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

Joe and the Lightning Pony
A Boy and his Horses

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

First published in Great Britain in 2013
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 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Victoria Eveleigh 2013
Illustrations copyright © Chris Eveleigh 2013

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.

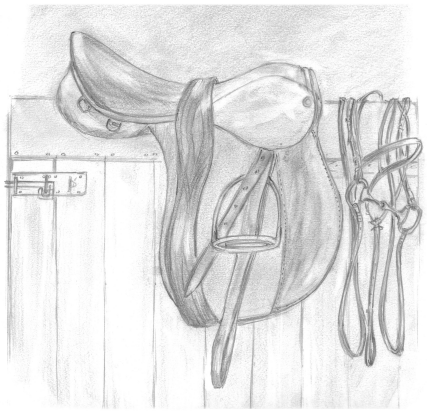
A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 4440 0592 9

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

www.orionbooks.co.uk

Chapter 1



Joe zipped up his jacket, checked there were gloves among the pony nuts and chaff in his pockets, took his riding hat off the shelf, opened the back door and hesitated.

Rusty bounded into the sleety rain with a joyous bark.

The countryside looked cold, grey and uninviting. It was difficult to remember how green Newbridge Farm had been when they'd moved in last summer – impossible to imagine the sun-baked fields now, in the muddy depths of winter.

I'm sure it never rained this much in Birmingham, Joe thought. Perhaps I just didn't notice, being indoors most of the time. He pulled the hood of his jacket up and made a dash for the old farmyard, wincing as ice-cold drops splashed against his face.

Three horses whinnied from their stables.

As Joe approached, Lady pawed at her door impatiently.

"Stop that, you hooligan." He paused to rub her broad forehead, and she bulldozed into his jacket with her hairy muzzle, seeking out the pony nuts in his pocket. She didn't look like a "Lady" at all, with her thick-set body and haphazard black-and-white markings. Her shaggy winter coat, which attracted mud like a magnet, did nothing to enhance her appearance either. Even so, she would always have a special place in his heart because it was she who'd got him riding again. And Lady didn't realise it, of course, but if Joe hadn't persuaded his parents to give her a second chance, she and Lightning could have had a very different future – or no future at all.

He moved on to Lightning. She bent her elegant neck to greet him, her nostrils flickering gently. He still couldn't really get his head round the fact that he had a pony, let alone this one. Everything about her was pretty well perfect, except for her feet. Perhaps even they were a good thing, though, because if she

hadn't appeared to be incurably lame her previous owner wouldn't have given her away for free when Mum had bought Lady.

Lightning was the reason why Joe didn't mind getting up on a bleak Sunday morning in mid-December. Chris and Caroline had arranged to meet him so they could go for a ride together. Chris was the farrier who'd suggested trying to cure Lightning's lameness by taking her shoes off and giving her the right balance of food and exercise. Touch wood, it seemed to be working.

Caroline, Chris' stepsister, was in the same year as Joe at school. Could she be another reason why he didn't mind getting up early to go for a ride? If so, he definitely wouldn't admit it to anyone, least of all himself.

Lady banged at her stable door again.

"Okay, okay. Hang on a minute," Joe said, moving on to the next horse, always careful not to let any of them feel left out.

Ella's Tribute, a big bay thoroughbred, was the first official resident of The Hidden Horseshoe Sanctuary – Mum's new venture at Newbridge Farm. The idea was to provide a relaxing rehabilitation centre where horses with problems could be treated and go on to lead happy lives.

"Morning, ET. Sleep well?" Joe asked, knowing full

well what the answer would be if she could talk. As usual, she'd worn a path in the bedding around the edge of her stable where she'd walked round and round all night long. "You'll never get better and win races again if you don't rest your legs, you know," he said, stroking her rigid neck.

The owner of a high-maintenance horse like ET wasn't likely to keep her if she couldn't race or do anything useful. Horses cost a huge amount to look after, and most owners wanted something back in return. At least ET had been given the chance to come right. Joe couldn't bear to think of what might happen to her if she didn't. "You don't realise how important it is, do you?" he said, picking a piece of straw out of her forelock.

She nudged Joe, then her attention switched to some distant point. She stood with her head erect, whinnied, withdrew into her stable and paced around again.

Joe went into the tack room and mixed up three feeds: pony nuts, alfalfa mix and supplements for Lady and ET, and a couple of handfuls of pony nuts for Lightning. She'd get a good meal when they returned from their ride. One of the many things Chris had taught him was that horses shouldn't have a lot to eat just before they were ridden.

ET pinned her ears back and looked positively evil

as Joe approached with her breakfast. He'd found she backed off when he entered her stable, but he still didn't trust her completely. He edged past, tipped her feed into the manger, ducked underneath her neck and left as quickly as he could. She ate frantically, pawing at the air with alternate forefeet, as if miming a shovelling action.

I'd love to know what's made her such a bundle of nerves, Joe thought. He hurried on to give Lady her feed.

She thrust her head into the bucket as he walked into her stable, nearly knocking it out of his hand.

"Get over, you greedy pig," he muttered, pushing against her so he could squeeze between the wall and the solid bulk of her body. It's lucky horses are vegetarians, he thought. If Lady were a carnivore she'd be terrifying.

Lightning waited politely, and ate her nuts with unhurried enjoyment while Joe groomed her. Even though she wasn't clipped, she had such fine hair that Joe had bought her a turnout rug to wear in the field during the day and a stable rug to wear at night. The rugs kept her clean as well as warm, which was ideal because grooming horses caked in mud wasn't his idea of fun.

He'd nearly finished tacking up Lightning when there was a clatter of hooves in the yard. "Good

timing!" he called. Glancing over the stable door, he noticed that Chris was riding Chocolate Buttons and Caroline was on another thoroughbred horse. "Where's Treacle?" he asked.

"I've got him here," Chris said. "We thought Emily might like to come too. I can lead her off Buttons."

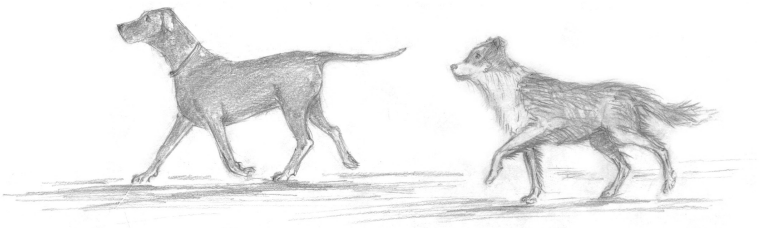
Joe took a proper look and saw Treacle, Caroline's little Dartmoor pony, standing happily between the two thoroughbreds, his large, inquisitive eyes peering through his dripping forelock.

"I think Emily's having a lie-in," Joe said. She wouldn't want Chris and Caroline to know that, but it irritated him that she always told everyone how much she loved horses when she rarely helped look after them.

"Oh. Can you go and see?" Chris asked.

"Okay." Joe hitched Lightning's rein underneath her stirrup for safety, and trudged back to the house. He'd been getting on better with his younger sister since they'd moved to Newbridge Farm but, even so, he enjoyed spending time alone with the horses and riding with Caroline and Chris. He'd turned out to be the one who really liked horses and was keen enough to do the hard work as well as enjoy the fun. Horses had become *his* thing, and he wanted it to stay that way.

Chapter 2



Emily was very much awake, dressed, and overjoyed at the prospect of a ride in the pouring rain.

Treacle jogged alongside Buttons while Emily chatted happily to Chris and Caroline. Joe hung back with Rusty and Chris' black Labrador, Bramble.

The rain turned into sleety snow, which lay white for a moment before melting into slush. Chris said they'd take the short route back to Lucketts Farm: up the road on the opposite side of the valley, then along the bridlepath that ran over some fields towards the river again.

They picked their way carefully down the hill and over a narrow bridge. Lightning slipped once or twice, and Joe's heart lurched each time, but she cleverly managed to save herself.

Once over the bridge, the horses started dancing about, eager to have a sprint up the long hill.

"We'll just walk today," Chris said. He didn't say why, but Joe was sure it was because of Emily.

The two thoroughbreds jogged on the spot and snatched at their bits in frustration. Joe knew just how they felt.

Eventually they arrived at Lucketts Farm. Chris and Caroline stabled and fed their horses and Treacle, and then they all went into the indoor school with Lightning.

"Don't worry about taking off her saddle and bridle," Chris said. "I'll lunge her with you on top today. Give you a riding lesson at the same time."

If anyone thinks they can ride, a lunge lesson without stirrups will soon sort them out, Joe thought as he bounced around uncomfortably while Chris bombarded him with instructions: "Look up, keep your hands still, sit tall and relax your lower leg . . ."

A stitch niggled in Joe's side and spread underneath his rib cage. He didn't want to ask to stop, especially

with Emily and Caroline watching, but if he carried on for much longer there was a distinct possibility he'd seize up completely and fall off.

"And wa-alk," Chris said in the calm sing-song voice he used when lunging. "Whoa-oa. Stand."

Oh, the relief!

"Great." Chris coiled up the lunge line in his hand. "Terrific."

Surely my riding wasn't that good, Joe thought.

Chris unclipped the line and gave Lightning a gentle pat. "As far as I can see, she's a hundred per cent sound. Congratulations, Joe. All your hard work looking after her and giving her regular exercise has paid off. You've got yourself a really nice pony there."

"Brilliant!" Caroline said. "Just in time for our Pony Club Christmas rally. It's going to be here on the Sunday before Christmas. You must come!"

"But I'm not a member," Joe replied.

"That doesn't matter. You're allowed a try-out session before you join. You'll *have* to become a member, anyway, now Lightning's fit and well."

"I don't know. I mean, it's a girl thing, isn't it?" Joe imagined his old friends in Birmingham rolling around laughing at the thought of him joining the *Pony Club*.

"Rubbish!" Caroline retorted. "Several boys are members – Simon Courtenay, for one."

Simon was in the year above at school. He was one of those self-confident types who always had a band of followers in tow.

"I'll think about it," Joe said.

"Great. Mum's organising it all, so I'll ask her to put your name down." Caroline turned to Emily. "You can come, too, if you want. Treacle will be free because I'm going to try out Simon's old pony, Minstrel."

Emily grinned. "Thanks!" she said. "Thanks a lot!"

"That's settled, then," said Caroline. "You're both booked in. It's not a serious rally, just fun and games. You'll love it!"