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opening extract from

Rosie: The Perfect Pony (Tilly's Pony Tails No. 3)

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One

Tilly Redbrow thought she was the luckiest girl alive. Ever since she was tiny, she had wanted to ride horses. Now her dreams were coming true. She spent every minute she could at Silver Shoe Farm, grooming, feeding and caring for the horses there. Tilly had been part of the Silver Shoe gang ever since she'd rescued an abandoned horse from a busy roadside.



She'd named him Magic Spirit and was his number one fan. She loved being with him and she also loved her weekly riding lessons with Angela, who ran the stables.

The one thing that would make it perfect, she thought, as she hurried down the lane to meet her friends, Mia and Cally – the one thing that would make it all absolutely perfect would be to have a pony of her own. Magic Spirit was her dream horse, but he was a bit too big and still a bit too wild for her. A patient pony was what she needed.

Tilly found Mia standing outside the stables, struggling to untangle a hay net.

"Hiya, Tilly," she said. "Do you fancy watching me practise some jumps today? Duncan has set up a course in the outdoor arena."

"Yeah, I'll come along," said Tilly. "But I've got a lesson with Angela first."

Tilly was learning to ride on Bunny, a gentle pony who belonged to a girl called Zoe. She spent a lot of time with her mum in America, and needed people to exercise and

care for Bunny while she was away.

"Oh dear," said Mia, sounding worried. "Didn't Angela tell you? Zoe got back last night. She's already taken Bunny hacking."

Tilly's heart sank. Now she'd have no pony for her lesson.

"I tell you what," said Mia. "Why don't you take Rosie? I won't be jumping her for a while yet."

Rosie was the pretty strawberry roan that Mia and Cally shared. She was a lovely pony with a gentle temperament.

"Could I?" said Tilly. "That would be great."

"No worries. You'll enjoy riding her. Come on, I'll help you tack up."



Without hesitation, Tilly and Mia collected Rosie and tied her in the yard. Tilly used one of the quick-release knots that Duncan, Angela's head boy, had taught her, while Mia collected the tack from the tack room.

While they were waiting, Tilly stroked Rosie's face and explained:



"I'm going to ride you today, girl. I hope that's okay. I can't wait – Mia and Cally always tell me how lovely you are."

Rosie gently nudged Tilly as if she understood every word.

"Since Rosie's so polite, she only needs a simple eggbutt snaffle," said Mia. "It attaches to this plain leather bridle with a cavesson noseband, and the reins have a rubber grip to stop them slipping through your fingers," she continued.

"Now I need to stand on her left side, called 'the nearside', and put a polypad on her back, which is basically just a numnah with slightly more padding than a plain saddle cloth."

Mia worked steadily as Tilly watched in awe. There was so much to remember! Mia placed the saddle on top of the polypad, taking care to make sure everything was central and that the saddle was correctly placed just behind Rosie's wither. She slid her thumb under the numnah at the front of the saddle and pulled it up, so that there was a gap between Rosie's wither and the numnah.

"Why are you doing that?" asked Tilly.

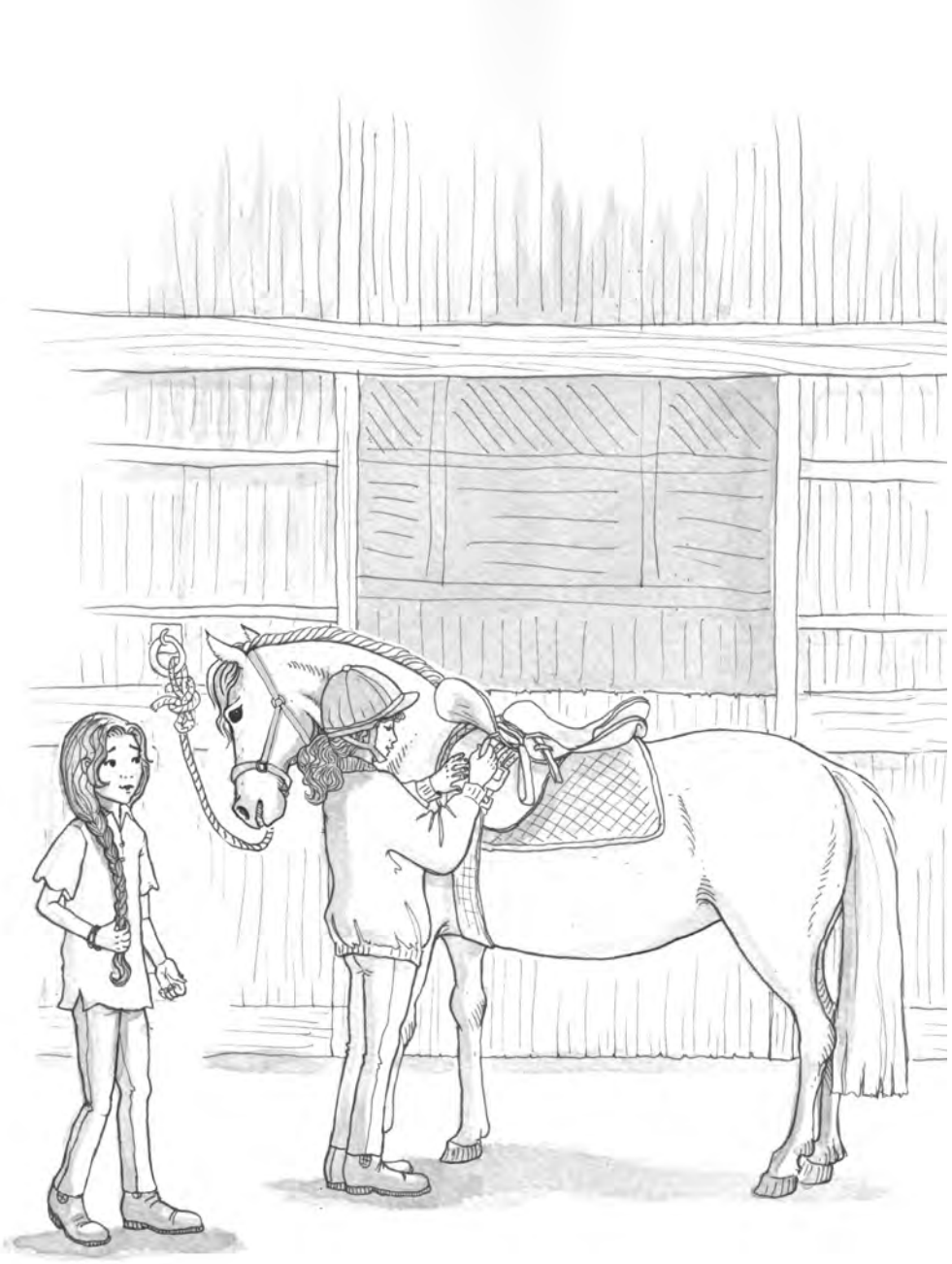
"To make sure she's comfortable and stop any rubbing on her wither," Mia explained. "Okay, now I'm going over to Rosie's right side, the offside, to attach the girth."

Mia attached the webbing girth to the girth straps under the saddle flap, then moved back to the nearside and gently slid the girth up, trying not to pull too hard.

"It's really important the saddle doesn't slip back, but if it does, you might need a breastplate to keep it in place. Luckily for us, Rosie has quite a tubby tummy, which helps the saddle stay in the correct position!"

Carefully, Mia began to fit the bridle. First, she slipped the reins over Rosie's head, and then placed Rosie's head collar around her neck, in case she tried to get away. While she was doing this, Tilly noticed Mia was holding the bridle in her left hand.

She watched Mia gently place her right arm under Rosie's chin. The pony lowered her head obediently and allowed Mia to hold



her head halfway between her eyes and nose. Then Mia passed the bridle to her other hand, so that she was holding both Rosie's head and bridle in her right hand. She rested the bit in the palm of her left hand and gently slid it towards the corner of the pony's mouth. Rosie opened her mouth obligingly, and as she took the bit into her mouth, Mia used her left hand to pull the head piece over Rosie's ears. Then she freed them with her fingers so they sat comfortably between the head piece and browband, helping to keep the bridle secure.

"Finally we buckle up the throat lash – there should be space to fit four fingers between it and Rosie's chin, and next, the cavesson so it fits snugly just below her cheekbones. Check that the bit isn't too low or too high, and then we're ready!" finished Mia.



Phew, thought Tilly, as she followed

Mia out into the yard. I'm never going to remember all that.

Angela was waiting for them in the yard. She thought Rosie would be a good ride for Tilly too.

"Let's get going then," she said. "You can warm Rosie up for Mia. We're going to do some more work on your trot today. Rosie should make it easy for you."

Tilly mounted and adjusted her position until she found her balance. She sat into the lowest part of the saddle with her hips square. It felt great – Rosie was the perfect size for her.

"Be clear with your leg aid as you ask her to move forward," Angela instructed. "Use your legs and allow her to move forward by softening your arm. I don't want to see too much bouncing today – remember what we said about rising in rhythm to the trot."



Tilly started with a walk, so that she could get used to Rosie's movement.

"That's it. Don't tighten up. Imagine you're a wet noodle – completely relaxed."

Tilly giggled at the idea of being a wet noodle, but it did help her to stay loose.

"Now, when you're ready, give her the cue. Shorten the reins slightly and with a nudge of your legs, ask her to trot. Sit

normally for a couple of strides then let her movement send you into a rising trot."

The start of the trot always felt awkward to Tilly. It was as if she was asking different parts of her body to do too many different things. How did Mia and Cally manage to make it look so effortless?

"Feel for the bumps," instructed Angela. "And remember, it's not about strength. Keep your shoulders back, heels down, and knees soft."

As Rosie started to move, Tilly could feel that she had a very easy trot. She was naturally balanced, and was able to trot at a constant speed – not surprising, given what a sweet creature she was. This meant Tilly could rise out of the saddle easily. Suddenly, it all came together and felt very natural.

"Eureka!" cried Angela. "I knew she'd be good for you. Keep it smooth and steady. You've found your rhythm!"

Tilly beamed. It was great to have Angela's encouragement, but already she was thinking about the next challenges. When

could she try a canter? When could she try jumping? When could she ride Magic Spirit?

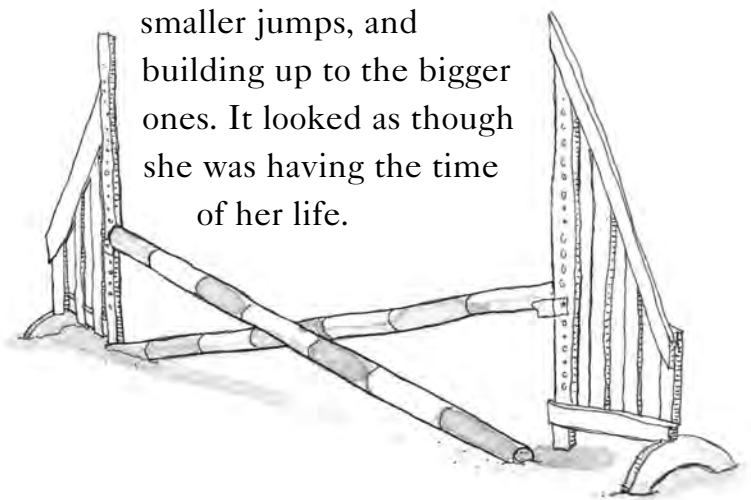
After her lesson, Tilly led Rosie over to the outdoor arena where Mia and Cally were going to be jumping.

"How did it go?" asked Mia, as she took Rosie's reins.

"Good. I've got the hang of my trot – thanks to Rosie."

"She's a fab girl!" grinned Mia, cuddling her pony's shoulder. "She's a mean jumper too. Watch this!"

Mia got started, fearlessly going for the smaller jumps, and building up to the bigger ones. It looked as though she was having the time of her life.





Cally, on the other hand, leaned against the fence, looking unusually glum.

"Are you jumping today?" asked Tilly cheerily. "Rosie's so keen!"

"I suppose so," said Cally reluctantly, as though she wasn't particularly interested. She sounded unhappy. Recently, she'd been missing her sessions at the stables, and she'd taken some days off school as well.

"What's up?" asked Tilly.

"Nothing. Don't worry about me," she muttered, and looked the other way, making it clear that she didn't want to talk.

After clearing several cross poles and a vertical, Mia and Rosie paused and joined them at the fence.

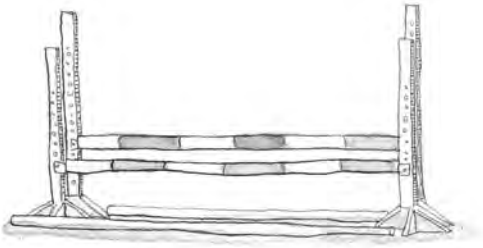
"I love it when it's like this," Mia enthused, patting Rosie's neck and staring up at the blue sky. "Perfect!"

It was one of those brilliant autumn days, when the air is crisp and the sun is bright.

"Are you going to try the oxer?" asked Tilly, glancing over at the biggest obstacle on the far side of the arena. "I can't wait to see you jump it."

"Can't wait to see me crash into it, more like!" chuckled Mia.

Normally Cally laughed at the silly things Mia said, but today there was no response. Tilly could see a sadness in her eyes. They were dull, like Magic Spirit's had been when he'd first arrived at Silver Shoe Farm as a rescue horse. Tilly had managed to cheer up Magic Spirit, so maybe she could cheer up Cally too. She scooped her arm around Cally's shoulders, and gave her a quick hug.





"I bet you'll jump really well today, Cally. Go for it!"

"Thanks," said Cally, barely moving her lips.



Duncan had arranged five jumps around the arena: two cross poles, two verticals and an ascending oxer. Tilly stared at it and gulped.

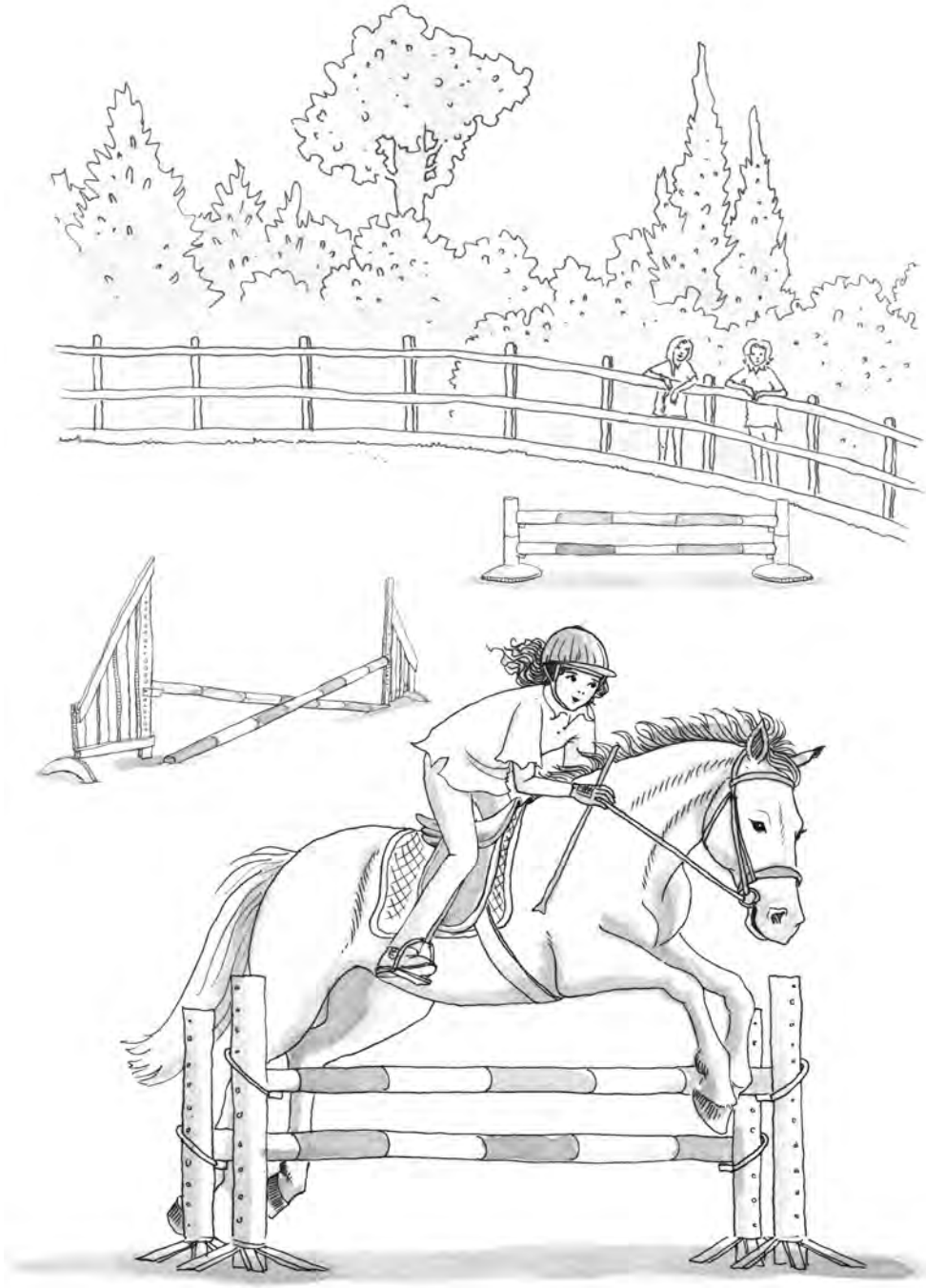
"Who's going for that one, then?" Duncan asked.

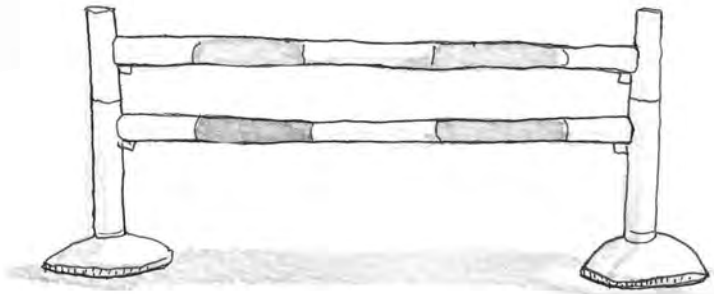
"Me!" said Mia eagerly, waving her hand about.

"The fearless Mia!" said Duncan, beckoning her forward.

Mia cantered a few circuits of the arena, and when she was ready, lined herself up at the lowest vertical and flew over it.







"Effortless!" cooed Duncan.

The next jump Mia tried was the bigger vertical. She cleared it but made a mess of the approach.

"You're panicking too much about Rosie's stride. Try not to interfere. She'll lose her balance if you push her on too fast," explained Duncan.

"But what if she doesn't take off at the right time. I'm worried she'll miss completely!"

"Trust her to work it out for herself," said Duncan firmly. "She knows what she's doing."

Mia and Rosie approached again. Tilly watched closely. She knew she could learn a lot from Duncan, and Rosie was such a great

pony. She moved so gracefully.

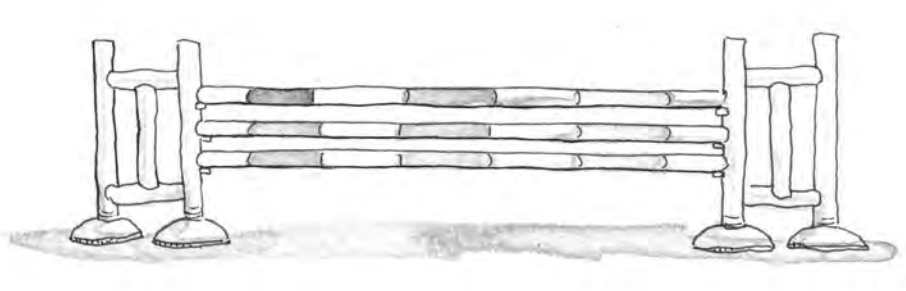
This time, Mia relaxed and let Rosie judge her own stride. They sailed over the vertical.

"That's the way," said Duncan approvingly. "Why not give the oxer a go now?"

On Mia's first attempt the front pole came down. Duncan hoisted it up, and she tried again. On the second attempt, the pole wobbled but stayed up, and on the third, she cleared it.

Tilly cheered. Cally, who was standing next to her, clapped limply, as though her wrists had no strength in them. She had hardly said a word since Tilly arrived.

"Wow! I can't believe I did that," grinned Mia, as she climbed down from Rosie.





“It felt as though I was flying! Do you want a turn, Cal?”

“No, thanks. I don’t really feel like it,” whispered Cally, reaching a hand towards Rosie and stroking her nose.

“Something’s wrong,” said Tilly. “You’re not yourself today.”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” sighed Cally.

“I guess you’ll tell us when you’re ready,” said Mia. “I know what you’re like.”

Cally just shrugged.