Determined to overcome this, she gave Magic an encouraging kick with both legs, then took him round a second time. She fixed her eyes on a tree in the distance, so that she wouldn't be tempted to look at the ditch. She urged Magic forwards, willing him to be the bold, brave horse she knew he could be, and willing herself to be just as bold and brave. This time she kept him in a much more positive rhythm, picturing the way Livvy rode. Magic cleared the fence with ease, and landed cleanly on the other side.

'As effortless as Livvy James!' said Angela, smiling.

'Good boy!' said Tilly, patting Magic's neck. 'I knew we could do it more confidently.'

Magic shook his head triumphantly as he did joyful little mini-bucks. He always knew when Tilly was pleased with him. He bobbed his head then they trotted back to Angela.

'That was much better. A lot more confident.

If you jump like that at the weekend, then I'd say you'll get picked –'

'Picked for what?' said a voice behind them.

Tilly swung round. It was her brother, Brook, approaching the fence and waving.

'Hi!' she said.

'Hello, Brook,' said Angela.

He leaned heavily on his walking stick. Even though it had been some time since his riding accident, he still relied on it.

'You're looking well,' said Angela, trying to cover her concern.

'Yeah, feeling well,' said Brook. 'I love this time of year.'

He smiled up at the canopy of golden-brown leaves and the blue, blustery autumn sky.

'It's so nice to be outside. I'm fed up of the four walls of that physiotherapy room. Dad drove me over for some fresh air. I've just paid a visit to Solo, so I thought I'd come and check on my favourite sister's training

progress. What is it you're hoping to get picked for?'

Tilly smiled.

'Um, the Junior Regional Team for the Championships at Weston Park – hopefully.'

It pained her to say it.

She knew Brook had had his heart set on the Championships. For ages they'd talked about how it was his big chance to shine. And then it had all been snatched away from him.

The horror of it came back to Tilly in flashes – dreadful images of Solo spooking while hacking on the road, of Brook losing his seat, then being flung to the ground. The sounds of screeching brakes, neighing, shouting and sirens – Tilly knew them only too well, because she'd heard the whole disaster on her phone. To make matters worse, she'd been abroad at the time, grooming for Livvy James at Luhmühlen.

Listening to the trauma, hundreds of miles away, she'd never felt so helpless in her life.

Now, Brook was finally walking again and Solo, his horse, was making progress. Solo had sustained a leg injury that had nearly ended his life, but thankfully, with great vet care, he'd pulled through. Keen to help, Angela had suggested Silver Shoe Farm take Solo on as a companion horse for some of the farm regulars such as Red Admiral and Pride and Joy. That way, Brook and Solo could still spend plenty of time together during their long rehabilitation.

'Weston Park!' said Brook encouragingly. 'Come on, Tilly. You know you'll get picked. You've had such a good season.'

'Yes,' she said, casting her eyes down. 'It's just –'

'Just what?'

'I wish – you *know* what I wish.'

Brook smiled and flicked his hair back. He'd

let it grow since the accident.

'Don't worry about me. I'm fine. I'm on my feet again and, yes, it is frustrating that I'm missing out on some competitions but it's all looking positive for the future. I'll just have to learn how to be patient, give myself and Solo all the time that's needed so that when we make our return we're one hundred per cent ready.'

