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Opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails: Royal Flame The Police Horse

Written by

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TILLY'S PONY TAILS

Royal Flame
the police horse

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TILLY'S PONY TAILS

Royal Flame
the police horse



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To Jenny Kleboe,
for all the endless hours of help over the years





One

It was a chilly winter's day. Tilly Redbrow adjusted her warm riding gloves and sat up straight in the saddle. She was having an early morning lesson at Silver Shoe Farm with her instructor, Angela. Tilly and her horse, Magic Spirit, were working on different types of trot.

'That's good Tilly. Now move into a medium trot. Remember, the rhythm and tempo remain the same as the working trot, but Magic has to cover more ground.

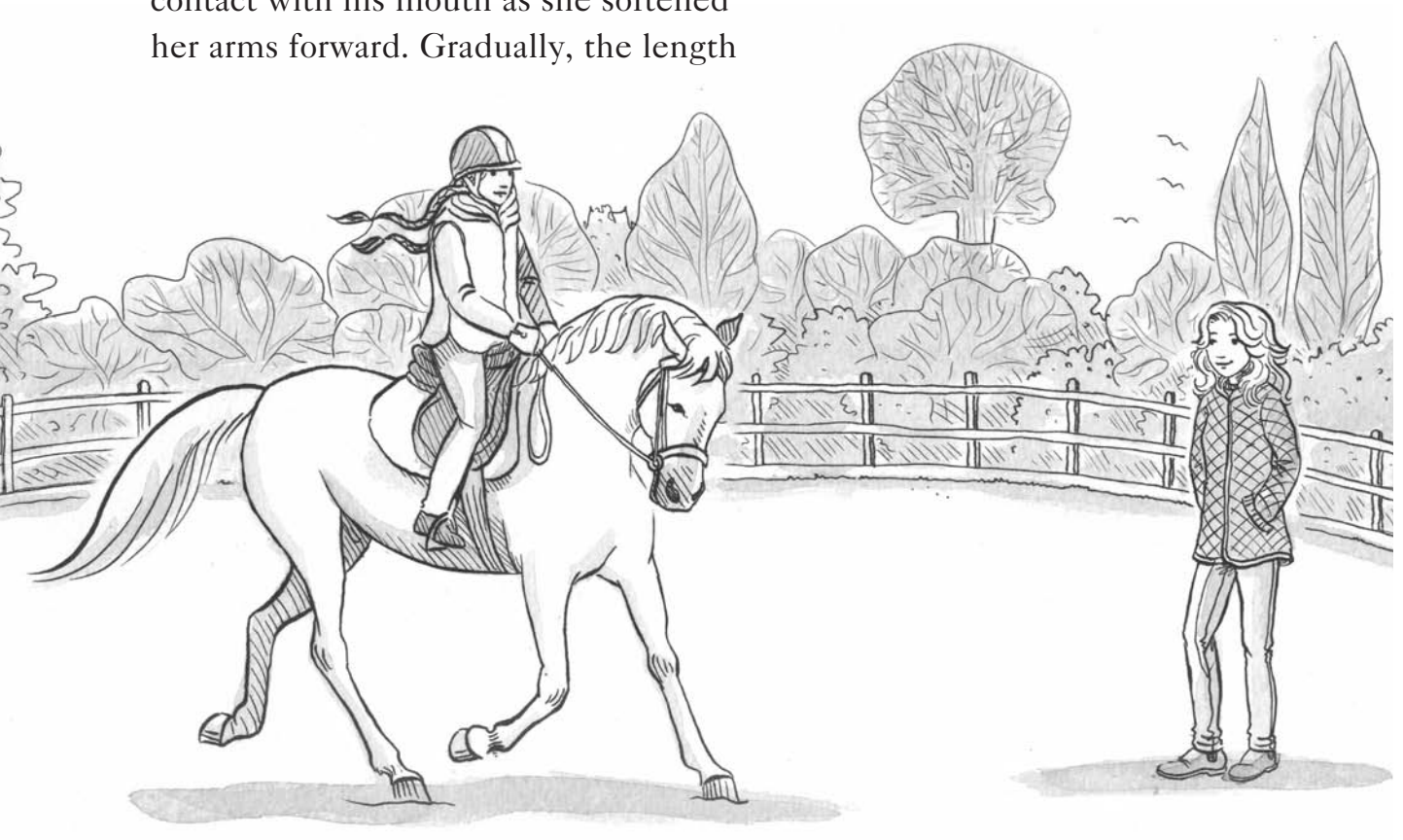
Longer, bigger steps, without increasing the speed.'

Tilly allowed Magic to extend his head and neck slightly. She kept a good contact with his mouth as she softened her arms forward. Gradually, the length of Magic's steps increased as Tilly put more leg on.

'Great,' said Angela approvingly.

They did the steps across the diagonal of the sand school and were about to go again when Tilly caught sight of a magnificent bay horse in the distance, being led towards the yard. It wasn't a horse she knew, not a Silver Shoe regular. He was tall and sturdy, with a light copper red coat and black points.

'Stay focused, Tilly! You've lost the rhythm. The steps are irregular now. Magic's lost his balance.'



Tilly felt Magic speed up. They'd both lost concentration. Closing her legs and letting her seat sink deeper into the saddle, Tilly made a transition to halt.

Magic stopped immediately and Tilly walked him back to Angela.

'You were going so well. What happened?' said Angela, shaking her head and smiling.

'I got distracted,' said Tilly. 'It was my fault. Sorry, Magic.'

She leaned forward and patted his neck.

'You'll both have to learn to ignore distractions – think of all the things going on at a competition,' said Angela. 'I know you'd probably prefer to be jumping or out hacking, but flat work is the best way to improve your riding. It helps horses strengthen up so they become better educated, balanced and well-mannered. It's important to keep practising.'

'I know,' said Tilly. 'And I will practise, as much as I can. I want Magic and I to be the best we can be.'

'That's the right attitude. Well, I think we've done enough this morning, Tilly. It's very cold. Put a turn-out rug on Magic and take him down to the long field. Then I suggest you go and get a hot chocolate from the club room. Looks as though you could do with warming up.'

Tilly brushed a hand across her forehead and wiped frosty hairs from her eyes. She could see her breath in the air.

'Okay,' she said. 'Thanks for the lesson.'

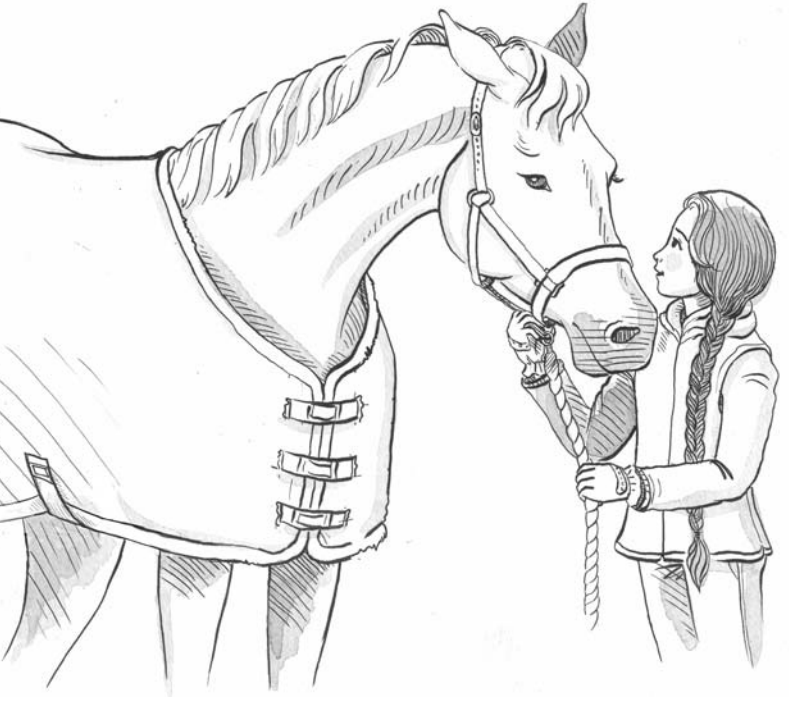
'You're welcome,' said Angela. 'We'll have another one next week and work on the canter a bit more. See you later.'

As Tilly led Magic away from the sand school, she thought about the bay horse she'd seen. Who was he? She hoped she would find out when she got to the yard.



Tilly untacked Magic. He hadn't sweated while they'd been working, so she was able to put his turn-out rug straight on. It was an extra thick one, especially for the cold weather.

'If anything will make you feel cosy and snug, Magic, this will.'



She'd bought it for him a couple of Christmases ago and it had lasted well, although it was looking a bit shabby now. Magic had a habit of rolling in the muddiest parts of the field.

'Maybe it's time to get you a new one,' she said. 'A horse as smart as you should have smart rugs to match.'

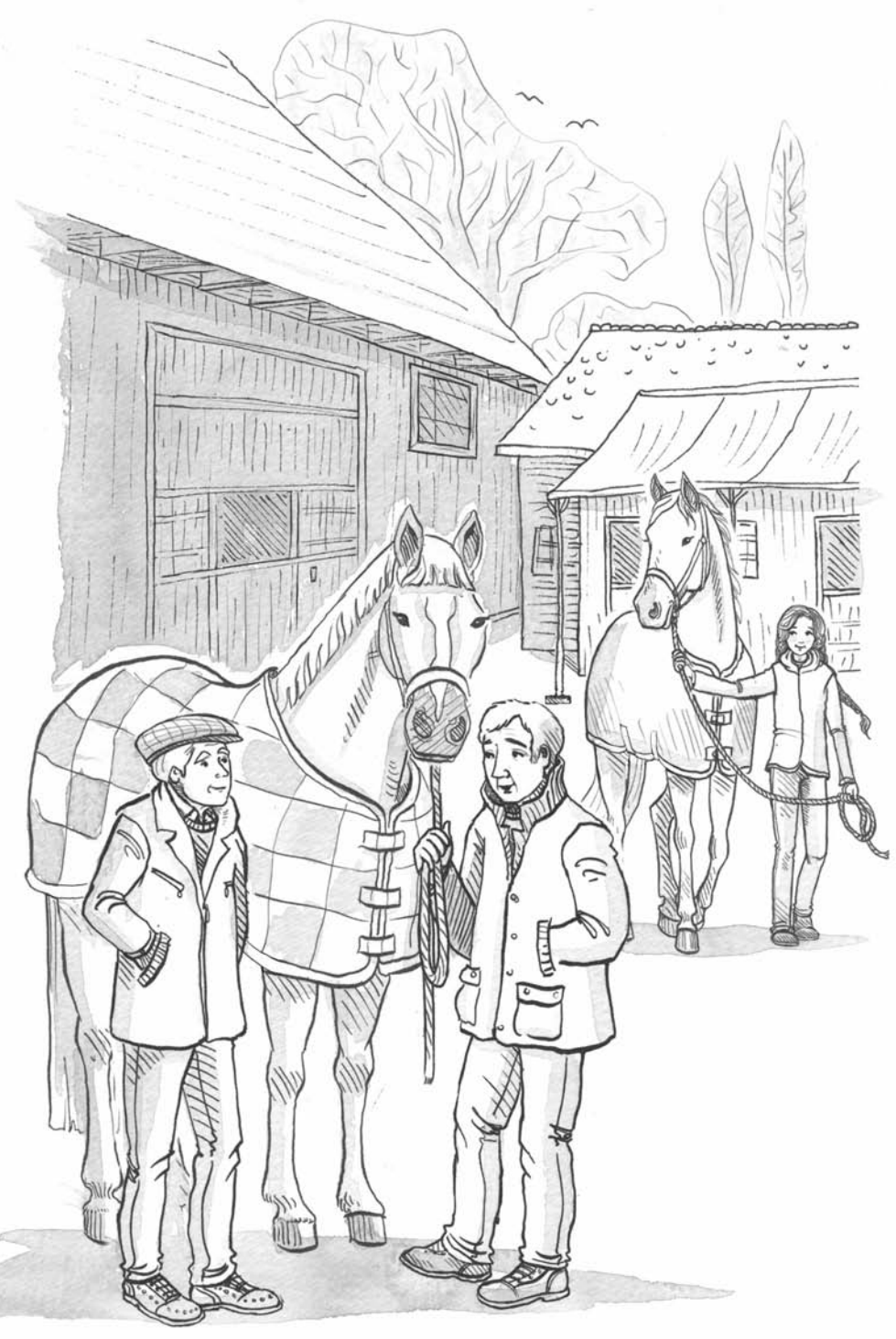
Magic gave a small nicker. She led him across to the feed room and gave him a handful of nuts, then headed down to the long field. On the way they passed Angela's dad, Jack Fisher. He was talking to a man Tilly didn't recognise. Beside them was the magnificent bay.

'Morning, Tilly,' Jack called.

'Hi.'

'Good to see Magic's rugged up. It's going to be a cold winter, this one. Martin here says the forecast is for snow this week.'

'Is he yours?' said Tilly, unable to take her eyes off the beautiful horse. He was slightly bigger than Magic, about 16.2hh,



Tilly guessed, and his coat was like copper satin. He stood proudly. Tilly thought he had a wise expression on his face. She wondered what sort of things he'd done in his life. His ears were keen and alert.

'Ah, sorry, Tilly,' said Jack. 'I haven't introduced you. This is Royal Flame. And this is Martin, an old friend of mine. Martin's off to Greece for Christmas.'

Martin smiled.

'Yes, I'm escaping the cold for a few months. Luckily, Jack's agreed to help me out.'

'We're looking after Royal Flame while he's away,' explained Jack. 'So you'll have plenty of time to get to know him. He's a very special horse.'

'I hope he doesn't mind the cold weather!' said Tilly.

'Oh, Royal Flame isn't fazed by anything,' said Jack.

'He's an ex-police horse,' said Martin proudly. 'He's the bravest animal I know. We worked together in the Mounted Police

force for years. He's certainly earned his retirement.'

Tilly smiled. The thought of an ex-police horse coming to stay at Silver Shoe was exciting. She remembered the amazing stunts she'd seen at Olympia – twelve police horses jumping through flaming hoops and performing a musical ride.

Tilly looked at Royal Flame. He stared back, his black eyes shining. She couldn't wait to get to know him properly.



Two

That afternoon, Tilly and her friends, Mia and Cynthia, gathered in the club room to help Angela plan the Silver Shoe Christmas party. It was held every year and everyone looked forward to it. All the horse owners, riding school students, and friends of Silver Shoe were invited, including the farrier, the vet, and the people who supplied hay and feed.

The horses were included in the festivities, of course. They got to eat their