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opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails 7: Pride and Joy the Event Horse

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One

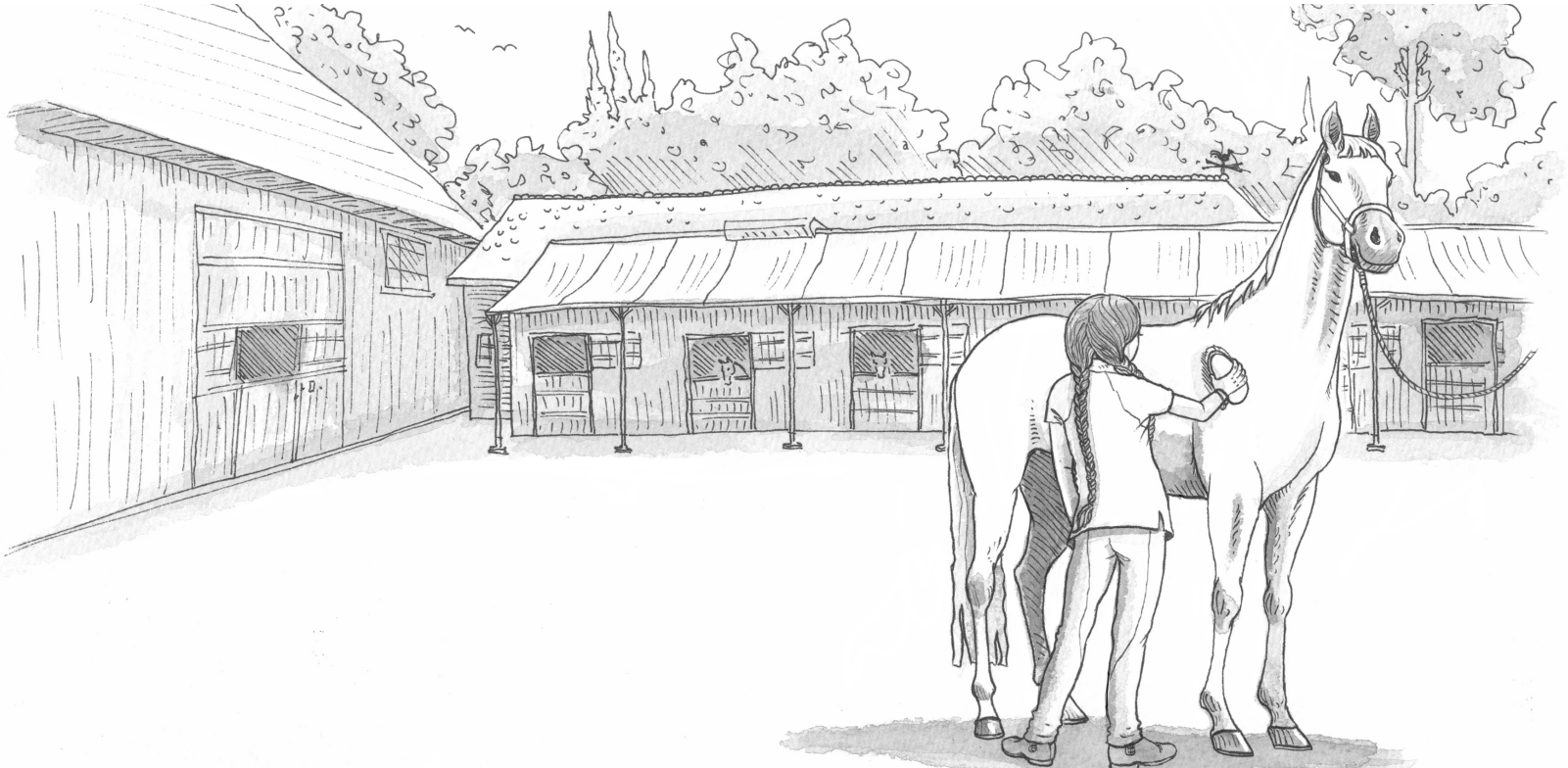
It was early summer and the stable yard at Silver Shoe Farm was busy as usual. People trooped to and fro, carrying saddles and bridles. The sound of happy chatter filled the air as both riders and horses eagerly anticipated hacking in the countryside or a lesson in the sand school. Tilly Redbrow loved Silver Shoe Farm at this time of year.

In fact, Tilly loved everything about Silver Shoe Farm, come rain or shine. Since going there she'd learned so much. She

knew all about caring for horses, about tack, mucking out and grooming. She knew the basics of how to work a horse on the flat, and her jumping had improved enormously since she'd first started.

The one thing Silver Shoe couldn't teach her, however, was how to use her special gift for communicating with horses. This came to Tilly instinctively. Ever since the dramatic rescue of her favourite horse, Magic Spirit, from the middle of the town, she'd realised she had an unusual talent for calming them. It had puzzled her at first, but gradually Tilly realised she could make use of it. From great racehorses, like Red Admiral, to gentle ponies, like Rosie, the strawberry roan she shared with her friend Mia, they'd all been helped by Tilly's instinctive understanding.

Today Tilly had no need for this talent because Magic Spirit was completely calm. He stood, tied up outside his stable,



enjoying a thorough grooming. His grey coat gleamed from Tilly's endless brushing. He'd come a long way since his arrival at Silver Shoe, when he'd been a neglected horse in terrible condition.

Now he was a picture of health and everyone talked about how one day he could be a serious competition horse. He had very good conformation and looked like the sort of horse many top riders would choose. The only problem was that he didn't have the easiest of temperaments. Or rather, if anyone other than Tilly Redbrow was trying to ride him, he didn't always cooperate.

So if Magic really was going to aim for the top level, there was only one thing for it: Tilly would have to be the rider that took him there! Tilly thought about this as she painted his feet with hoof oil. When she'd finished she let him nuzzle her hair and neck. As his warm breath and whiskers tickled her ears she stroked his neck and gazed dreamily across the yard.

'Hey, Tilly, keeping busy?' came a friendly voice.

Tilly was definitely busy, but that's how she liked to be. She looked up and saw Angela, Silver Shoe Farm's owner. Angela was clearing out the club room, removing stacks of aging storage boxes and bags of old rosettes. They were beginning to pile up in the yard.

‘Hi, Angela. That’s a lot of stuff!’ said Tilly.

‘I know. I’ve been meaning to tidy it for ages. Some of it goes back to when I was doing my first big eventing competitions. Brings back a few memories . . .’

‘Those were the days, eh?’ called Duncan, from across the yard.

Duncan was Angela’s head boy. He and Angela had known each other for a long time. Tilly had always thought they’d make a nice couple, and her friends, Mia and Cally, had recently convinced themselves the pair were going out together. Tilly wasn’t so sure. It would be nice if it were true but she knew better than to believe the rumours.

Duncan was doing some cleaning out of his own, forking bedding from the stable opposite Magic’s. The stable’s previous occupant, a small chestnut gelding called Archie, had moved with his owner to another county, so there was a space at Silver Shoe Farm. This was exciting as it didn’t happen

often. Tilly briefly wondered what kind of horse or pony would eventually fill it.

‘Did you win any events?’ she asked, watching Angela put down the last of the boxes.

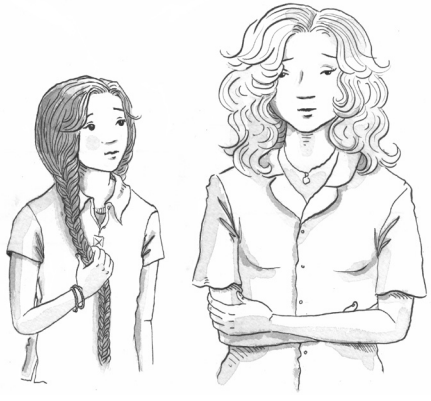
‘Oh, a few,’ said Angela coyly.

‘She won loads,’ said Duncan. ‘She was really good. She rode an amazing bay gelding called Pride and Joy. They had an incredible partnership.’

‘Do you think you’ll compete again? I’d love to see you.’

‘I doubt it,’ said Angela. ‘I haven’t competed for years. Unfortunately, Pride’s competition days were cut short by injury. And after that, other rides just didn’t feel the same. There was no other horse as special as him. I haven’t seen him for a while. It makes me sad to see him retired. He’s stabled in Long Bloxton, the other side of North Cosford, at his owners’ place.’

As she said this her voice shook slightly. Tilly could see that thinking about Pride made Angela sad. She understood. The idea



of not seeing her favourite horse, Magic Spirit, was too distressing to think about.

'Long Bloxton's not far away,' said Tilly helpfully. 'You could still visit him, couldn't you?'

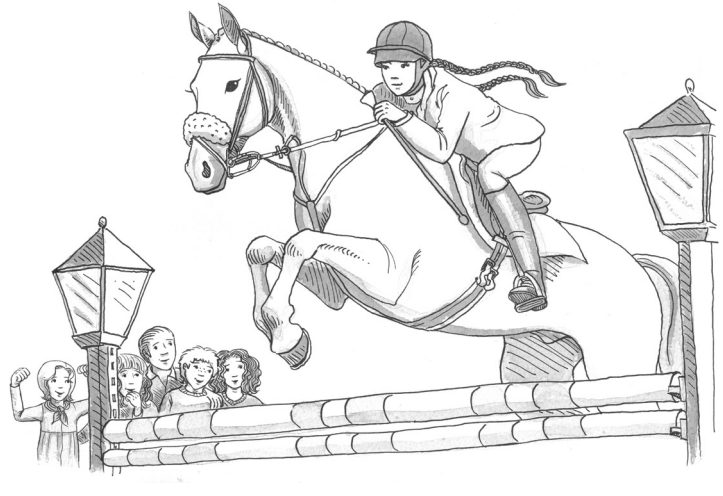
'Maybe . . . anyway, how's Magic doing?' said Angela, abruptly changing the subject.

'He's great, aren't you, boy?' said Tilly, as she reached up and patted Magic's shoulder.

'You've done a really good job with his coat. You're always so careful and thorough, Tilly. If every horse at Silver Shoe Farm was groomed by you, we'd have the best-kept stable yard in Cosford!'

As Tilly continued grooming, her mind drifted; jumping Magic Spirit over the biggest combination fence at Badminton Horse Trials, the lake where hundreds of

spectators were watching. She imagined all the important people in her life standing in the crowd cheering her on. Mia and Cally and Becky were there. And Angela and Duncan, and of course, her mum and dad and younger brother, Adam. And then she pictured Brook Ashton-Smith. He would be at the front, cheering the loudest.



Not only had Silver Shoe Farm brought Tilly and Magic Spirit together, it had led her to find her long-lost brother, Brook,

thanks to the matching horsehair bracelets their real mum had given them just before she died. Brook was a talented rider and, like Tilly, his world revolved around horses.

Tilly and Brook didn't know much about their real mum, but one thing was certain, she'd given them both an instinct for horses. As Tilly stroked Magic's nose, she knew Brook also understood what it was like to have a special bond with a horse. He had Solo, his black thoroughbred.

Someone else who understood was Angela. Tilly thought about how upset she'd seemed when she talked about Pride and Joy. He obviously meant a lot to her. Why didn't she see him very often? Why was she so keen to change the subject?

'Mia!' she called, spotting her friend outside the tack room. 'We've got some investigating to do . . .'

Two

Tilly and Mia crouched over the boxes that Angela had left in the yard and leafed through the piles of papers and photographs.

'Look, there's Duncan with long hair – how funny!'

'And look at this one. Everyone's wearing fancy dress. Even Jack Fisher!'

The girls laughed. It was strange seeing old pictures of the people they knew well. Suddenly, in a box that was lying to the side, separate from the others, Tilly found what she wanted.