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Opening extract from

Tilly's Pony Tails: Free Spirit the Mustang

Written by

Pippa Funnell

Published by

Orion Children's Books

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Buttons
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Royal Flame
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TILLY'S PONY TAILS

Free Spirit
the mustang



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Illustrated by Jennifer Miles

Orion
Children's Books

First published in Great Britain 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 UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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

ISBN 978 1 4440 0264 5

Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD



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For all of you who have read and enjoyed the Tilly series





The character of Anna in this story takes her name from a real-life Anna, who is a member of The Pony Club. Anna won a competition run through The Pony Club to become a character in a Tilly's Pony Tails book.

To find out more about The Pony Club, go to www.pcuk.org.





One

'That's it, Magic! Good boy!'

Tilly Redbrow rose in the saddle as her horse, Magic Spirit, performed a rather smart extended trot. She wanted this movement to be perfect. Top marks. No errors.
She pictured the faces of the judges, the scoreboards, and the crowds. She imagined herself wearing an elegant dressage top hat and tailcoat and long, polished riding boots.

'And now into halt,' came a distant voice. 'Halt, please!'

Tilly pulled Magic to a muddled stop. She took the reins in one hand and saluted.

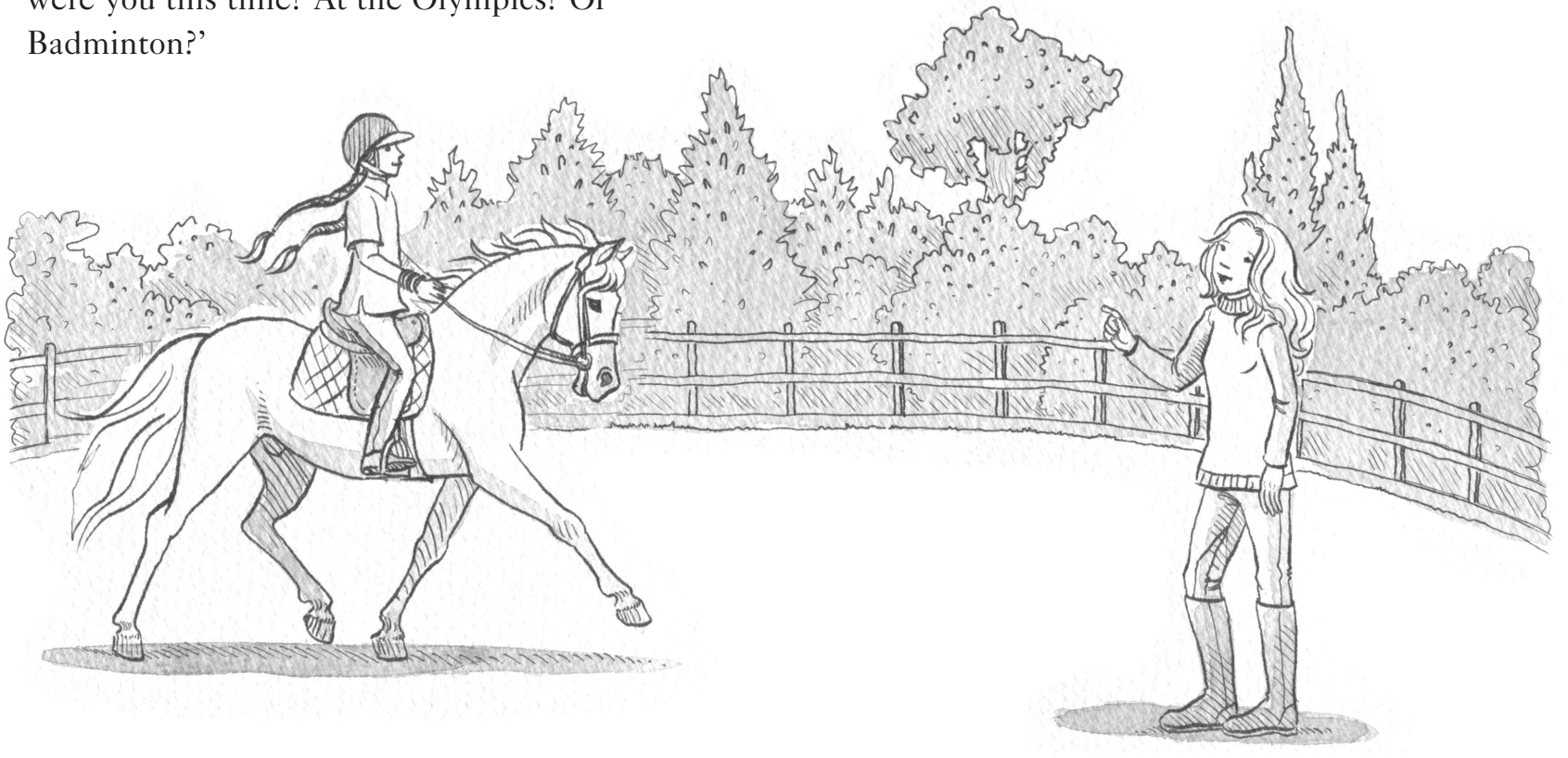
'Didn't you hear me asking you to halt?' said Angela, her instructor.

'Yes. Er, I mean, no. I was, um, I guess I was a bit lost in the moment,' Tilly said, blushing.

'I could see that,' said Angela. 'Where were you this time? At the Olympics? Or Badminton?'

'The Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event,' said Tilly. 'The top event in America.'

'Of course,' said Angela. 'I should have known. I guess Silver Shoe Farm can't compete with the excitement of a real four star event. Not long now. You and Brook must be so excited.



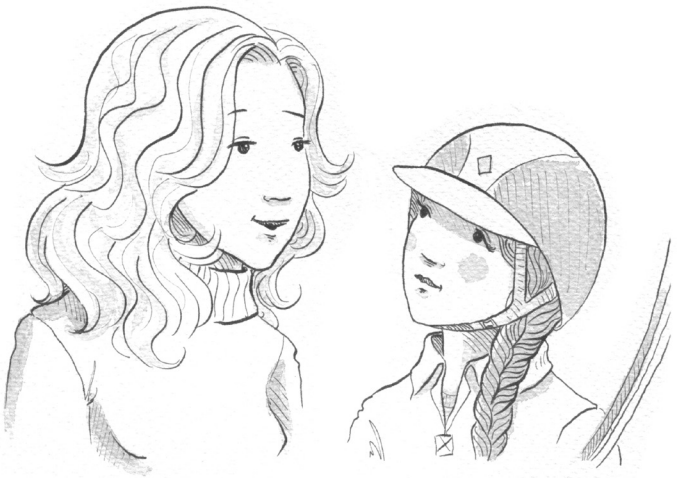
I'm sorry for being so agitated. I guess I'm starting to get more nervous too now that it's a matter of days rather than weeks before we leave.'

Tilly understood why Angela had been getting gradually more twitchy over the past few months. As the day of their departure approached, Angela had been putting endless hours of work into preparing her beloved event horse, Pride and Joy, for the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event. Ever since Tilly and the girls at Silver Shoe had begged Angela to bring Pride and Joy out of retirement and give him another chance at competing, their partnership had never looked back. Having had so many years off, it was quite remarkable that there had been no sign of Pride's old injury, and just as remarkable that Angela had been able to step back into the highest level of the sport.

Tilly was as excited as Angela was nervous. To her delight, Angela had asked Tilly to be her groom for the week, and Tilly's brother, Brook, was also joining them on the trip. He had persuaded his parents to let him go for the experience of seeing top riders at their very best.

'I never realised how much extra work had to be done to get horses fit enough for a three day,' said Tilly. 'I hope it all works out.'

'So do I,' said Angela cautiously. 'It's a big challenge after so many years, and we'll



be up against some of the best riders in the world. It takes a very special horse to do well at a three day event. In the dressage, they have to be responsive, supple and elegant, and with so many more people watching, it creates an electric atmosphere.'

'It must be very distracting for horses and riders,' said Tilly.

'Yes, it really tests the concentration. That's why in all the training, we work to teach our horses to respond to us, despite distractions. For the cross-country, horses need to be brave, athletic and very fit. And for the show jumping on the final day they need to be able to jump a clear round.'

It sounded thrilling, but extremely tough. Tilly had already been to Badminton and she'd seen clips of Kentucky on the internet, so she knew it was going to be demanding. The cross-country course covered four miles, with thirty jumps, and the show jumping required horses to clear a height of 1.3 metres.

'Wow. I can see why you've been working so hard over the past few months,' said Tilly.

'Yes, but remember it's a team effort, and grooming is an invaluable role. I know I can trust you to look after Pride and Joy.'

Tilly grinned. The idea of grooming at such a major event made her feel nervous, as well as excited, so she appreciated Angela's words of encouragement.



After her dressage lesson, Tilly led Magic back to the yard and tied him up.

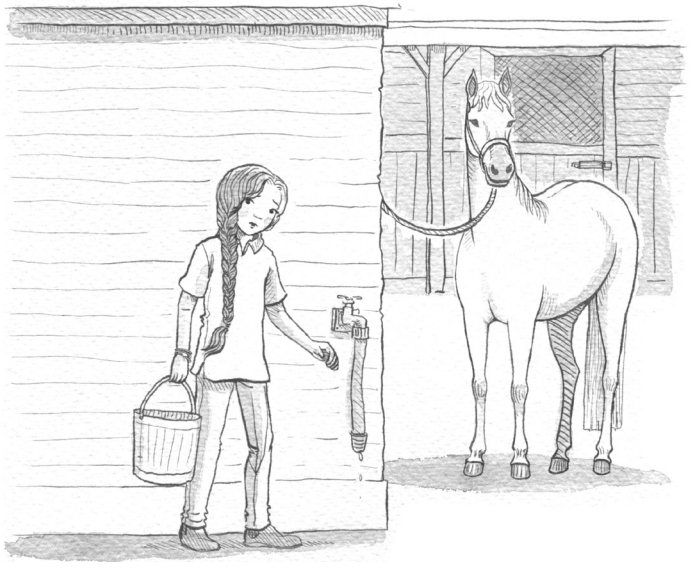
'Let me get you a drink,' she said. 'You must be thirsty after that. Who knows? Maybe one day it'll be you and me competing at Kentucky. I suppose we'd better work on our halt though. We were a bit messy today!'

Magic shook his head. Tilly gave him a pat then carried his bucket to the water

tap and filled it. As she reached down she noticed one of her horsehair bracelets had come loose. Some of the hairs had frayed and didn't look as if they'd last much longer.

'Oh, no! I must have caught it on something!'

The bracelets were very important to Tilly. They were made from the tail-hairs of the special horses in her life. She made them for her friends, and wore three of her own.



One was from Magic's tail. Another was from the tail-hairs of Stripy, a zebra foal she'd helped rescue while on a safari holiday with Brook. And the other, the one that was coming loose, she'd had since she was born. She and Brook had each been given a bracelet by their birth mum, before she died.

Tilly and Brook believed their bracelets were Native American and that, years ago, their mum had spent some time living with a tribe. They'd been in contact with a man called Chief Four Paws, whose people watched over free-roaming wild Mustangs.

Tilly inspected the damage. The bracelet was secure but she hated the thought that it might fall off without her noticing.

'I can't lose it, Magic,' she said. 'It's one of the only links I have to my past. But how on earth am I going to repair it? I don't think there are many wild Mustangs roaming the streets of North Cosford!'



Just then, her phone rang. It was Brook.

'Hi,' she said. 'How are you?'

'Busy,' he replied. 'I've been trying to sort out a programme for Solo while we're away. I've managed to persuade a friend to keep riding him for me.' Tilly knew that Brook had a few ambitions of his own with Solo – he was hoping to get selected later in the season for the Junior British team. 'I can't believe we're really going to the USA! Are you looking forward to it?'

'Are you kidding?' said Tilly. 'I can't wait!'



Two

It had taken lots of persuasion, but when Tilly's parents had finally agreed to her going to Kentucky, they'd had some conditions. First, she needed to catch up on all the school work she was going to miss. Luckily, Tilly's school had agreed to this too. Second, she had to wash the car and do the vacuuming for a month, in order to contribute to the cost of the flight. She didn't mind the extra work involved. It would be worth it. And, secretly, she