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opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails: Solo the Superstar

written by

Pippa Funnell

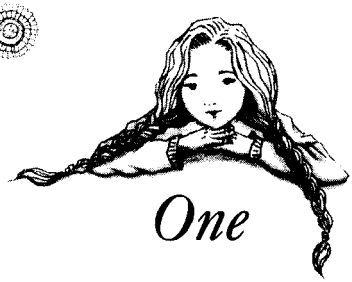
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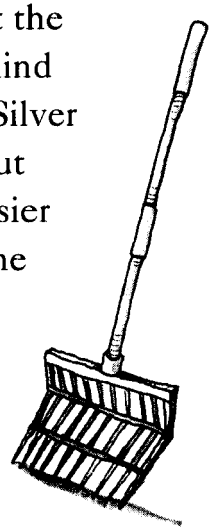
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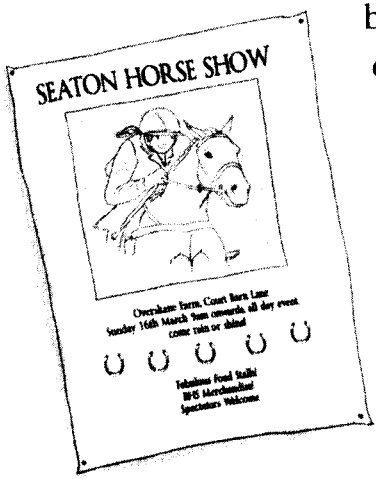
Tilly Redbrow was pleased that the summer was here. She didn't mind getting up early to go down to Silver Shoe Farm to feed and muck out the horses, but it was always easier when it was light outside and the weather was warm. She'd been helping out at the farm for almost a year now and had learned so much about looking after ponies and riding.



She loved every bit of it.

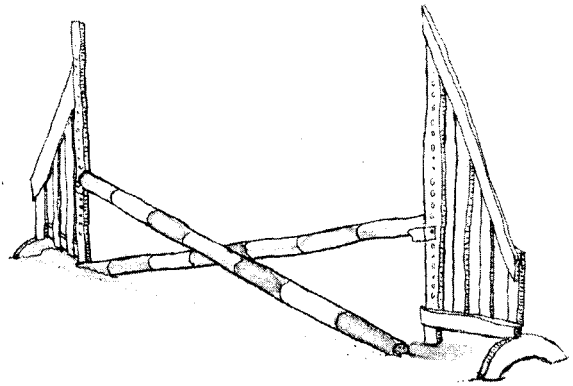
The thing she was most looking forward to, however, was her first ever Pony Club competition. Shows and rallies were being arranged throughout the holidays. Every weekend, horseboxes were being loaded up in the yard; and in the club room, people were constantly chatting about where they were taking their horses next. The atmosphere was great.

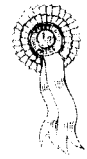
With only a few days to go before the Seaton Show, Tilly was keen to get as much practice in as possible. She would be jumping her strawberry roan, Rosie, in the smallest class, which was especially for beginners. Tilly shared ownership of Rosie with her friend Mia. Mia would be jumping Rosie in the next, slightly bigger, class, so it was going to be a busy day for the little pony!



Angela, the owner of Silver Shoe Farm, was certain Tilly was ready for her first competition. After years of dreaming about being able to ride and compete, it was thrilling for Tilly to be able to do it for real. Angela had seen Tilly's skills and confidence improve enormously. She'd been giving her riding lessons ever since she'd joined Silver Shoe Farm after helping to rescue Magic Spirit, an abandoned horse, who had quickly become Tilly's favourite.

"Come on then, Tilly. Now you're warmed up, let's start popping over the cross pole," she called, pointing towards a single cross pole in the middle of the schooling area.



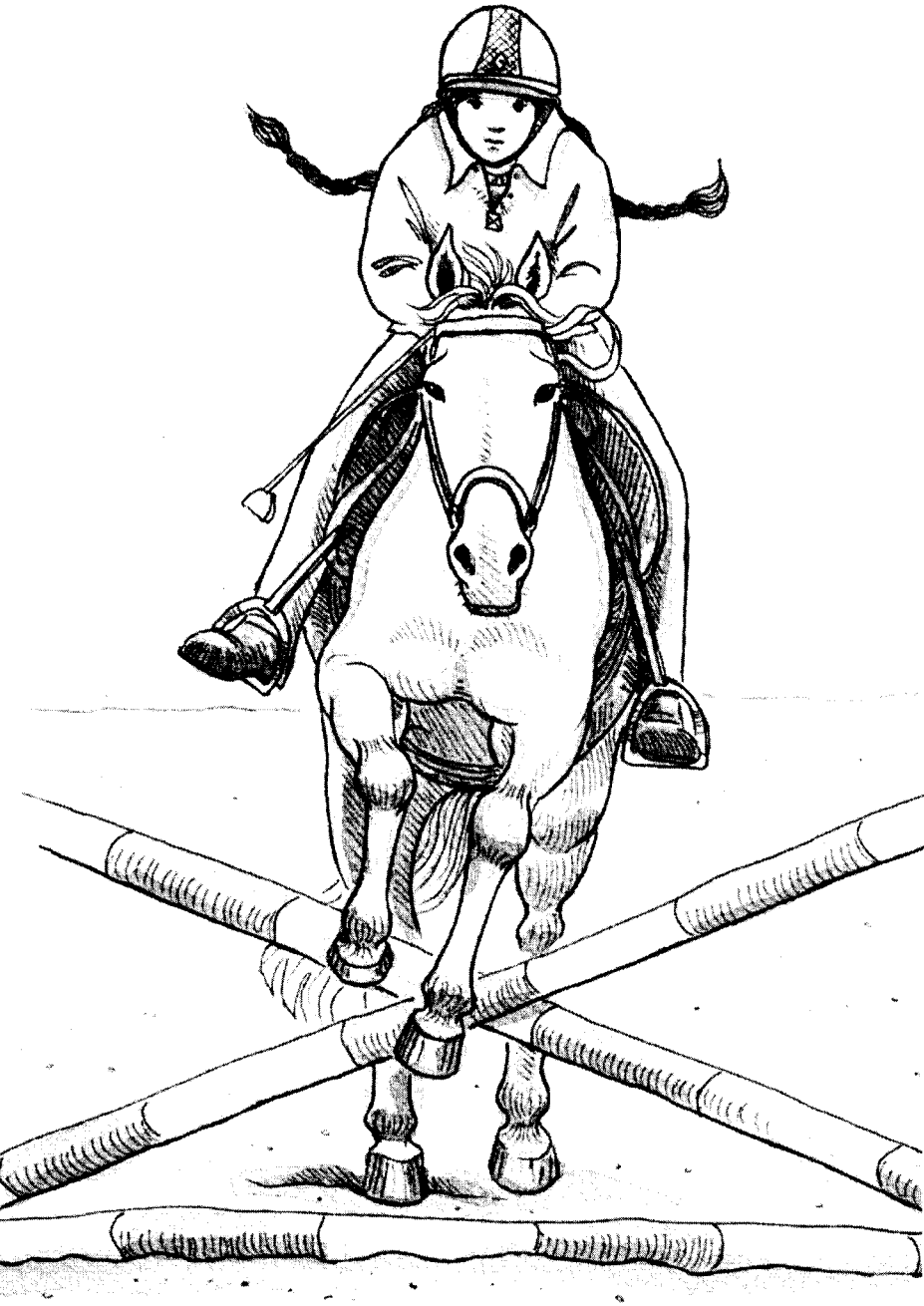


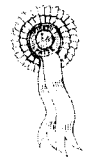
"Remember to interfere as little as possible. Keep your heels down, hands quiet, and see how still you can sit. I don't want to see any driving with your bottom," said Angela.

Tilly always found this difficult. Rosie could be on the lazy side, so Tilly had developed a habit of pushing with her seat, rather than using her legs, which Angela had quickly spotted.

"That's it," encouraged Angela. "You've got plenty of room, get nice and straight on your approach."

Tilly and Rosie moved directly towards the jump. Tilly made sure she was very calm in the last few strides, so as not to disturb Rosie's concentration. Then they took off together, and as Rosie popped over the cross pole, Tilly concentrated on looking straight ahead and riding away from the fence. Angela had explained to her before that the first landing stride after a jump was the first approach stride to the next fence.





"Make sure you follow enough with your arms over the top of the jump, and be careful not to thud into that saddle," warned Angela. "The impact of the landing needs to be absorbed through your knees and ankles."

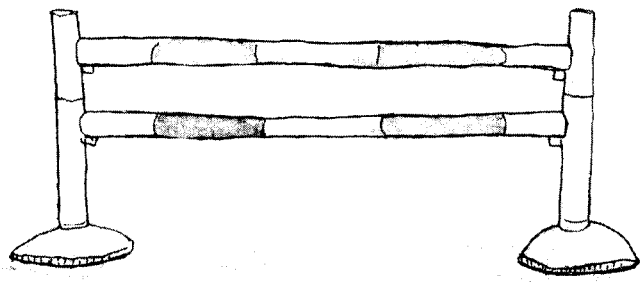
Tilly repeated the simple exercise several times until she really found her rhythm.

"I'm impressed," said Angela. "Remember to keep your hands as still as possible. If you watch top show jumpers you'll see that their hands barely move. Do you think you're ready to try again? This time I'll add a small vertical four strides from the cross and you can jump both of them."

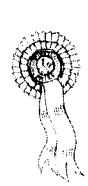
Tilly drew a deep breath and nudged Rosie back into a canter towards the jumps. She knew that practice was important – no time to waste. She also knew there was no room for negativity. Duncan, who was Angela's head boy and a talented rider, always said that riders needed to 'commit' to the jump; once they'd started there

should be no indecision, just positive forward thinking.

But negative thoughts were never a problem for Tilly. Even when she was nervous about something, she was determined to conquer her fears and go for it.



Following Angela and Duncan's advice, she took a moment to think about how she could improve the approach, and then advanced towards the first cross pole. She was rewarded when Rosie sailed over it very neatly. There was just enough time for Tilly to regain her balance and for Rosie to adjust her canter, before they were up and jumping the vertical. Perfect!



"Thank you, girl," said Tilly, patting Rosie's neck. As brave as Tilly had been, she realised that most of the effort had been Rosie's. Nevertheless, Tilly did feel quietly excited about the forthcoming competition – she just hoped they could jump as well as they had done today.



After her lesson, Tilly went to the stables to see the other important horse in her life – Magic Spirit. Tilly and Magic had been through a lot together. She had been the only person he'd felt confident around when he first arrived at the stables. She'd groomed and cared for him. She'd helped Duncan break him in, and seen him grow from an unpredictable, nervous animal into a calm and cooperative ride. When Magic had had colic, she'd stayed by his side and helped nurse him back to health. They were best friends.

As she entered the stall, Tilly adjusted

the horsehair bracelet her mum had made her. It contained hairs from Magic's tail and matched the other one she had worn all her life. When she was little she'd had to loop this bracelet round her wrist several times, but as she grew it fitted better. Tilly had never known her real mum and dad. Her mum had died just after she was born, and for as long as she could remember, Tilly had happily been a member of the Redbrow family.



The only link Tilly had to her past was an old photograph and the bracelet. There was something special about it – it was like a lucky talisman. Tilly never took it off.

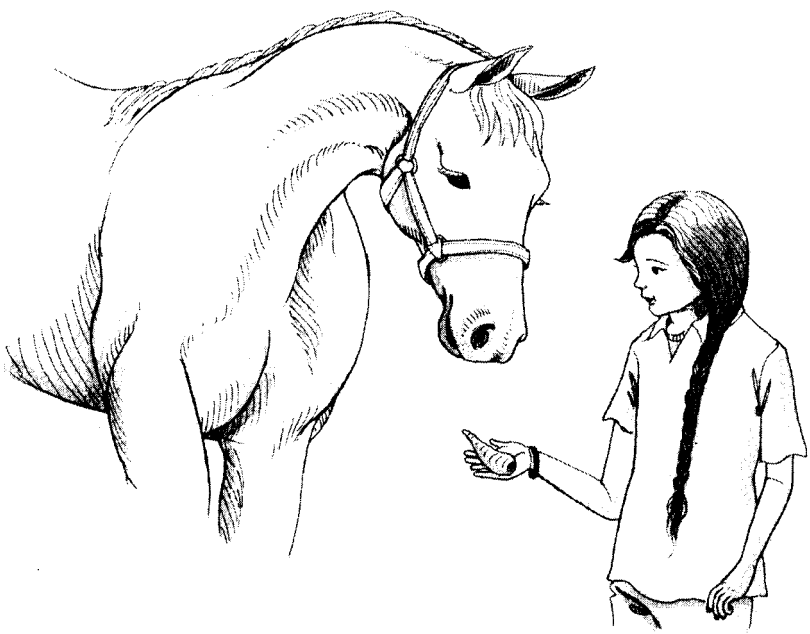
"Hello, boy!" she said, as Magic came towards her. He fussed over her, sniffing her hair and nuzzling her cheeks. It didn't

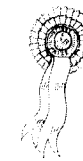
matter that he couldn't say how much he adored Tilly – it was obvious from the way he reacted.

Tilly produced a fresh carrot from her pocket, which he munched eagerly, while she stroked his neck. They were alone together for several minutes, until Duncan appeared, lugging a bucket of water.

"Hi, Tilly. How's Magic?"

"He's in a chirpy mood. He likes the sun."





"We'll turn him out in a minute – so he can graze in the long field with the others. I've been thinking, Tilly . . ."

Duncan sounded as though he was going to say something interesting.

"I've got a few hours spare tomorrow morning. Maybe it's time I got you in the saddle. Time for your first ride on Magic Spirit."

Tilly gasped. She had wanted to ride Magic since she'd first set eyes on him. Duncan hadn't wanted to rush into it though, because he had to make sure it was totally safe.

"I believe he's ready. He's had enough experience with Jack Fisher and me now. And *you're* definitely ready – Angela tells me you're doing great with your lessons."

Tilly grinned and blushed.

"Let's meet here tomorrow morning then. About ten o'clock. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah!" said Tilly, eyes wide with excitement.



"And is it also okay with *you*?" Duncan smiled at Magic. Magic lifted his head and shook it gleefully.

"That's a yes, then!"