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Opening extract from

A Stallion Called Midnight

Written by

Victoria Eveleigh

Published by

Orion Children's Books

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A Stallion Called Midnight is set on a real island called Lundy at a time when there were lighthouse-keepers in the North and South Lights and a stallion called Midnight really did roam free. Lundy is a place that is very special to me for lots of reasons, and I hope you enjoy reading this story as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

All The Very Best (the traditional Lundy toast!)

Victoria

Also by Victoria Eveleigh

Katy's Wild Foal
Katy's Champion Pony
Katy's Pony Surprise

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A Stallion Called Midnight



Victoria Eveleigh

Illustrated by Chris Eveleigh

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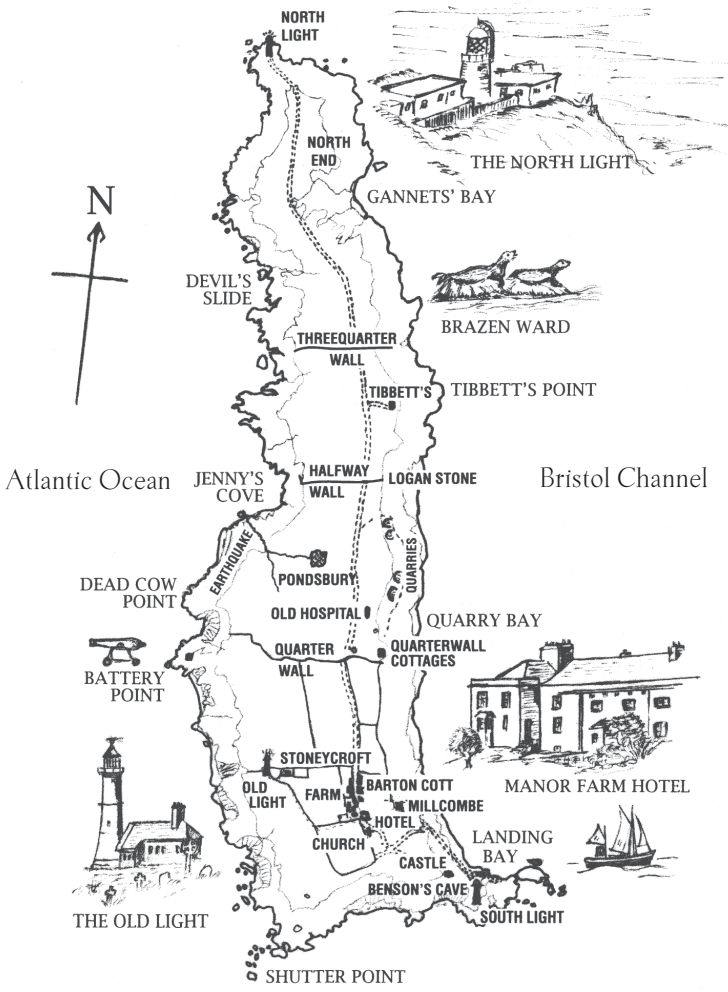
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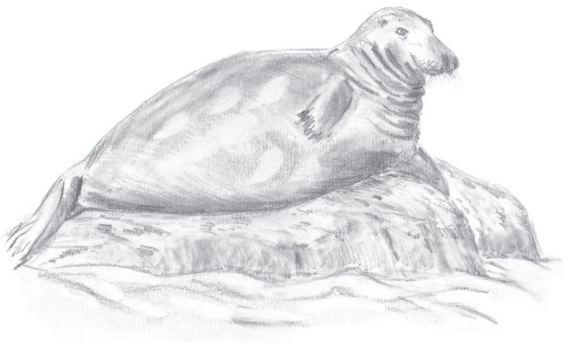
For Diana.
Thank you for all your help
and for some wonderful holidays on Lundy.

Lundy


NORTH LIGHT
THE NORTH LIGHT
NORTH END
GANNETS' BAY
N
DEVIL'S SLIDE
BRAZEN WARD
THREEQUARTER WALL
TIBBETT'S
TIBBETT'S POINT
Atlantic Ocean
JENNY'S COVE
HALFWAY WALL
LOGAN STONE
Bristol Channel
EARTHQUAKE
QUARRIES
DEAD COW POINT
PONDSBURY
OLD HOSPITAL
QUARRY BAY
QUARTER WALL
QUARTERWALL COTTAGES
BATTERY POINT
MANOR FARM HOTEL
STONEYCROFT
OLD LIGHT
FARM
BARTON COTT
MILLCOMBE
HOTEL
CHURCH
LANDING BAY
CASTLE
BENSON'S CAVE
SOUTH LIGHT
THE OLD LIGHT
SHUTTER POINT

PART I

An Island Kingdom



1



Jenny fled up the stony track from the village. "I won't go! *I won't!*" she shouted.

The wind snatched her words and carried them over the sea towards the mainland – towards that other world which had played little part in her life, until now.

"I'm perfectly happy living with Dad," she said to herself, "and I've got plenty of friends. There are the islanders, lighthouse-keepers, fishermen, summer workers, visitors; you can't have many more friends than that! So why does Dad think I need to make friends and learn about the world? Why will it be *good* for me to go away to that stupid school?"

"Stupid, stupid school" Jenny screamed into the wind.

She struggled to shut the gate at Quarter Wall. Then she turned and ran, with the wind chasing her, towards the quarries.

What if nobody likes me? she worried. What if I don't like them? It'll be like going to prison. Miles from Lundy, miles from Dad and, worst of all, miles from Midnight.

Jenny couldn't remember life without Midnight. He'd been the herd stallion since before she was born. He was the king, and Lundy was his kingdom. He roamed where he liked, jumping the walls with ease, and he took orders from nobody. Everyone who had tried to catch and tame him had failed miserably. Everyone except Jenny – but that was their secret.

Jenny picked her way down the slippery path to the old quarries, knowing where she'd choose to shelter from a south-westerly gale if she were a pony.

She was right. The ponies were in the second quarry, protected from the elements by the massive walls which made a kind of open cave looking out to sea. It was a peaceful sanctuary, while the storm raged all around and waves crashed against the rocks below.

Three foals had been born so far. Jenny sat down on a slab of granite, and watched as they played together. She loved their ruffled, fluffy coats. Two foals were a creamy colour with pale grey legs. They'd probably end up golden dun with black points, like Midnight.

The third was a light roan. Foals had to be the best baby animals in the world.

The mares dozed or wandered around picking at the plants that grew between the stones. They took no notice of the small, slender girl in their midst.

Jenny had spent so much time with the ponies that they probably thought she was another feral animal – once domesticated but now wild, like them. She liked the idea. Mrs Hamilton was always calling her a wild child.

"Why, oh *why?*" Jenny cried out, startling a couple of mares nearby. "Oops, sorry!" she said, lowering her voice. "I mean, why does anything have to change? Why can't Mrs Hamilton carry on teaching me? She must have done a pretty good job so far, or I wouldn't have got that scholarship, would I? And why was I told that exam was just a test to see how well I was doing?"

She gazed at the idyllic scene before her, and sighed. "I can't go away! I *can't!*" she said.

As if in agreement, Midnight walked up and nuzzled her short brown hair.

Jenny looked into his extraordinary midnight-blue eyes. "I wish I was a pony, Midnight. Life's simple for you, isn't it? You don't have to worry about exams and schools, or being sent to the mainland. All you have to do is find water, food and shelter."

Midnight gave a snort.

Jenny's cold fingers snuggled into the warm, soft

hair under his thick mane. "Okay, so you have to take care of the mares and foals, I suppose, but that's not a hard job, is it? They pretty well take care of themselves, leaving you plenty of time to do as you please." She stood up on the granite slab and leaned over Midnight's broad back.

He shifted his weight slightly, but didn't move away.

Without a second thought, Jenny leapt lightly onto him, and sat there as if it were the most natural thing in the world. It didn't even occur to her that riding a wild stallion without a saddle or bridle was dangerous.

He wandered along the old quarry terrace, nibbling at the sparse vegetation. Jenny just sat there and talked about anything and everything.

Midnight and Jenny seemed to have an understanding; he allowed her to sit on his back, and she let him do as he pleased – mainly because she didn't know how to get him to do anything else.

"I wish I could ride properly," Jenny told him. "Then we could gallop over the island, jumping everything in our way. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Riding lessons were the one thing Jenny longed for which she couldn't get on Lundy. Nobody else on the island seemed particularly interested in the ponies, beyond the fact they were nice to look at and had become a traditional part of Lundy – almost as popular as puffins with the tourists.

If only Mum . . . Jenny began to think, and then stopped herself. Dad said "if onlys" could drive you mad, and he was right.

By the time they got back to the quarry, Jenny's jeans were cold and clammy from Midnight's damp coat. They clung uncomfortably, chilling her body to shivering point.

"Time to go home and face the music," she said, giving Midnight a farewell rub on his shoulder. His lips quivered in ecstasy, and his eyes started to close.

"You big baby!" she teased. "It's lucky nobody else knows what a softy you are. Promise me you'll stay wild with everyone else, won't you? You'll stay safe and free as long as you're wild."

Midnight nudged Jenny with his nose. "Good boy," she said, scratching him under his chin. "Now, I really must be going."

Although Jenny was cold she ambled home reluctantly, taking the longer route through the north entrance to the quarries. The wind had calmed to a fresh breeze and a watery sun, like a torch with flat batteries, hung low in the sky. She hadn't realised how late it was.

As she walked past the farm buildings she saw her dad, Robert Medway, walking towards her with his

long, easy stride. There was no escape; she'd have to talk to him.

"Thank goodness you're back. I was beginning to worry," he said. "I've just fed your animals for you. Do you want to help me with the chickens?"

She scuffed some gravel with her foot. "Okay."

"I'll get the corn, and you can collect the eggs," he said.

Jenny never tired of egg-collecting; it was like hunting for treasure. She went to the back of the wooden chicken shed, and opened the flap covering the nesting boxes.

The rusty hinges creaked.

She felt inside, her fingers searching for smooth eggs nestling in the straw. Instead, they dipped into the slimy contents of a jagged eggshell. As she withdrew her fingers something furry writhed against them. She snatched her hand away and peered cautiously into the long, dark box.

A large rat glared back, whiskers twitching, surrounded by a gooey mess of broken eggshells. It leapt out of the box and ran for cover under the shed.

Jenny screamed and jumped back, dropping the flap with a bang.

Dad hurried over, corn spilling from the feed scoop in his hand. "What's happened? Are you all right?"

"A rat! A really big one! Under there!" she squeaked.

"All the eggs are broken! Ruined!"

Dad swore. "They've been in the vegetable garden too; it's a never-ending battle. Poor old you!" He hugged his daughter, holding her close.

Jenny loved his hugs. They were safe and solid.

"Ah well, rabbit stew for supper tonight," Dad said.

All the tensions of the day welled up and exploded inside Jenny, like a wave crashing against rocks. She burst into tears.

"Hey, what's up?"

"Everything! I hate rats and I hate rabbit stew!" she wailed into her father's coat.

He stroked her damp hair. "I bet they don't eat rabbit stew at St Anne's."

Oh no! Jenny thought. Here comes the lecture.

Dad hugged her tightly, engulfing her thin body in his strong arms. "I'm so proud of you," he said. "A scholarship to St Anne's really is a great achievement, you know."

"But I don't want to go, Dad! I know I'll hate it there!" She glanced up at him. "And why didn't you tell me it was a scholarship exam? Why did you lie?"

"Oh, Jenny! I thought you'd love to go away to school and be with girls your own age for a change, rather than being stuck here the whole time. I couldn't afford to send you without the money for the scholarship, but I didn't want you to feel under pressure or to be

disappointed if you failed. It was a white lie, I suppose."

"What's a white lie?"

"A lie told to avoid hurting someone's feelings."

"Oh. Well, it didn't work, did it?" Jenny looked up again, and met her father's concerned gaze. "This is my home. I love it here. Why does anything have to change? Please don't make me go!"

"Of course I won't *make* you go, Jenny, but you'll be missing the greatest opportunity of your life – and a lot of fun, too." Dad lowered his voice to a secret whisper. "I've heard there are stables nearby, and riding's an optional extra. You'd be able to have lessons every week. Would you like that?"

Riding lessons! Jenny thought. Perhaps if she went away to school for a little while – just a term or two – she could learn to ride and then come home again for good. Riding lessons cost a lot of money, though. And she'd need riding clothes, like the girls in the *Princess Pony Annual* Mrs Hamilton had given her for Christmas. It would all be hopelessly expensive.

"Would you like riding lessons?" Dad asked again.

"Of course I would, but we can't afford it," she answered. "Also, I'll need boots, a hat, jodhpurs, a jacket and a yellow polo neck." She'd always longed for a yellow polo neck. She imagined herself looking like the girl on the front cover of the annual.

"I expect we'll manage somehow. Summer's coming

up, so you'll be able to earn some money in the Hotel, and I'll get all the extra jobs I can. If you want riding lessons, you shall have them."

Jenny couldn't help smiling now. "Do you mean it?"

Dad smiled back. "Of course I mean it."

"I suppose school *could* be okay, if there's riding as well."

"I bet it'll be more than okay. It'll be great fun, you wait and see." Dad put his arm round Jenny's shoulder and turned towards home. "Meg! That'll do!" he called to his sheepdog as she tried, in vain, to get at the rat under the chicken shed.

A new world of possibilities opened up to Jenny. "Perhaps I could keep my own pony at the stables," she said, secretly thinking of Midnight.

Dad laughed and ruffled her hair. "Don't push your luck, young lady!"

Ah well, it was worth a try.