1

New Neighbours



As Katy rode her Exmoor pony, Trifle, along the lane from Barton Farm, she felt she was the luckiest girl in the world. Although it was odd to think about Christmas on the first day of the summer holidays, Katy decided she felt the same sort of excitement as on Christmas morning when there was a stocking full of presents at the end of her bed. Also, she thought, holidays are like Christmas stockings because most things are half-expected but there are always some complete surprises tucked in-between. For instance, this summer she knew there'd be horse

shows, Pony Club camp, picnics, long rides, lazy days and having fun with her best friend, Alice. But the surprises – well, if she knew what they were going to be, they wouldn't be surprises.

"Next week it's Pony Club camp, Trifle. I'm afraid you'll have to go because poor old Jacko's still lame from that horrid nail he trod on last winter. Anyway, it'll do you good to have a bit of proper schooling. You'll learn how to jump too; that'll be fun!" Katy leaned forward and pretended to ride like a jockey. Trifle felt the shift in her weight and accelerated into a canter. Laughing at the eagerness of her pony, Katy sat up straight again and closed her fingers gently on the reins. Trifle eased back into a steady trot.

They rounded a sharp bend and skidded to a halt. Katy bumped her nose on Trifle's neck, and just managed to save herself from falling off by grabbing a handful of bushy mane.

The lane was blocked by a huge removal lorry. A couple of men in blue overalls, supervised by a dark-haired man wearing a black leather jacket and blue jeans, were using a very noisy electric ramp to unload furniture.

"Oh!" Katy exclaimed. "Wellsworthy Farm must have been sold. That was quick! We can't get past the lorry, so I suppose we'll have to turn back."

"Hi, there!" the man in the leather jacket shouted,

raising his hand in greeting. "Hang on a minute!"

Katy tried her best to hang on a minute; Trifle was dancing on the spot with agitation. The man's eyes were hidden by expensive-looking sunglasses but, as he came closer, Katy could see a smile on his lined, suntanned face. He gave Trifle a hearty pat on the neck, which was more like hitting than patting, and she tried to shy away.

"Nice little Shetland pony you've got there," the man said, nimbly avoiding Trifle's hooves as they tap-danced on the tarmac. "I've just bought this place. Who are you? I'm Dean, by the way."

Katy was just about to speak when Dean gave Trifle another slap and asked, "What's his name?"

Trifle spun round, pushing him to one side.

"Oops! Sorry!" Katy said. "I'm Katy Squires, and I live at Barton Farm, about a mile up that lane. This is my Exmoor pony, Trifle. She's only four, so she gets a bit nervous about new things like removal lorries. And she's a mare – a girl, not a boy."

"Exmoor, Shetland, mare, stallion – they're all the same to me, I'm afraid. Dangerous at both ends and uncomfortable in the middle. Hang about! You're the girl who was on the telly with a pony who saved somebody's life! Is that the pony?" Dean gave Trifle another hit-pat, and she decided she'd had enough.

"Yes, she rescued Granfer – my grandfather. Sorry!

Got to go! Nice to meet you!" Katy said quickly, as Trifle set off down the lane, cantering sideways.

"I like the circus trick!" Dean called out. "What d'you do for an encore?"

Katy barely heard him above the noise of Trifle's clattering hooves as she flew round the corner, heading for the safety of home.

Katy's mum was in the kitchen at Barton Farm, talking on the telephone. She broke off from her conversation as Katy appeared. "Boots off! And what are you doing with that bucket?"

"I just need a bucket of warm water from the sink so I can wash Trifle," Katy replied. "She's all sweaty."

Mum sighed. "Go on then, but don't spill any." Her attention returned to the telephone. "Sorry, Melanie. Where was I? Yes, the new kitchen's wonderful, but I don't know how long I'll manage to keep it that way," she said, watching as Katy struggled to squeeze the bucket under the elegant mixer tap of the new sink.

"Oh, are you talking to Alice's mum?" Katy asked.

"Yes, attempting to."

"Can you ask if it's okay for me to go over to Stonyford this afternoon? Alice and I want to get everything sorted for camp."

"Melanie heard you, and she says that's fine. She'll

give you a lesson on Trifle if you get there by two-thirty. We're having salad for lunch as it's such a hot day, so you can have it early if you like."

"Ideal! Thanks!" Katy said, sloshing water onto the floor as she carried the heavy, steaming bucket to the door. "Oops, sorry!" she called over her shoulder.

After she'd washed Trifle, Katy turned her out into the field with Jacko so her coat would dry in the sunshine. She watched while her ponies greeted each other like long-lost friends. Then Trifle wandered away, pawed the ground, circled, crumpled, rolled, sat up for a moment and clambered to her feet again, shaking herself and snorting with satisfaction before settling down to the serious business of eating as much grass as possible.

Even now, Katy found it hard to believe she actually owned the two ponies. She'd bought Trifle as a newly weaned foal from Brendon pony sale, and had kept her in secret at Stonyford for her first winter. During that time, Melanie had taught her to ride on Jacko, a handsome liver chestnut gelding Katy had loved from the start. Granfer had found out about Trifle while he was arranging to buy Jacko for Katy as a present, and on her birthday she'd had the biggest surprise of her life when both Jacko and Trifle had arrived at Barton Farm. Over three years had passed since that day, but she still remembered every detail. She smiled to herself

as she watched Jacko and Trifle grazing side by side.

Katy sometimes wondered what her life would be like if Alice hadn't moved to Stonyford with her mum and twin brothers. She probably wouldn't own Trifle, certainly wouldn't own Jacko and she wouldn't have a best friend – not like Alice, anyway. Also, if she really thought about it, Barton Farm would have been sold by now, her family would be miserable and Mum most definitely wouldn't have a brand new kitchen, paid for with the income from Dad's paintings. In fact, Granfer could be . . . Yes, it was scary thinking about what life would be like if the Gardners hadn't moved into Stonyford.

"Lunch time!" Mum called.

"Coming!" Katy replied, and after one last look at the ponies she hurried indoors.

"I thought you said you were just going for a gentle hack this morning. How come Trifle got so sweaty?" Mum asked as she sliced a home-made loaf fresh from the Aga.

The smell of the bread made Katy realise how hungry she was. "I meant to go for a gentle hack, but Trifle had other ideas. It wasn't her fault, though – not really. You see, we met the man who's bought Wellsworthy. He was there with a removal lorry, and he came up to say hello."

"Really? What's he like?"

"Well, Trifle didn't think much of him. He wears those odd sunglasses which look like mirrors, and he obviously doesn't know the first thing about horses – he's one of those people who thinks the right way to greet a horse is to slap it. Oh, and he's called Dean."

Mum looked amused. "Poor Dean! It appears he's managed to fall out with his most important neighbour, an Exmoor pony, before he's even set foot in his new home!"

Trifle looked very surprised and rather grumpy when Katy caught her, tacked her up and set off on another ride after lunch. However, she soon perked up, especially when she realised where they were going. She seemed to love Stonyford almost as much as Katy did.

They took the field and moorland route, avoiding the Wellsworthy lane. Riding through the fields meant going through several gates, but Katy didn't mind because she was trying to teach Trifle how to open them.

It's amazing how quickly she learns new things once she understands what she's supposed to do, Katy thought, as Trifle headed for the correct end of the gate onto the Common, then stood with her head over it and her body close to the post so Katy could undo the latch. "Push it," she said, and Trifle pushed the gate

open with her chest, walked through on command, turned in a tight circle and stood still on the other side while Katy did up the latch again. "Good girl!" she said, stroking Trifle's neck. "What a clever pony you are."

They had plenty of time, thanks to an early lunch, so Katy had decided they should walk most of the way to save Trifle's energy for their lesson with Melanie. However, Trifle jigged around so much once they were on the Common that Katy couldn't resist letting her gallop some of the way.

"Yippee! Hurray for the holidays!" Katy shouted as Trifle raced over the heather.

Despite their gallop, the journey seemed to take longer than usual, probably because Katy couldn't wait to see Alice again. They'd remained best friends even though they now went to different schools; Katy went to the local secondary school and Alice went to a boarding school miles away. This made the holidays even more special, and they spent as much time as possible with each other. There was so much Katy wanted to tell Alice, including the news about Wellsworthy.

At last they reached the back entrance to Stonyford, and Trifle announced their arrival with an excited whinny. Katy giggled; it was like sitting on a mini-earthquake when Trifle whinnied.

Alice ran to the gate, opened it and bowed with a flourish. "Behold! Trifle the Wonder Horse!" she announced with extreme grandness. "Are you too famous to grace our humble home now you're a TV celebrity? We'll have to feed you chocolate-coated apples and put champagne in your water buckets."

"She's fizzy enough as it is, thanks," Katy said. "I had a job to stop her on the Common just now."

"Why, hello!" said Alice in mock surprise. "I didn't see you up there!"

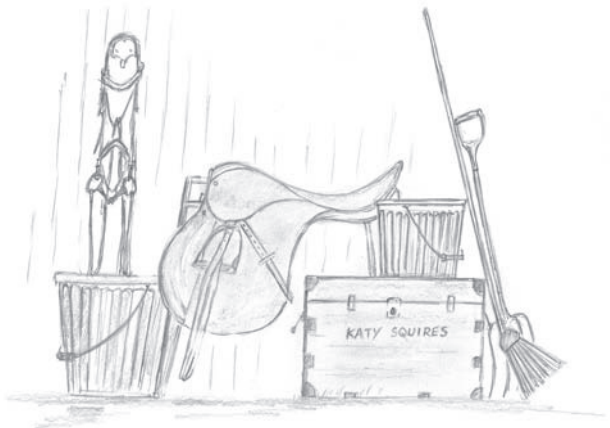
"Well, I'd better come down to your level then," Katy replied. She made a clicking sound with her tongue, and Trifle instantly dropped her head to the ground so Katy could slide down her neck. "Tra-lah! That's our latest trick."

"Trifle! Is there no end to your talents?" Alice asked.

The girls laughed. Little did they know they'd soon find out.

2

Pony Club Camp



Camp was one of the highlights of the Pony Club year. On Exmoor, two camps were held in the summer: one for the seniors at the beginning of the holidays and one for the juniors later on. Junior camp wasn't really a camp at all, because the riders and their ponies went home every evening, but at senior camp the horses and ponies were stabled overnight and the riders stayed in tents or caravans.

Katy and Alice had attended junior camp several times, but this would be their first year as seniors. They'd been planning everything for weeks, mostly

by text and email, but now it was all becoming real as they packed the things they'd need into Melanie's caravan on the evening before they were due to leave.

"This already feels like home, doesn't it? Our own little house, for five whole nights!" Katy said, stuffing some clothes into one of the neat cupboards above her bed.

Alice sat at the foldaway table by the end window. "Yes, thank goodness Mum said we could take it. Imagine what it would be like fitting all our things into a tent?" She picked up a long list which had been lying on the table. "Right, we'd better check everything's here. This is for each of us, okay? Here goes: two water buckets . . . two feed buckets . . . one tack cleaning bucket and kit . . . two hay nets . . . head collar . . . sweat rug . . . bridle . . . saddle . . . each grooming kit should have a body brush, dandy brush, curry comb, mane comb, hoof pick, two sponges, stable rubber, hoof oil and brush . . ."

The list seemed endless, but at last the final item was checked. Katy plonked herself down on the cushioned seat opposite Alice. "Phew!" she said. "It's a miracle, but I think we've got everything."

"I see we've both bought new buckets and grooming things," Alice said.

Katy laughed. "Yes, I thought it would be *so*

embarrassing to turn up with the old sheep mineral buckets I usually use for water, or the brushes our new sheepdog puppy chewed, so I went to the tack shop last weekend. Everyone going to camp must have had the same idea, because there were hardly any brushes or buckets left and I got the last pair of jods in my size. I'll have to use my old jods as spares, even though they're much too short."

"I thought you'd grown taller since the Easter holidays," said Alice. "We'll both have to ride horses soon."

"Oh, please don't say that!" Katy said. "It's just not fair – when I was younger I longed to be tall like you, but now I'm desperate to stop growing because I want to carry on riding Trifle. There's so much more I want to do with her before I set her free again."

"Set her free?" Alice exclaimed. "That's crazy, after all the work you've done taming her!"

"No it isn't. I've made a promise to her, you see. She's given me so much, and eventually I'm going to give her the greatest gift I can in return, which has to be her freedom. I'm sure if she were given the choice she'd want to be running with the herd on the Common again, having foals of her own." The thought of Trifle with a foal by her side always gave Katy butterflies.

"Trifle's a very lucky pony, to have an owner like you," Alice said.

Katy smiled. "No, I'm the lucky one, to have a pony like Trifle."

Her friends at camp all seemed to think she was lucky as well. As they settled in on the first evening, everyone wanted to meet Trifle. A tame Exmoor pony was a bit of a novelty – even on Exmoor – so a tame *and* famous Exmoor pony was irresistible. They'd seen all the television reports and newspaper articles about her medal for the daring rescue earlier in the year.

"She's so adorable!" said Fiona.

"I love her colour, with those blonde highlights in her mane!" said Sophie.

"And those light bits around her muzzle and eyes," agreed Susan.

Claire hugged Trifle's neck. "I want one!" she declared.

"She can even do tricks, can't she, Katy?" Alice said.

"Well, sort of," Katy replied. "But I hope the only tricks she'll do this week will be to canter on the correct leg and jump when she's asked to."

Her friends laughed, but now that Katy had arrived at camp she realised how small and inexperienced Trifle was compared with the other horses and ponies. Some people her age already had horses which were

over fifteen hands high. They looked enormous beside Trifle, who was only twelve-two. Claire had wasted no time in telling everyone about all the prizes her new horse had won with his previous owner.

"Do you think I'm being unfair on Trifle, bringing her here?" Katy asked Alice as they lay in their sleeping bags later that evening, tired and still rather damp after a girls versus boys water fight by the stream.

"What d'you mean?" Alice asked sleepily.

"I'm beginning to think I shouldn't have come this year. Jacko knows all about Pony Club events and jumping and things, but Trifle doesn't. I don't think she's ready for camp yet."

"You worry too much. She'll be fine. Night, night." Almost immediately, Alice started snoring gently.

Katy lay awake for a long time, worrying.

After breakfast the following morning, there was a scramble to see the list of riders and teachers. The classes were numbered from one to six, with the most experienced riders in class one and the least experienced in class six.

"You're with Fiona and me in class four, Katy!" Sophie said, squeezing her way out of the scrum. "Needless to say, Alice and Claire are in class two, but we've got Tony, so they'll be well jealous!" Tony was

a volunteer instructor from the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, and the girls had already decided he deserved the prize for the best-looking teacher of all time.

Trifle was tense with excitement as Katy groomed her and tacked her up with fumbling fingers. I must be calm, Katy thought, or my nervousness will make her worse.

A bossy-looking instructress marched passed, yelling, "Two minutes! You should be mounted and in line with other members of your class in two minutes!"

Katy quickly dabbed some hoof oil onto each of Trifle's hooves before leading her out of the stable. Most of the others were already mounted and in line, and she felt several eyes on her as she pulled down her stirrups. Trifle pawed the ground impatiently.

"Stand!" Katy said, and put her left foot into the stirrup, ready to mount. Then she sprung with her right foot and lifted herself into the saddle – or she would have done if the saddle hadn't swivelled round to meet her, ending up under Trifle's tummy.

Alarmed by the terrifying dangly object underneath her, Trifle started bucking while Katy held on to her reins and tried to soothe her with gentle words. *Idiot! I'm a complete idiot!* she said to herself, feeling her cheeks glowing bright red with embarrassment. Why on earth didn't I check the girth? I always

check the girth before I get on. That's what comes of hurrying too much. She didn't have to look up to know everyone was looking as Trifle plunged in circles around her.

The bossy instructress stormed up and grabbed hold of Trifle. "Stand still, you lunatic!" she commanded. With a couple of deft moves, she undid the girth and removed the saddle. She glared at Katy. "Always check the girth before you mount. Don't they teach you anything at this Pony Club?" With ruthless efficiency, she put the saddle on Trifle's back and heaved up the girth as far as possible. Then she pointed at the neat row of riders facing them. "Look, you're holding everyone up."

Katy's cheeks burned even more as she mounted and rode over to join class four.

Tony smiled at her sympathetically. "Don't worry, we've all done it. You can't learn from your mistakes if you don't make any," he said kindly.

Katy decided she liked Tony a lot.

Trifle tried her best, but Katy could tell she was struggling. She was the smallest pony in the class by far. When the ride was walking, Trifle had to jog to keep up, and when they were trotting, she cantered. Also, it was obvious that the other horses and ponies were much more experienced and well-schooled, especially when they started jumping. Unfortunately the poles

were painted bright colours, and Trifle wouldn't even walk over them.

"Perhaps she thinks they're snakes or something," Katy said as Trifle half-reared and leapt away from the poles on the ground in front of her yet again.

"Whatever it is, I don't think this is doing her much good," Tony said. "I'll try leading her."

They tried it with Tony leading her and with Trifle following the other ponies, but nothing seemed to work. Eventually Katy got off and managed to lead her over one pole, which she jumped with a huge leap, as if it were going to bite her. Katy knew they were taking up too much time, so she offered to wait in the centre of the ring while the others did some jumping. Watching them, she couldn't help longing for Jacko. He was really good at jumping. In fact, he was so good at everything that he made riding effortless. It was easy to be a good rider if your pony knew exactly what to do.

At the end of the lesson all the riders dismounted, ran their stirrups up, loosened their girths and walked their horses and ponies back to the stables for a lunch break.

"Katy? Can you hang on a minute?" Tony said.

"Ooh! Aren't you the lucky one?" Sophie teased.

Katy knew she wasn't. She waited for Tony, dreading what he was going to say.

"I think Trifle is a lovely pony, and you ride her very well, Katy."

She waited for the "but".

"But she's still young and rather green, isn't she? I'm worried that we might be teaching her to run before she can walk, so to speak. She's such a willing little pony, and I don't want to frighten her with difficult things before she's learned the basics. Do you think it would be better, for her sake, if she were in class six? I gather they're going to be doing a musical ride, which will be a really good way of making flatwork enjoyable for her."

Katy didn't know what to say. She liked Tony and wanted to stay in his class, but knew that she and Trifle were way out of their depth there. They'd probably end up holding everyone back – the dunces of class four. "Okay. Whatever you think would be best for Trifle," she said, trying to hide her disappointment.

At lunch, Alice and Katy's other friends were sympathetic, but they all agreed that class six would probably be better for Trifle as she'd never jumped before. Katy couldn't help noticing that Tony was talking to the bossy instructress at a table in the far corner, and that she didn't look pleased.

Just when it seems that things can't get much worse, they do, Katy said to herself as she trotted around

a dusty arena for the umpteenth time that afternoon, following a reluctant boy called Tim on a slow pony which looked like a mini carthorse. Katy now knew what the bossy instructress was called. Her name was Val, and she was in charge of class six. Yes, just when it seemed things couldn't get much worse, they had.

Val stood in the centre of the ring, shouting, "Pompom! Pompom! Impulsion, Tim! Impulsion! Pompom! Pompom! Pompom!"

The woman's completely mad, Katy thought, stifling a giggle. This would make a brilliant comedy sketch on TV. Trouble is, it's for real and it's getting incredibly boring.

Tim had told Katy that Val was pretending to be the music because the sound system was too expensive to hire for a whole week. They were only going to have real music for the open day on Friday, when the musical ride would be performed in front of their parents.

"Tumtitum! Tumtitum! Tumtitum!" Val yelled. "Katy! Pay attention! Pompom is trotting and tumtitum is walking. How many times have I got to tell you?"

"It's a new language called gibberish, don't you know?" Tim whispered over his shoulder.

Katy snorted. "Stop it, I'm trying not to laugh as it is!"

"Stop talking, Katy!" Val screamed. "If you're not careful, I'll send you home!"

I'm going to go home anyway, Katy decided. I don't *have* to be here. It's supposed to be a fun holiday activity, not worse than school. I'll ring up Melanie this evening and ask her to come and collect me – and Trifle, of course.

"Don't go!" Alice exclaimed when Katy told her at tea time. "Mum will be so upset, after all her hard work getting us both here. I expect your mum will be too; it's a lot of money and you won't get a refund. And what about me, alone in our caravan? It won't be any fun at all without you!"

Katy knew that Alice was bound to have fun whether she was there or not – Alice was the kind of person who attracted fun and friends like a magnet – but she did see that it would appear ungrateful and rather cowardly if she left after just one day.

Alice picked up on her hesitation. "Give it one more day at least," she pleaded. "I'm sure things will get better tomorrow."

Things didn't seem to be getting any better the following morning, except the class progressed to "tarapom", which was cantering in the now official Pony Club language of gibberish.

"Tarapom! Tarapom! Change legs, Caroline! Tarapom! Tarapom!" Val yelled, on and on.

"I wonder what galloping is," Tim whispered as they lined up for one of Val's frequent lectures.

"Zoomzoom!" Katy replied. "And jumping?"

"Wheeeplop."

Katy started to laugh, and couldn't stop.

Val stood in front of Trifle. "Your sense of humour appears to be much better than your riding, Katy. I now understand why Tony said you were hopeless and needed to go right back to basics."

I'm sure Tony wouldn't have said that, Katy thought. He told me I rode very well – I'm sure he did. She felt as if she'd been punched in the stomach, and she looked down at Trifle's mane so Val wouldn't see that her eyes were blurring with tears.

"He said *my pony* needed to learn some of the basics. You see, she's only four years old. She hasn't done much work. Riding on the moor, mainly," she mumbled.

"Bad riders blame their horses," Val sneered. "Although I must admit your parents do seem to have been very foolish in buying you an Exmoor pony, of all things. And a young Exmoor at that."

"But they didn't," Katy explained. "I bought her with my own money from Brendon pony sale when she was a foal. I trained her myself."

"Well then, you have only yourself to blame,

haven't you?" Val said. "You're already far too big for her," she added triumphantly, and she swaggered off to her position of command in front of the class. "For the rest of the lesson we shall do some jumping," she announced.

"Wheeeplop," Tim whispered, but somehow Katy didn't find it funny anymore.

To begin with it went remarkably well – when they weren't actually jumping. Their first exercise was to trot over trotting poles in jumping position. The top classes had all the coloured show jump poles, so class six was left with rustic ones. Trifle didn't mind trotting over rustic poles; they must have looked natural, like fallen branches. She didn't even seem to mind when the last pole was raised slightly so she had to lift her legs high to trot over it, as she did when trotting through deep heather. However, once the pole became too high to trot over, she stopped in front of it and tried to go round the side. To Trifle, it probably seemed a very sensible thing to do, but Val wasn't impressed. Katy was told to try the jump again, and Val ran behind, shouting and waving her whip.

Trifle refused and then, faced with a shouting madwoman behind her, did an enormous cat-leap over the jump.

Katy was taken by surprise. She shrieked, gripped the reins to steady herself and accidentally jabbed

Trifle in the mouth. The next thing she knew, she was sitting on the ground, gasping frantically. She couldn't seem to get any air into her aching chest, and every time she tried it sounded as if someone was saying, "Hyeeee!"

"Breathe. Breathe deeply. One, two, one, two . . ." Val's bossy voice swam in and out of her consciousness.

"Are you okay, Katy?" A man's voice now – much kinder.

Katy tried to reply, but all she could manage was a long, drawn-out "Hyyyeeeee!"

"She's fine thank you, Tony. Just a bit winded, that's all. Thank you for bringing the pony back. I can't think why she galloped off to you like that."

"Perhaps she was trying to tell me something," Tony said.

"Hmm," Val replied. "Well, I think you'd better get back to your class now."

Gradually Katy's breathing eased and the pain between her ribs subsided. "I'm . . . much . . . better . . . now . . . thank . . . you," she gasped, anxious to stop Val from hovering over her.

"Good," she said. "You sit there, and I'll teach that pony of yours a lesson."

"No, please," Katy tried to protest, but Val strode up to Tim, who was holding Trifle, and started adjusting the stirrups.

As soon as Val mounted Trifle, the little pony's head shot up in alarm and her tail clamped between her legs. Katy could hardly bear to watch her looking so unhappy and frightened. She knew that what Val was doing was wrong – very wrong – but she was so weak and out of breath that she felt powerless to stop her. Val rode Trifle around the arena in trot, then canter, before heading for the jump. Trifle refused, Val whipped her, Trifle leapt over from a standstill, Val accidentally jabbed her in the mouth, Trifle stopped and was whipped, so she bucked and was whipped again.

"Don't! Please don't! She doesn't understand!" Katy tried to shout, but it came out as a breathless squeak. She couldn't believe what was happening. Her kind, beautiful, intelligent, fun-loving pony was being hurt. All the love and trust which Katy had built up with her over four years was being destroyed in a few minutes by this vicious, stupid woman. Katy scrambled to her feet and ran towards them.

"She'll be better this time! Watch and learn!" Val yelled as she cantered around Katy, turned for the jump a second time and urged Trifle to go faster by making what she must have thought were encouraging clicking noises with her tongue.

"Don't do that! She'll think it means stop so you can . . ." Katy started to shout, but it was too late.

Trifle did a spectacular sliding stop and dropped her head to the ground so her rider could dismount down her neck, but it was so abrupt that Val was catapulted into the air and hit the ground with a dull thud.

Katy hurried over and caught Trifle, while Tim and several others rode off to get help.

Tony and Mrs Edwards, the District Commissioner, soon hurried into the arena.

"Well done, everyone," Mrs Edwards said, looking flustered despite her bright and breezy smile. "I'm sure everything will be fine, but I'm afraid your lesson will have to finish early. Take your mounts back to the stables, give them a feed and a rub-down and then clean your tack. An instructor will be with you shortly." Then she hurried over to Tony, who was crouching beside Val.

Katy and Tim walked up the hill to the stables without speaking. It's odd, Katy thought, but it's much easier to find things to say when you're not supposed to be talking, like in a riding lesson, than when you can talk freely, like now.

The silence was broken by the wail of an ambulance. They turned, and saw it drive across the field towards the arena.

"Must be serious," said Tim.

Katy was shocked to realise she didn't really care.

She put a comforting hand on Trifle's neck as she jogged by her side, wild-eyed and sweaty.

At lunch, Katy was the centre of attention. Everyone wanted to know what had happened. She relayed the story over and over again, feeling slightly guilty about the thrill she felt in telling it. They were just queuing for a pudding of jelly and tinned peaches when Mrs Edwards rang the hand bell which signalled for everyone to be silent.

"Good afternoon, everyone."

"Good afternoon, Mrs Edwards," they all replied.

"As you all know, there was a slight mishap this morning. However, the good news from the hospital is that Val Smith isn't seriously hurt. She's concussed, so they'll keep her in overnight, but they're hoping to discharge her tomorrow."

"I bet they are. They'll want to get rid of her as soon as possible," Tim whispered to Katy.

"Shh!" she whispered back, smiling.

"I'm afraid we'll have to re-shuffle the classes a bit now we're short of an instructor," Mrs Edwards continued. "So, as classes three and four have the fewest riders in them, they will be amalgamated and taught by Anne Ruddock."

The female members of class four groaned rather

too loudly. Katy felt sorry for Anne Ruddock, who must have heard them. She was a good teacher, but she was a middle-aged woman, not a gorgeous young man.

"And Tony Burrell will teach class six."

Katy and her classmates beamed and whispered things like "Brill!" and "Hurray!"

The final three days sped by. Camp was just as Katy had hoped it would be, with enjoyable lessons where she and Trifle learned a lot, interesting talks from a vet and a farrier, and lots of fun in the evenings with her friends.

It was generally agreed that the performance by class six was the most entertaining demonstration at the open day. To begin with it was like a normal musical ride, with the horses and ponies walking, trotting and cantering in the formations they'd learned at the beginning of the week – although, to everybody's relief, it was all set to stirring military music rather than Val's improvisations. Then the music changed to the song *Crazy Horses*, the riders lined up, took off their jackets and ties, and things became much more interesting. Everyone was given the chance to do something he or she was good at. Caroline and Jill did a vaulting demonstration, Tim rode his pony perfectly without a saddle or bridle – he said he usually rode like that at

home, and his pony certainly looked much happier for it – another boy called Charles shot arrows at a target with pinpoint accuracy while riding his pony, and Katy and Trifle demonstrated their gate-opening skills with a pretend gate Tony had made especially for them. As the smiling riders lined up to take a bow after the grand finale, Katy and Trifle walked forward a few paces. Katy clicked her tongue and Trifle lowered her head to the ground, as if she were taking a bow, to delighted applause from the audience.

Afterwards they had a prize-giving. Claire won the prize for the cleanest tack, Tim won the prize for the most improved rider and Trifle won the prize for the most improved pony. Katy knew she should have been thrilled that Trifle had won a rosette, but as she shook Mrs Edwards' hand and thanked her, she couldn't help thinking it was partly a consolation prize.