Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Katy's Wild Foal

Written by

Victoria Eveleigh

Published by

Orion Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Katy's Wild Foal

Also by Victoria Eveleigh

Katy's Champion Pony
Katy's Pony Surprise (from June 2012)

A Stallion Called Midnight (from June 2012)

For more information visit –

www.victoriaeveleigh.co.uk
www.orionbooks.co.uk

Katy's Wild Foal



Victoria Eveleigh

Illustrated by Chris Eveleigh

Orion
Children's Books

First published in Great Britain under the title *Katy's Exmoor* in 2002
by Tortoise Publishing
This edition first published in 2012
by Orion Children's Books
a division of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
An Hachette Livre UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Victoria Eveleigh 2002, 2012
Illustrations copyright © Chris Eveleigh 2002, 2012

The right of Victoria Eveleigh and Chris Eveleigh to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Orion Children's Books.

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 4440 0541 7

www.orionbooks.co.uk

1

Born on the Moor



Katy sat alone at the kitchen table, staring blankly at the birthday presents in front of her. A cheerful weather man on the TV was forecasting snow on high ground. Katy knew it was the last thing they needed at lambing time, but a part of her longed for the excitement of snow.

My birthday will always be in the middle of lambing, she thought gloomily. Why couldn't I have been born in the summer? Even Christmas Day would have been better than the first day of April.

Lambing was a hectic time of year at Barton Farm,

so Katy's family were too busy to organise a party or an outing somewhere for her. Today they'd done their best, she had to admit. They'd even said she could invite someone over for the day, but she hadn't been sure who to ask. She didn't really have a best friend.

Gran and Granfer had come round for the afternoon, so that had been fun. She'd helped Gran make a trifle. Everyone had stopped for tea, complete with trifle and cake. For a moment it had felt like a proper birthday.

Now it was early evening. Gran and Granfer had gone back home, and Mum, Dad and Katy's older brother, Tom, had gone outside to catch up on all the work that needed to be done before darkness fell. The house felt cold and empty.

Katy took the iPod her parents had given her out of its box. She'd have to ask Tom to set it up for her when he came in again, as the instructions were impossible to understand. What she'd really wanted was a mobile phone – everyone at school had one, except her. But her parents said mobiles were a waste of money because there was no signal at Barton Farm. Katy put the iPod back in its box, looked briefly at a jewellery-making kit Auntie Rachel had given her and then picked up an old book called *Moorland Mousie*. She turned the thick, yellowing pages. There were some lovely illustrations, but the writing looked rather heavy going. She found reading hard work.

"Take care of this book. I hope you'll love it as much as I did at your age," Granfer had said when he'd given it to her.

"What's it about, Granfer?" she'd asked, thumbing through the pages.

"It's the life story of an Exmoor pony called Mousie. A bit like the story of Black Beauty, but much better in my opinion," Granfer had replied. "That book started my lifelong interest in Exmoor ponies."

"Have Exmoors been at Barton forever?"

"Well, I don't know about forever," he'd said, smiling. "But they've been here for as long as I can remember, and way before that I expect. Your great grandfather was a founding member of the Exmoor Pony Society, you know. Loved his Exmoors, he did, and he was determined they should stay as they've always been. He was even against me having one to ride when I was a boy. 'Their place is on the moor, living as nature intended,' he used to say. Free-living, it's called nowadays. It means they live like wild ponies but they're actually owned and managed by someone, so they're not truly wild – not like deer, foxes and other wildlife."

The Barton herd of registered Exmoor ponies was one of the oldest and best herds in the country, and Granfer was a highly respected member of the Exmoor Pony Society. It was a great sadness to him that his

son, Katy's father, had no interest in the herd. The farm had been handed over to Dad, but Granfer still owned the ponies.

Gran and Granfer had lived at the farm until last year, but Gran couldn't cope with the stairs anymore so they'd moved to a bungalow. Now they only visited a couple of times a week, and Katy missed them terribly. Barton Farm was an isolated place, surrounded by the high moors, several miles from the nearest town. She often felt lonely and cut off from other people her own age. Most of the children at school lived in town, and the girls were mainly into fashion and music, which really didn't interest her much, although she'd learned to pretend it did. Tom was nine years older than she was, and all he talked about was farming. He seemed to know exactly what he was going to do with his life: he'd go to agricultural college and then help Dad farm Barton. One day the farm would be his.

Katy put the book down and picked up the jewellery kit. The box slipped out of her hand as she tried to open it, and hundreds of beads and fake jewels spilled out.

"Oh, no!" she squeaked, watching in disbelief as they hit the floor and sprayed out in all directions like a multi-coloured firework.

What do I do now? I'll lose them completely if I use the vacuum cleaner. I'd better find a dustpan and brush, she thought.

The beads were surprisingly slippery. Katy nearly fell several times as she tried her best to gather them together. They seemed to have other ideas, shooting off in all directions as soon as the brush touched them. Eventually she managed to round most of them up and crammed a rather unpleasant mixture of beads, jewels, dust and dog hairs back into the box.

I can't face sorting it all out now, she thought. I may as well walk up to the lambing shed and see if I can help. The orphan lambs will need feeding soon. I'll go and give them a birthday cuddle. Perhaps they'd like a little bit of cake.

Katy took a piece of birthday cake, wrapped it in some foil and put it in the pocket of Tom's old army jacket which was hanging on the back of the chair. The jacket smelt overpoweringly of sheep and was far too big for her, but she put it on anyway. It saved having to hunt around for her own coat, and wearing Tom's clothes made her feel like a proper farmer. She went to the hallway, took off her cosy sheepskin boots – a birthday present from Gran – and winced as she slipped her bare feet into her chilly, damp wellies.

Socks really would have been a good idea, she said to herself. Oh well, too late now. I won't be outside for long, anyway.

She opened the door and stepped out into the sleety rain. Behind her, the door slammed before

she had a chance to turn and shut it herself.

Cold drops hit Katy's warm face. Going from warm and dry to cold and wet was always horrible. Screwing her face up against the weather, she trudged along the muddy track to the lambing shed, which was a beacon of light in the darkness.

Nobody was in the shed, but Katy noticed a ewe in the corner straining and grunting loudly. She didn't know what to do, so she decided to stay and keep an eye on things for a few minutes, hoping someone would come.

No one came, and no lamb came out of the ewe. As she stood there, Katy noticed a newborn lamb nearby who didn't seem to know who its mother was. One ewe kept butting it whenever it went near her, and two others weren't sure if it was theirs or not. The poor lamb looked so wet and bewildered. Perhaps its mother was the one trying to give birth in the corner. Above the roar of the wind, Katy thought she could hear the tractor in the direction of the Common, so she left the sanctuary of the shed and went to find help.

The wind in the fields was even stronger than it had been on the way up to the shed. It snatched Katy's breath away and made Tom's wet jacket slap against her body. Underfoot, the ground was uneven and slippery. To add to her discomfort, the rain started to trickle down into her wellies, surrounding her bare

feet with ice-cold water. With every step she took, the combination of bare feet, water and rubber boot made a rude squelching noise which at any other time would have had Katy in fits of laughter.

She reached the Common gate, but there was still no sign of the tractor, although she thought she could hear the rumble of its engine. Perhaps it was only the wind she could hear.

The Common was a large area of moorland on which Barton Farm and other neighbouring farms had grazing rights for sheep, cattle and ponies. It was here that the Barton herd of Exmoor ponies lived all year round.

Katy leaned against the gate and peered through its bars.

Water ran in a shallow sheet off the saturated surface of the moor, forming tiny rivers in the sheep tracks and making ponds against the boundary walls. A wide stream flowed through the gateway where Katy stood. Beyond the gate, she could see the outline of her den – a dark grey shape against the lighter grey of the rain-soaked moor and cloud-laden sky.

The den was a group of gorse bushes that had grown together and had been eaten by sheep so that they formed a circular shelter with a hollowed-out middle. Katy had made it her own special place, and she'd spent many happy hours playing there.

She was just about to turn for home when she spotted something moving on one side of the den. It looked like the back half of an Exmoor pony, with its head and neck hidden from view in the circle of gorse. Katy remembered Granfer saying ponies sometimes left the herd if they were sick or foaling. She opened and closed the gate with difficulty, and walked up to the den. It was odd that, as she approached, the pony didn't move. Perhaps it was caught up or injured. When Katy was only a few steps away, the mare leaped backwards and started whinnying in a low, agitated voice.

"Oh!" gasped Katy.

A tiny foal's head poked out of the bushes, followed by four matchstick legs which shakily supported a skinny body. Its bony frame seemed to be shrink-wrapped in dark, wet skin, and it looked impossibly thin and fragile. The foal started to walk with wobbly steps towards Katy, and she was spellbound as it came right up to her. She reached out and just managed to touch its tiny forehead with her frozen fingertips before the mare whinnied anxiously and the foal realised its mistake and hurried away. In an instant, the magical moment was lost and the mare and foal had disappeared over the brow of the hill.

Katy realised she was shaking all over with cold and her hands, feet and face hurt. If she felt like this, what must the little foal feel like? It wouldn't be able to

survive outside, not in this weather. She'd have to get Dad to bring it back to the farm, and she'd look after it.

Filled with new purpose, Katy ran most of the way back home. She'd forgotten all about the lambs, and the ewe trying to give birth in the shed.

Katy walked into the kitchen to find Dad flat on his back having slipped on some of the beads she hadn't managed to pick up.

Her mum was plugging in the vacuum cleaner. "Where have you been, Katy? We've been looking for you everywhere! I even rang Gran and Granfer to see if you went back with them, so now I've worried them unnecessarily too. Oh my goodness, you're soaked to the skin! What have you been up to?" she asked.

"And the next time you want to try killing me, choose a method that's a little less painful, please," said Dad, climbing unsteadily to his feet.

"I'm sorry, I was looking for you, so I went up to the Common and I found . . ."

"Why on earth did you think we'd be on the Common at this time of night? We were feeding the cows in Broadacre," Dad interrupted.

"What were you thinking of, leaving these beads all over the place?" Mum added. "We've got enough to do without this sort of mess, and Dad nearly had a nasty accident."

"Nearly!" Dad exclaimed. "It feels as if I've done

myself a permanent injury."

At that moment, Tom came in from looking round the sheep in the fields. "One dead lamb – a fox has taken most of it – and a lame one, which I injected and marked, and I brought those twins we were worried about back to the shed because they're not getting enough milk." He turned to Katy. "So that's where my jacket got to! How many times have I got to tell you not to take my things without asking?"

The conversation was not going as Katy had planned, and she tried to alter its direction before everyone started telling her off at once. "I'm really sorry, honestly I am," she said. "You see, I went up to the Common and found this tiny foal which must have been born today. It's going to die if we don't bring it in!"

"I'm sorry, Katy, but there's no way I'm going out on the Common to get a mare and foal in tonight," said Dad. "The foal wouldn't be able to walk all the way back to the farm, for a start. And the mare has never been parted from the herd or stabled, so she'd probably get so distressed that she'd end up accidentally trampling her baby or something. They're much better off where they are. Besides, every inch of shed space is taken up with ewes and lambs at present."

"But Dad!" sobbed Katy, "It'll die out there, I know it will!"

"Well, that's just a chance we'll have to take, love,"

Dad said wearily.

Katy's mum sighed. An argument like this was the last thing they needed. "Exmoor ponies are very good at surviving in awful weather, you know. Their ancestors lived during the Ice Age," she said.

"I don't want a history lesson! I want to save my foal!" cried Katy.

"Crikey, it's *your* foal now, is it?" Tom teased.

"Shut up Tom, you're not helping," hissed Dad.

"Yes! Shut up, Tom!" shouted Katy, and she burst into tears. Her hands and feet had become unbearably painful as they'd started to thaw out, and she was terribly disappointed. Why couldn't they see how serious this was? She ran up to her bedroom and banged the door.

"Happy Birthday," whispered Mum.

"Oh dear," sighed Dad. "I'd better take a look, I suppose."

Dad put on his coat and boots, collected some hay and went off on the quad bike to look for the mare and foal. After an hour of searching, he found them sheltering by a hedge. The foal was suckling the mare, but he had to admit that it looked very frail.

Its mother looked thin, too. Bad weather and not enough milk were often a lethal combination for early foals. Taking care not to frighten the mare, he placed the

hay nearby. It was the best he could do at that time of night. Besides, he'd been away from the lambing shed for too long. He'd check on them both again in the morning.

"Sorry, little fella," he said to the foal. "You'll just have to take your chance."

The shed was in chaos. Five ewes had given birth. One had produced a good, strong single lamb. Three had produced twins which all looked identical, or perhaps they were actually a single, twins and a set of triplets, or even two singles and a set of quadruplets. Another had two lambs already, and was trying to give birth to a third one which was coming backwards. The abandoned lamb Katy had seen a couple of hours ago was wandering about, cold, hungry and bewildered. Several sheep who were about to give birth were adding to the confusion by trying to claim babies which weren't theirs. There were only two spare individual pens left for newborn lambs and their mothers. In a big pen in the corner, lit by the red glow of a heat lamp, the hungry orphans bleated noisily.

Dad sighed heavily. His back ached from the fall on Katy's beads, and he felt shattered. "Damn the Exmoor ponies," he muttered as he set about sorting things out. A long night lay ahead.