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opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails 8: Neptune the Heroic Horse

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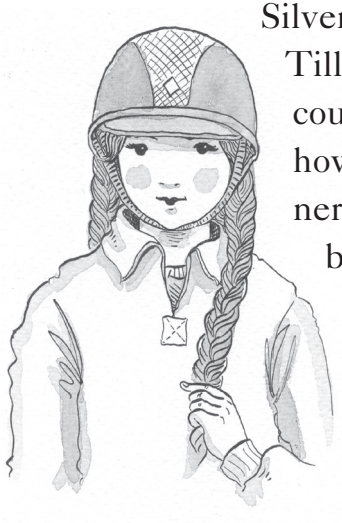
One

The start of the school summer holidays always made Tilly Redbrow happy. She couldn't wait to have six weeks of uninterrupted time at Silver Shoe Farm. She planned to be there every morning, afternoon and evening. For a pony-mad girl like her it was going to be great!

Silver Shoe Farm was very special to Tilly. Not only was her dream horse, Magic Spirit, stabled there, but it was where she hung out with her friends, Mia and Cally,

and had riding lessons with the farm's owner, Angela.

Tilly and Magic Spirit had come a long way since they'd joined the Silver Shoe gang. When Tilly looked back she could hardly remember how neglected and nervous Magic had been when he'd first arrived. Thanks to everyone's care and attention, he was now a picture of health. Tilly's dream had come true too. Once she'd only ever fantasised about the horses from her books and magazines, now she was a keen rider with a talent for understanding them. She listened and looked and learned everything she could from other riders, particularly talented ones like Angela, her teacher, and Duncan, the head boy at Silver Shoe Farm. And Brook,



of course, her new-found horse-crazy brother.

Magic Spirit would always be important to Tilly. They had an incredible bond. For other riders Magic could lack confidence and be very tricky. He played up for Duncan and made it hard for Angela to catch him. But with Tilly, he *always* behaved. When she rode him, he responded to everything. It was as if they were destined to be together. Whenever Tilly was with him, the trust in Magic's eyes was clear. When she wasn't there, Duncan often said that Magic seemed to have a wild look about him.

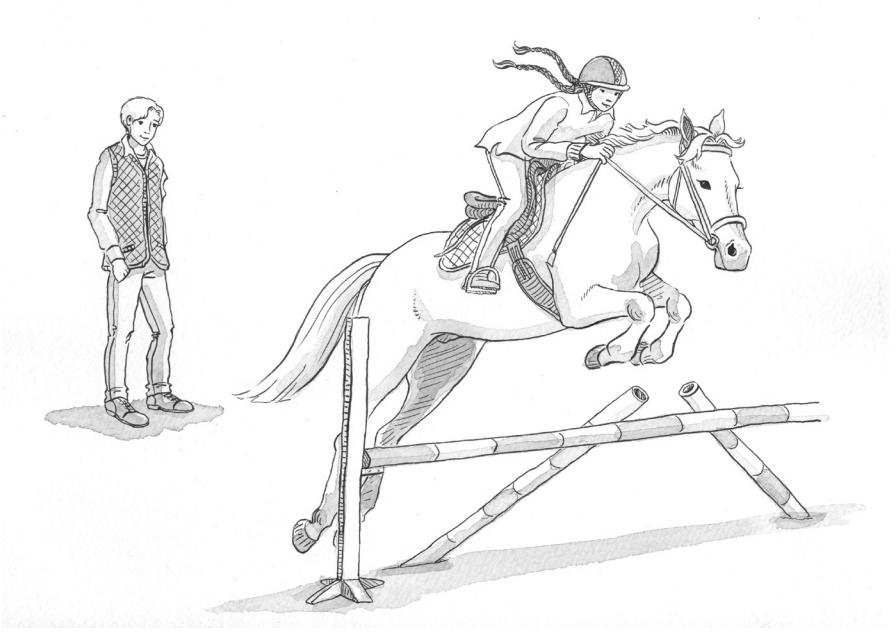
Tilly was riding Magic regularly now, as she'd grown out of Rosie, the pony she shared with Mia. She still loved Rosie dearly and saw her every day, but Mia was also getting too tall to ride



her, and the girls' parents had discussed finding a new owner for Rosie soon. Tilly dreaded the idea that the little pony might have to leave Silver Shoe.

One balmy summer Saturday, Tilly was working Magic in the sand school. She'd just started doing some jumping training with him, and she'd been having trouble because he was jumping to the left over fences. With Duncan's help, she was trying to teach Magic to keep to the middle of the fences. They had set up a low upright with two poles placed in an upside-down V shape. The poles rested on the top bar like an arrow pointer, helping Magic to keep straight.

'Nice work,' said Duncan. 'It's really helping him. It's important to sort this out now, before he gets into the habit of jumping left. If we don't, the problem will



be exaggerated the more we ask him to do, and this way, when we build in more complex jumps and cross-country training, he'll have a solid base to work from.'

Tilly agreed. She didn't mind concentrating on the attention to detail because a horse like Magic deserved the best quality training, and she was determined to take him to the top.

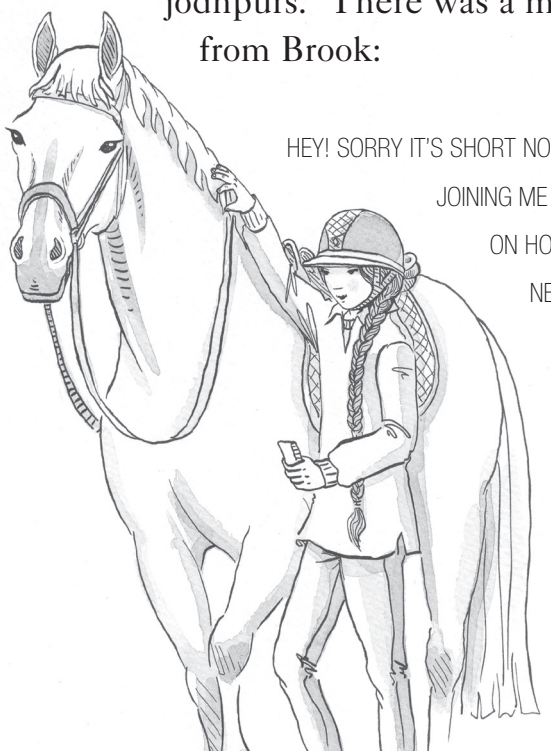
'It's great that you'll be around for the whole summer,' Duncan added. 'With you

on board, Magic's bound to make progress. Hopefully, he'll be ready to jump some solid cross-country fences by September. Right, that's enough for today...'

Tilly pulled up at the fence where Duncan was leaning. She hopped off Magic and gave him a rewarding cuddle.

'I'll be here every day,' she said. 'There's nowhere I'd rather be than Silver Shoe Farm.'

Just then, Tilly's mobile buzzed. She pulled it out of the pocket of her navy jodhpurs. There was a message from Brook:



HEY! SORRY IT'S SHORT NOTICE BUT FANCY JOINING ME AND MY FAMILY ON HOLS IN CORNWALL? NEXT WEEK. WLD BE GREAT IF U CLD MAKE IT. MY MUM WILL SPEAK 2 UR MUM. BROOK X

'Well, almost nowhere,' said Tilly. 'Oh dear. Brook's just invited me to go on holiday with him. I'd LOVE to but . . .'

'Sounds too good to miss,' said Duncan. 'Don't worry. Magic will cope. Go and enjoy yourself. I expect you and your brother have lots of catching up to do.'

Tilly smiled. She and Brook definitely had lots of catching up to do. They'd first met on a visit to Cavendish Hall, the exclusive boarding school that Brook and Tilly's friend Cally attended. It had been obvious then that there was a connection between them. Now they knew why. Thanks to their matching horsehair bracelets they had discovered they were brother and sister, separated when they were tiny and adopted by different families.



Going on holiday with Brook was perhaps one of the few things Tilly would sacrifice a week with Magic Spirit for. She

looked into Magic's eyes. She knew he'd understand, although the thought of being apart from him made her feel sad.

'It'll only be for a little while, boy. I'll miss you. Maybe one day, I'll take you on holiday with me.'

An image popped into Tilly's head, of her and Magic galloping along a beautiful sandy beach, seawater spraying in their faces. It was wonderful.



Two

Tilly's parents were happy for Tilly to go on holiday with the Ashton-Smiths. Mr Redbrow, being a teacher, said it was 'more educational' to go on the odd family away day to a museum or a castle, rather than spend a week lazing around in the sunshine. Tilly and Adam had been slightly alarmed by this suggestion, but Tilly didn't really mind. She knew her parents had already spent quite a bit of money on her riding lessons, and besides, one week away