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Opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails 11: Moonshadow The Derby Winner

Written by

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TILLY'S PONY TAILS

Moonshadow

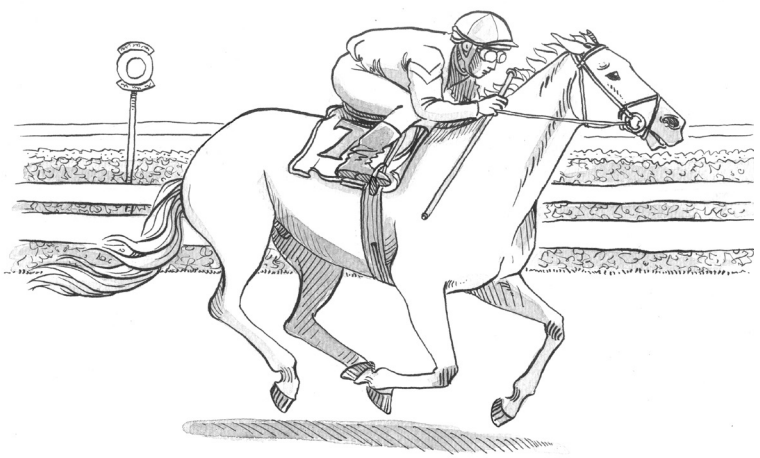
the derby winner

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TILLY'S PONY TAILS

Moonshadow
the derby winner



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For my dear brother, Tim





One

It was a chilly winter morning. A layer of sparkly frost covered the yard at Silver Shoe Farm, but Tilly Redbrow didn't mind how cold it was. She was always happy to be up early, mucking out and feeding Magic Spirit.

Tilly knew how lucky she was to be helping out at Silver Shoe.



Not every girl got the opportunity to spend so much time with her favourite horse, to ride every day, or have lessons with a teacher as good as Angela, Silver Shoe Farm's owner.

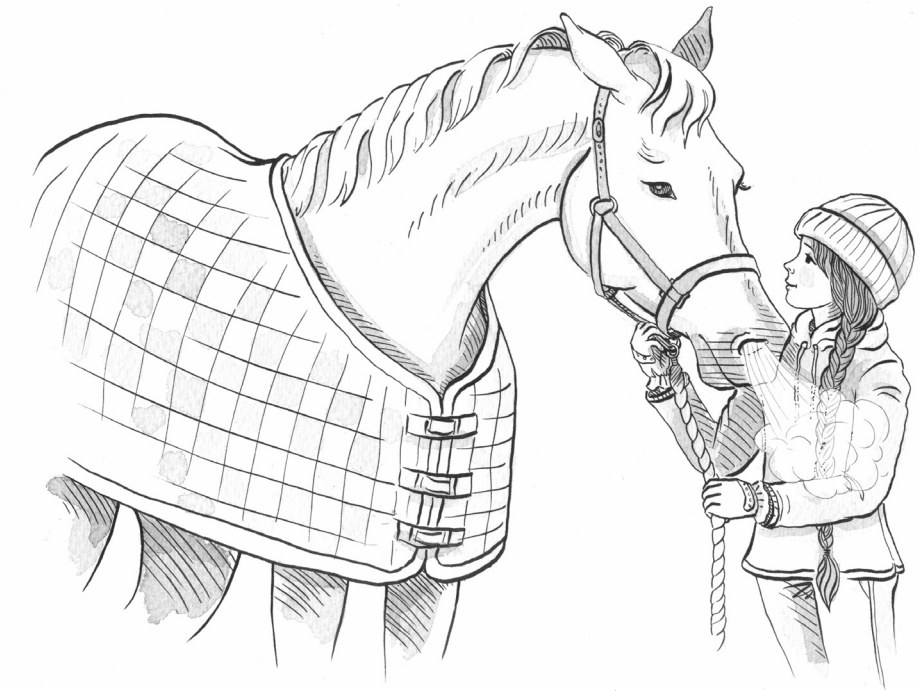
She carefully made her way across the icy ground towards Magic's stable. As she opened the door, he came to greet her. Tilly was glad to see his fleece-lined winter blanket hadn't come loose in the night. She was also grateful for her own Toggi gloves and woolly hat, which had been a Christmas present from her friends, Mia and Cally.

'Good morning, Magic. How are you today? It's freezing out there, but beautiful too – like a winter wonderland!'

Magic let out a snort, which looked like two puffs of smoke coming from his nostrils, visible in the cold air.

'Is that your impression of a dragon?'

He stared at her for a moment, then came close and nuzzled her shoulder. She stroked his neck, whispering softly and telling him how fantastic he was.



It wasn't long ago that Tilly had never even been on a horse. She'd always loved them. She'd read lots of pony magazines, books and annuals. She'd watched hours of Badminton and Burghley action on television. Her bedroom walls were covered with posters of ponies and horses. And every night she would go to bed dreaming about riding a horse of her own. She'd hoped that one day it would happen, but she'd never imagined it actually would.

Then, when she'd helped rescue Magic Spirit from a busy roadside, her life had changed completely.



Tilly refreshed Magic's bedding and gave him water and hay, then headed for the Silver Shoe club room. Her toes were frozen and she wanted to warm up with a mug of hot chocolate. The club room was a nice place to be at any time of year, but it was particularly welcoming in the winter. It was warm and cosy, with scruffy old sofas that you could sink into.

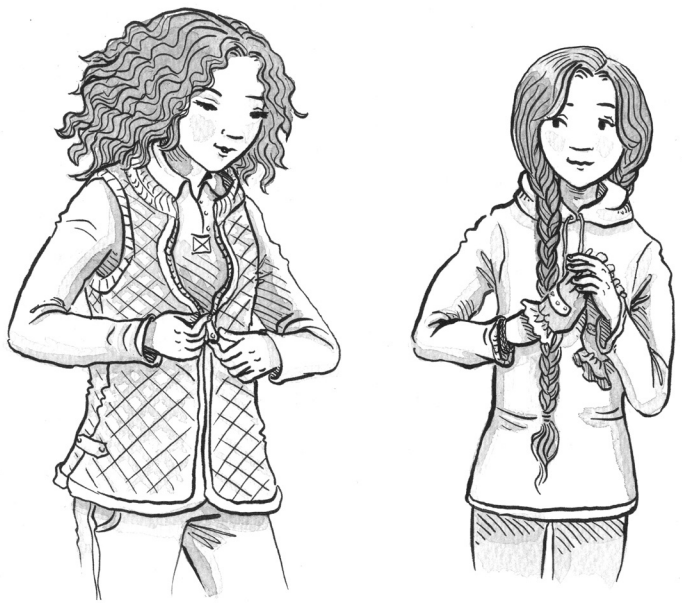
Mia was already in there, struggling to undo a purple padded gilet. Mia was one of Tilly's closest friends, along with Cally, and Becky, of course, her best friend from school. Cally was at Cavendish Hall, the same boarding school that Tilly's brother, Brook, also attended. Tilly, Mia and Cally had all shared a pony, Rosie, at one time,

before they'd grown too big for her. Now Tilly rode Magic, and Cally had her dun Connemara, Mr Fudge. Mia was still looking, hoping she'd find her perfect horse soon.

'I can't grip the zip. My fingers are soooo cold!' said Mia.

'Let me help you,' said Tilly, as she removed her gloves.

'I hope it's not this cold on Friday, for my birthday sleepover,' said Mia.



'We'll have to bring extra thick sleeping bags. I'm going to wear thermals and two big fleeces while I'm sleeping.'

'You won't be doing much sleeping,' said Mia, with a giggle. 'We'll be up all night telling spooky stories and having midnight feasts.'

'Not too spooky. It might be quite scary in the stables after dark.'

'The horses will look after us,' said Mia.

'True.'

The girls had been planning the sleepover for weeks. A group of them were going to stay overnight at Silver Shoe, as near to their favourite horses as they could be. Their parents hadn't been sure at first, but when Angela said that she and Duncan and some of the other stable hands would be up in the farm house and could keep an eye on them, everyone agreed. Tilly and Mia were very excited.

'Here, have this,' said Mia, passing Tilly a hot chocolate. 'Extra marshmallows.'

Just as the girls were getting comfy on

the sofas, the club room door swung open. It was Duncan, carrying a crate of canned drinks for the vending machine.

'Hi, girls. Frosty start, eh?'

He put the crate on the kitchen worktop.

'Do you mind if I put the television on? I want to check the weather. If it's going to stay cold like this I'll need to get some extra grit down in the yard. I don't want anyone slipping.'

The television screen came to life. It was the local morning news. Uninterested, the girls turned back to each other and discussed party games for the sleepover.

'We should play the chocolate game, you know, where you have to eat a bar of chocolate with a knife and fork and wear gloves and a hat?'

'Or what about the one where everyone has to write the next line of a silly story?'

'Yeah. That's good. What else?'

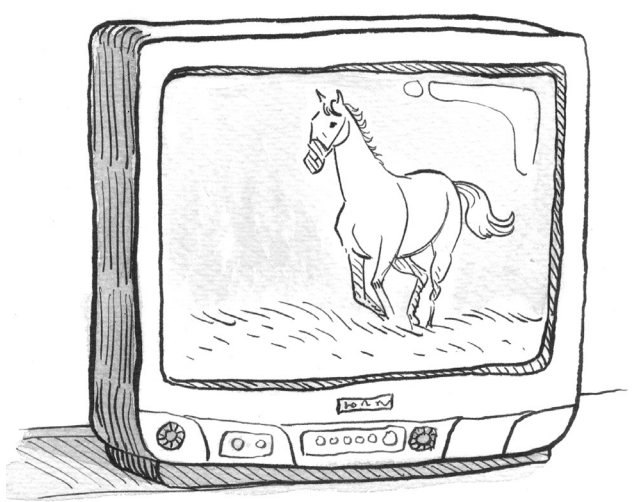
Suddenly, an image on the screen caught Tilly's eye. It was a familiar one: a

silvery grey horse galloping across a field. Just like Magic Spirit! She blinked and looked closer.

'Who's that?' she said, mesmerised.

'That's Moonshadow,' said Duncan. 'Do you remember? He won the Derby last year. He's a fast one. Look at those, long limber legs. He looks extra special, like no ordinary horse.'

Duncan turned up the volume. The three of them watched and listened with interest.



'Local residents can see this famous racehorse, owned by the Archer's Engineering Racing Team, on the all-weather surface at Cosford County Winter Classic Flat Race this weekend. Good luck, Moonshadow. Good luck, Archer's Engineering. Let's hope he wins again…'

'Won't the ground be too hard for flat racing?' asked Tilly. 'It's so cold at the moment.'

'Good point,' said Duncan. 'Actually, it's only in recent years, since they've started racing on special all-weather surfaces, that flat racing has been able to take place all year round.'

'Cool,' said Mia. 'And he's coming here!'

'Not here,' corrected Tilly. 'He's not actually coming to Silver Shoe.'

'No, I mean, he's coming to our area. He's probably going to stay in some really fancy stable somewhere.'

'You mean Silver Shoe isn't fancy?' said Duncan.



'No, I mean . . . I didn't . . . oh . . .'

'Don't worry,' said Duncan, laughing. 'You're right. A horse like Moonshadow is worth so much money. They'll put him in a top-end place, with all the latest kit. It'll have to be very high security though. There've been lots of problems with horse theft recently.'

'Really?' said Tilly. 'That's awful.'

'When there's big money involved, people get greedy.'

'I can't imagine what I'd do if someone stole Magic Spirit,' she said. She thought about it for a moment, then couldn't bear it. It was just too upsetting.