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Opening extract from

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Written by

Patricia Leitch

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Night of the Red Horse

Also by Patricia Leitch and published by Catnip:

For Love of a Horse
A Devil to Ride
The Summer Riders

Jinny at Finmory

Night of the Red Horse

Patricia Leitch



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Foreword

by Lauren St John, author of *The White Giraffe*

For Love of a Horse, the first book in the *Jinny at Finmory* series, is my favourite pony book of all time. I read it for the first time when I was about eleven and every bit as horse mad as Jinny, and it's hard to overstate how much impact it had on me and how much I related to the story and to Jinny's relationship with her horse. It didn't matter that Jinny lived at Finmory on the Scottish moors and spent her days passionately trying to save or tame a chestnut Arab mare, and I lived on a remote farm in Africa and spent my days trying to save and train a black stallion, it seemed to me that the way we thought, felt and dreamed about the horses we loved was identical.

Imagine having a best friend who thinks about riding exactly the way you do; who gets into the same kind of disastrous, scary or embarrassing situations and suffers the same kind of highs and lows, and who just happens to have the horse of your dreams. That's what Jinny and Shantih were for me. Over the years,

scores of other fans of the series have felt the same way. You will too. And if you're anything like me, you'll be drawing pictures of Shantih and pinning them up on your bedroom wall, reading each book at least five times, and wishing and dreaming that you had a chestnut Arab mare just like Shantih and could gallop across the moors with Jinny, mysterious, magical Ken, and all the other characters who make up Jinny's world at Finmory.

You're in for the ride of your life. Enjoy!

Lauren St John
London, 2010

One

'Again,' said Jinny Manders. 'I'm going round again.'

Shantih, the chestnut Arab Jinny was riding, pranced impatiently, threatening to buck – her white stockings glinting in the grey evening, her red-gold coat bright. A wind gusted in from the sea, blowing back Jinny's long, red hair and fanning out her horse's mane and tail.

'Isn't it getting rather late?' said Sue Horton. 'Mum will be wondering what's happened to me.'

She glanced over her shoulder to where the Horton's yellow tent perched on the grass above Finmory Bay. Sue and her parents were spending their summer holidays camping at Finmory. At the last minute they had managed to borrow a trailer and bring Pippen, Sue's skewbald pony, on holiday with them. Now he stood, four-square and solid, his feet planted firmly on the ground and an expression of mild disapproval at

the Arab's behaviour on his brown and white face. His rider was as square and sturdy as her pony. She was twelve years old, the same age as Jinny, with short brown hair, hazel eyes and an open expression.

'You've jumped her round four times already,' said Sue. 'You'll only sicken her.'

'Not over these silly little jumps,' stated Jinny, and before Sue could produce any more of her common-sense arguments Jinny had eased her hold on Shantih's reins, tightened her legs against her horse's sides and they were away, galloping at the first jump.

Shantih thundered up to the first pole. Yards in front of it she launched herself into the air and sailed over it in a wide, flowing arc. Jinny, sitting tight in the saddle, moved with her horse. A grin of sheer delight spread over her face as Shantih, gathering speed, flew on down the field, over the jump made from one of Mr MacKenzie's cast-out sheep pens and over the third jump of two straw bales.

Turning to come back up the field, Shantih was going faster than ever. Her speed whipped tears from Jinny's eyes, made her laugh aloud. She could have gone on galloping and jumping Shantih forever. It was more exciting than anything she had ever known in all her life.

The last of the five jumps was made of wooden fish boxes piled precariously on top of each other. Shantih was galloping too fast to be able to time her take-off

and Jinny knew nothing about such things. She only knew that, most of the time, all she needed to do was to sit on Shantih and her horse would jump anything. But this time Shantih took off too soon. Her front feet sent the boxes flying, and in a sudden panic Shantih was bolting round the field, her head low, her body tight and her hooves beating out a frenzied tattoo of fear.

It took Jinny four circles of the field before she was in control again.

'Well, surely that's enough,' said Sue, as Jinny brought Shantih from a trot to a walk and rode her back to Pippen. 'I told you she had had enough.'

'Enough! Shantih would go on jumping all night. It's these silly jumps. If we had proper ones . . .'

'If that last jump had been fixed she would have fallen. Coming at it at that speed! Just stupid. You let her go too fast.'

'I like her fast,' said Jinny irritably.

Although Sue arriving with Pippen and lending her a saddle had been the best thing that could possibly have happened in Jinny's summer holidays, she couldn't help feeling that at times Sue was depressingly right.

Almost as bad as Petra, Jinny thought. *As if an elder sister isn't enough*. She sighed gustily.

'I'm going in anyway,' decided Sue.

Reluctantly, Jinny followed her out of the field.

'Tomorrow,' said Jinny, 'we'll build some proper jumps.'

'OK,' said Sue, grinning, and instantly Jinny was sorry that she had even thought that Sue was in the least like Petra.

'See you tomorrow about ten,' Jinny called back, as Sue took Pippen to their tent to give him a feed before she turned him out for the night in Mr MacKenzie's field.

Jinny rode Shantih back across the fields to Finmory. The Arab walked out with her long-reaching stride. She was still excited after her gallop. Her neck was arched, her ears alert and her eyes wide to catch the least movement on the moorland that stretched about her, grey and barren in the late summer evening.

Lights shone from the windows of Finmory House, glowing warm and welcoming.

Home, thought Jinny, and shivered with pleasure to think that home wasn't a flat in the city as it had been a year ago when the Manders family had lived in Stopton. Now, home was Finmory House, a grey stone house in the north of Scotland, standing between mountains and sea and surrounded by heather-clad moors. The only other house that Jinny could see was Mr MacKenzie's farm, and beyond that it was miles to Glenbost village. Jinny loved it all – the space, the freedom and the silence.

In Stopton, Mr Manders had been a probation officer. Now he was a potter, selling his pots to Nell Storr's craft shop in Inverburgh, and the author of a

book about the slums of Stopton and the lives of the people there with whom he had worked. *Almost an author*, thought Jinny more truthfully. Her father had written the book and one publisher had turned it down but he had sent it to another. So far he had not heard whether they wanted to publish it or not.

Petra, Jinny's elder sister, was fifteen. Riding home, Jinny knew exactly what Petra would be doing. She would be playing the piano, practising the pieces for her music examination. Jinny could picture her, sitting very straight on the piano stool, wearing neat, smart clothes, for everything that Petra wore became neat and smart the second she put it on. She would be playing very precisely, her face concentrating on getting each and every note exactly right – as each and every hair of Petra's dark, short curls was always exactly right.

We're not sisters, thought Jinny. *I'm a changeling. Petra couldn't possibly be my sister. At least I won't have to go to the same school as her, where they would always be telling me how wonderful Petra is.*

Until now, Jinny had gone to the village school in Glenbost, riding there with Mike, her ten-year-old brother, on Punch and Bramble, two Highland ponies borrowed in the off season from Miss Tuke's trekking centre, and Petra had been a weekly boarder at Duninver Grammar School. When they all returned to school in September, Petra would go back to Duninver,

but Jinny was to travel each day by school bus to the new comprehensive school at Inverburgh. It had been like a miracle when Jinny had heard that they were building a new school and that she would be able to travel there each day. She could not possibly have left Shantih at Finmory; could not possibly have gone to stay at the Duninver school hostel.

'I just wouldn't have gone and that would have been that.' Jinny laid her hand on Shantih's warm, strong neck. 'I couldn't have left you alone all week, could I?'

Shantih flickered her ears at the sound of Jinny's voice and flurried her nostrils in reply to the question.

Warm and sweet and sudden, love for Shantih filled Jinny. Once the Arab had been 'Yasmin the Killer Horse', beaten into a fury in a circus. Jinny had rescued her, made Shantih her own, tamed and gentled her.

'And now you can jump,' said Jinny, 'I must go on schooling you.'

Jinny knew that Sue didn't consider what she had been doing on Shantih tonight as schooling, but then Sue only had Pippen. She didn't know what it was like to jump Shantih, to feel as if you had wings, so that all you wanted to do was to go on jumping, faster and higher, over and over again.

Jinny rode up to the stables at Finmory House. Once they had been broken-down, deserted outhouses, but now they were a feed house, tack room, two stalls that Punch and Bramble used, and a loose box for Shantih.

Mike was waiting for her.

'Where have you been?' he asked, opening the loose-box door for Jinny. 'You've been ages. They've been waiting for you since before tea.'

Mike had short curly hair like Petra's and brown eyes. Jinny liked her brother. Even if he hadn't been related to her, Jinny thought, she would have wanted to know him. He was easy to be with, not moody, always the same.

'Who?' Jinny asked, taking off Shantih's tack.

'Two people,' said Mike. 'Especially to see you. So buck up.'

'Who?' said Jinny again, but Mike had gone. *Well, whoever they are they'll have to wait until I've finished with Shantih*, she thought.

Jinny tipped oats and nuts into the trough and stood watching Shantih eating her feed. When the horse had chased the last elusive grain of corn into the corner of her trough and swallowed it down, Jinny put on her halter and led her down to her field.

Punch and Bramble were at Miss Tuke's being trekking ponies again, so Shantih was alone. Jinny had thought that Pippen could have shared Shantih's field, but Mr MacKenzie had said the Manders' grass needed resting and Pippen would be better in his field.

'I expect the Hortons are paying Mr MacKenzie for their grazing,' Mr Manders had suggested, and Jinny had agreed that it was more than likely.

Shantih waited while Jinny gave her a sugar lump, then plunged away from her. She lay down to roll, her legs suddenly clumsy and ridiculous as she scrubbed herself into the grass. She surged upright again and instantly began to graze. For a moment longer Jinny leaned on the gate, watching her, hearing her cropping the grass and, in the distance, the slow rhythm of the waves in the bay.

'Dear horse,' said Jinny and walked backwards up the path until Shantih's gold was only a grey silhouette in the grey evening.

People to see me, Jinny thought, and she spun round and began to run up to the house, imagining that the committee who chose the showjumping team for the Olympic Games were waiting to see her.

'Of course, we do realise that you are not quite ready yet, but we like to select promising partnerships of horse and rider and start training them together for a few years before they actually compete in the Games. Can't guarantee you a place in the team, of course, but from what we've seen of your horse we think you've a pretty decent chance.'

The sight of an unknown Land Rover parked in front of Finmory brought Jinny back to reality. There really was someone in the house waiting to see her. Jinny had thought that Mike was only kidding her, wanting her to hurry up so that she would be in time to dry the dishes.

A loud woman's voice came from an open window.

'These Scottish digs can be rather amusing, but of course when Terry was alive, most of our work was in Egypt.'

Jinny didn't know the voice. It didn't sound like someone who would want to see her. Cautiously she went round to the side of the house and in by the back door.

Ken was standing by the sink, washing some stones he had collected from the beach. He had put the stones in a basin of water and was gazing down at them, meditating on them.

Ken Dawson lived with the Manders. He worked with Mr Manders in the pottery, cared for the vegetable garden, which he had created and which fed them all with vegetables and fruit. 'No need for all the slaughtering. The earth feeds us, if we'll only let it,' Ken said. And with Ken to look after the garden it did.

Ken was eighteen – tall, bony, with straw-coloured hair growing long, past his shoulders, his green eyes calm in his weather-beaten face. Ken had saved Jinny's life and had helped her to rescue Shantih.

Mr Manders had been Ken's probation officer in Stopton when Ken had been involved in a break-in to a warehouse. On the last day of his probation Ken had said to Mr Manders, 'I'd nothing to do with it.' 'I know,' Mr Manders had acknowledged.

After the Manders had come to live at Finmory,

Ken had arrived with Kelly, his grey, shaggy, yellow-eyed dog, and offered to help. Now he was part of the family. *Just as well he found us*, Jinny often thought. *Just as well for all of us*. For Ken's rich parents wanted nothing to do with him. They sent him a monthly cheque through their bank. 'So that they'll know I'm not starving,' Ken said.

'Who's here?' Jinny asked, going across the kitchen to look at Ken's stones.

He handed one to her, holding it carefully between bony forefinger and thumb.

'A flint,' he said. 'You can see where it was chipped to make a sharp edge on it. Made in the Stone Age and now you're holding it.' He laid it reverently on Jinny's open palm.

'I thought I heard you come in,' exclaimed Jinny's mother, bursting into the kitchen. 'Where have you been?'

Jinny gave the flint back to Ken. She knew from the tone of her mother's voice that things more urgent than Ken's stones were about to overtake her.

'Jumping Shantih,' Jinny replied, while Ken turned himself off from their raised voices and went on staring silently down at his underwater, shimmering stones.

'All afternoon and all evening?' said Mrs Manders in obvious disbelief.

'Well, more or less,' said Jinny, trying to remember anything else she might have done.

But her mother wasn't really wanting to know.

'You've to go upstairs straight away and tidy your bedroom. It's an absolute disgrace.'

'Now?' asked Jinny in amazement. Remembering the strewn clothes, books, paints, paper and all the other things that were rioting over her bedroom floor, Jinny could quite see why her mother should think that it needed tidying up, but she couldn't imagine why she wanted her to do it now.

'This very minute. Two archaeologists arrived hours ago wanting to see your mural. Luckily, before I took them upstairs, I had the sense to look at your room. It is a shambles, Jinny. I wasn't going to clear it up after you so I told them they would have to wait until you came home. We're all onto our fourth coffee, so do you think you could hurry up?'

'I don't see why they should get into my bedroom . . .' began Jinny.

'At once,' said her mother in the voice which Jinny didn't argue with.

Jinny raced up the wide flight of stairs, ran along the landing corridor to where an almost vertical ladder of stairs led up to her room.

When she had first seen it, Jinny had known that this must be her room at Finmory. It was divided into two parts by an archway. The window on the left looked out to sea – down over Finmory's wild garden to the ponies' field and on to Finmory Bay. Waking in

the morning, Jinny would lean out and call Shantih's name, and her horse would look up and whinny in reply. The opposite window looked out over the moors and the high, rocky crags hustling up against the sky. It was in this half of the room that there was a painting on the wall which the archaeologists wanted to see. A mural of a red horse with yellow eyes that came charging through a growth of blue-green forest branches laden with white blooms.

Jinny could see what her mother had meant about her room. It was worse than usual. She gathered up armfuls of clothes and pushed them into drawers, stacked books into piles, collected pencils, felt-tipped pens, pastels and paints into boxes and tried to sort out the sheets of paper that lay like autumn leaves after a gale, covering everything.

The walls, too, were covered with Jinny's pictures – drawings, paintings, collages. They were mostly of Shantih and the animals that Jinny had seen on the moors – red deer, foxes, eagles, and the insects that lived their intense, secret lives in the same world as blind, gigantic humans.

Suddenly Jinny stopped clearing up. If the unknown archaeologists came up to her room they would see her pictures on the walls and Jinny hated anyone looking at her drawings. She wondered if she should make a fuss, go down and tell them that her bedroom was private.

'Jinny,' called her mother, still using 'that' voice, 'are you ready? Can we come up?'

Jinny pushed a last pile of drawings under the bed, captured a stray sock and hid it beneath her bedclothes and glanced quickly around. Her room was not perfect but it would have to do.

'Yes, OK,' she called down, and waited, hearing footsteps and voices growing louder as they approached.

Jinny's mother came in first, looking round quickly to see if Jinny's tidying was satisfactory. She was followed by a large woman in a tweed suit, bulletproof stockings and sturdy lace-up shoes. Her white hair was cropped, her wrinkled skin a dusty yellow. A young man with pimples and thick glasses peered out from her shadow.

'This is Jinny,' said Mrs Manders. 'Jinny, this is Mrs Horgan.'

'Freda,' said the woman, holding out a powerful hand to Jinny.

Jinny grasped it, said how do you do – but already Freda was striding towards the mural.

'And Ronald,' said Mrs Manders, but the young man was trotting behind Freda, paying no attention to Jinny.

They both stood for a moment in front of the Red Horse, their heads thrust forward staring at it, then Freda gave a snort of disgust.

'Useless,' she announced. 'Totally useless. Obviously

painted this century. Crude primitive.'

'Waste of an afternoon,' agreed Ronald. 'No chance of an original underneath.' And he scratched at the paint with his fingernail.

'Well, I like it,' protested Jinny indignantly. 'I like it very much indeed.'

Secretly, Jinny was afraid of the Horse. There was a strangeness about it, a power. When Shantih had been trapped in a circus, and Jinny had thought she would never see her again, she had drawn a picture of the Arab galloping free on the Finmory moors and pinned it on the wall opposite the Red Horse, and Shantih had come to Finmory. Jinny didn't really believe that the Red Horse could have had anything to do with bringing Shantih here, but then you never knew for certain about these things. You could never be quite sure about them.

'And it's mine,' added Jinny, as if that settled the whole matter.

'Jinny,' warned her mother.

'Now please don't get the wrong idea. I'm sure you're very fond of the old fellow, but we're looking for something else. Traces of a pony cult that we think might have existed in these parts. The Celts had many sacred animals – the horse, the stag, the dog, the boar and several others are all linked up with Celtic mythology. We're excavating a Celtic settlement at Brachan, about twelve miles from here. One of the locals told us there was an old painting of a horse at

Finmory House. We pricked up our ears when we heard that. There's cup-and-ball markings on some of the rocks about Finmory. Wouldn't mind excavating here sometime. Definite links with the Celts. So we took a chance and came over. Decent of you to let us see it, but no interest.'

'What's a pony cult?' asked Jinny.

'The Celts worshipped the Earth Mother, and one of the forms she took was the goddess Epona, goddess of ponies and foals. Not so long ago, about the turn of the century, a statuette of Epona was found quite close to where we're digging. A tinker found it, handed it into a museum in Inverburgh. Still there. Utterly ludicrous, a museum that size sitting on a valuable piece like that. Ought to be in London.'

'I didn't see it,' said Jinny. She had been to Inverburgh Museum with her teacher, Miss Broughton, and the other pupils at Glenbost School. 'I was doing a project on horses and I'm sure Miss Broughton would have shown it to me.'

'It's not in *the* Inverburgh Museum. That's quite reasonable. The silly old joker who handed it in had to go poking down the back streets and give it to the Wilton Collection. Nothing but a dust dump and you cannot get them to part with a thing.'

'Wish I'd seen it,' said Jinny. She liked the idea of worshipping a pony goddess, or, better still, a horse goddess like Shantih.

'Are you interested?' asked Freda.

'She is if it's horses,' said Mrs Manders.

'Well, why don't you ride over? Your mother has been telling us about your horse.'

'I'm not sure that I'll have time,' said Jinny doubtfully.

'Can't promise to produce another Epona while you're there, but we'd show you round the dig.'

'Could Sue come?' asked Jinny. 'To ride with me?'

'Why not? Bring sleeping bags, bunk down for the night and give us a hand the next day. Two ponies might bring us luck.'

Jinny hesitated.

'It would be very interesting,' said her mother.

Broadening my interests, thought Jinny.

'Not tomorrow, but the next day?' suggested Freda, making it definite where Jinny had hoped it would remain vague. 'Your father knows where the dig is. He'll show you where to come.'

'Well . . .' said Jinny doubtfully, thinking of course-building and jumping Shantih, and how there was so little of the summer holidays left, and then school and probably masses of homework. 'Well . . .'

But Freda was already out of the room, Ronald pattering behind her.

'So sorry to have troubled you,' Freda said, standing in the doorway as she said goodbye. 'One never knows, does one? Can't afford to ignore any clue.'

She was sitting in their Land Rover before she

remembered about Jinny.

'See you on Saturday,' she called, starting up the engine. 'And your friend.'

'It's not absolutely definite,' Jinny explained to her father as they went back into the house. 'She just mentioned that Sue and I could ride over and see the pace where they're excavating. It wasn't absolutely settled. We're going to build more jumps tomorrow and it really depends on how long that takes.'

'She invited you to stay the night,' said Mrs Manders. 'I think you should go.'

Mr Manders brought out his Ordnance Survey map and laid it on the table.

'That's where they are,' he said, 'staying in the old schoolhouse at Brachan. And that's where they're digging.' He traced with his finger.

'You could ride across the moors. You know your way to Loch Varrich. Ride along the side of the loch to there . . . and take that track that's marked right across the moors to Brachan.'

'Well . . .' said Jinny, knowing that it was something that she was always talking about doing, riding further that she had ever ridden before. She supposed there would be walls for Shantih to jump. 'I'll ask Sue tomorrow. Too late to go down to their tent tonight.'

Lying in bed before she went to sleep, Jinny was thinking about show jumps. Behind Mr MacKenzie's hay shed there was a discarded gate, and she was

almost sure that he would never miss it. She would go over tomorrow morning and ask him if they could have it. They could paint it red and white and that would be almost as good as a real show jump.

Jinny remembered a chapter in one of her pony books that told you how to build a showjumping course. She got out of bed and went through to the other half of her room to look for the book.

When she found it, she leaned on the windowsill, staring out at the moors. They were patched with gulleys of black moon shadow and plains of blue silver moonlight. The mountains were dense velvet against the clear, cold sky. Jinny stared out, fascinated by this strange moonlit world, remembering how she had ridden Bramble over the moors at night.

What would it be like to take Shantih out on a night like this, to gallop and jump by moonlight? she thought, and Jinny was riding Shantih out into the night. She felt the Arab plunge forward into a gallop, felt her rise over the stone walls as she came to them, while Jinny balanced easily in the saddle.

Then suddenly, bringing her back from her dreaming, Jinny knew there was someone in the room with her, someone who had crept up close behind her. She sprang round, ready to be furious with Mike or whoever else it was. But the room was empty. No one was there. Only the yellow eyes of the painted Horse, luminous in the silver light, were staring directly at Jinny.

For a second she stood frozen to the spot, her fingers gripping into her arms, unable to move. Then she dashed across the room, dived into bed and curled under the bedclothes as if she was hiding from something, as if the painted Horse could come galloping out of the picture to find her.