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

Race the Wind

Written by

Lauren St. John

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

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Lauren St John 2013
Illustration copyright Julia Owen 2013

The right of Lauren St John and Julia Owen 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

Typeset by Input Data Services Ltd
Bridgwater, Somerset

Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

ISBN 978 1 4440 0270 6

www.laurenstjohn.com
www.orionbooks.co.uk

1



LONG BEFORE ANY of the humans stirred, the horse saw the trouble coming. He stared out into the darkness as two pinpricks of light grew steadily on a country lane where cars rarely passed at 3.35 a.m.

Storm Warning shifted in his stable. His muscles ached, but not unpleasantly. The cheering of the crowd that had urged him on to victory hours earlier still roared in his ears. He had run until his great heart – twice the size of that of a normal horse – had threatened to burst from his chest, yet he'd do it again right now if he could. For if there was one thing he enjoyed more than leaping so high it felt as if he were flying, it was galloping. Storm loved to race the wind.

Impatiently, he jostled the stable door with his

shoulder. In another couple of hours, the birds would begin their dawn song and the sun would outline in gold the leaves of the ancient trees that gave the White Oaks Equestrian Centre its name. Shortly afterwards the stable manager, Morag, a woman he didn't dislike but wasn't particularly partial to either, would arrive with a banging and crashing of buckets, and the grooms would descend, stiff and wild-haired, from their flat above the office.

But that wasn't why Storm was restless. He was hungry for the hour when the girl he adored would come striding across the dew-whitened fields, accompanied by the old woman who smelled of exotic places and had magic, healing hands. When Casey and Mrs Smith arrived at his stable each morning, all was right with Storm's world.

Today, however, something felt different. Felt wrong. As the car drew level with the boundary fence of White Oaks, it slowed to a crawl and turned off its headlights. Like a panther, it crept up the lane, halting outside Peach Tree Cottage. Three dark figures climbed out.



In a pocket-sized upstairs bedroom at Peach Tree Cottage, in the English Garden County of Kent, Casey Blue was dreaming. A smile played on her lips. She was reaching for the Badminton Horse Trials trophy, a magnificent

sculpture of three silver horses mounted on a red and black base. Cheers and applause rang out all around her.

'This is a huge achievement for Casey Blue,' the announcer was booming. 'She is the youngest ever winner of one of the toughest championships in world eventing.'

He didn't say that impoverished teenagers from grim concrete tower blocks in London's East End, riding one-dollar horses rescued from a knacker's yard, were not supposed to overcome some of the world's greatest riders to become Badminton champions, but that, Casey suspected, was what he was thinking. And who could blame him? Yet the impossible had been made possible because on the final day, the show jumping round, Storm, who could have been weakened by the gruelling cross-country, had felt strong and sure beneath her.

In the dream, Casey was smiling so widely her face hurt. But as her hands settled on the trophy it was torn from her grip. A flurry of officials surrounded her.

'There's been a mistake,' said one. 'You are not the winner. You don't deserve to be Badminton champion.'

'What are you talking about? Why not?'

'Your father is a burglar. A common thief.'

'He's not!' Casey almost screamed the words. 'Don't say that. He made a mistake once, a long time ago, and he's paid for it. He went to prison and served his time. Haven't you ever made a mistake? And anyway, what does that have to do with anything? This is not about my dad. It's about me and Storm. *We* did the dressage

and cleared the cross-country. *We* achieved the times and put the scores on the board. This is *our* life. Isn't that what counts?'

But the officials were walking away, taking the trophy with them, and already the arena had almost emptied. The last stragglers cast disapproving glances over their shoulders.

'We did win,' Casey protested, tears streaming down her face. 'We did win, you know we did.'

An urgent hammering shocked her awake. She lay without moving, trying to separate the nightmare from reality. Had she and Storm won Badminton or hadn't they? Yes, they had. She'd gone to sleep at midnight after an evening of celebration. The trophy was on the kitchen table downstairs, in among the champagne glasses.

She sagged against the pillows, smiling with relief. Now she only had good things to look forward to. Top of the list was the Kentucky Three-Day Event in America. As a result of her Badminton victory, she'd received an automatic invitation. It had put the icing on the cake of the best day of Casey's life.

The hammering came again, and this time there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs and lights clicking on. Still Casey didn't move. It was pitch black outside – 3.46 a.m., according to the clock, and she loathed getting up at that hour, even when she was going to an event.

Besides which, there were plenty of other people to get the front door. Her father was an early riser, as was Peter,

Storm's farrier, who was her . . . boyfriend. She had to get used to that word. As of yesterday, he was her boyfriend. There was also Angelica Smith, her sixty-three-year-old coach, who was a bit of an insomniac and was often up all hours of the night, drinking chai tea.

In the kitchen below, the muffled voices grew louder. The stairs creaked. Peter spoke through her door: 'Case, are you awake?'

She sat up, pushing her dark hair out of her eyes. 'How could I not be?'

Light spilled in behind him as he entered. His shirt was unbuttoned, revealing a brown stomach ridged with muscle, hollowing as it dipped towards his jeans. Despite the uncivilised hour, Casey felt her own stomach lurch with longing.

She flushed as the events of the previous evening came back to her. He'd kissed her. He'd told her he loved her. But he didn't look loving now. He looked worried.

'What's happening?' she asked. 'Is it the farmer again? He seems to get a kick out of frightening us from our beds at the crack of dawn. Or is it Morag with some foaling disaster?'

'Casey, you need to get dressed and come downstairs. The police are here.'

'The *police?'* Casey was wide awake now. 'What do they want? Is Storm okay? Please don't tell me he's been stolen.'

'No, Case, they're here to see your dad. I think you'd better come quickly.' And with that he was gone.

Casey flew out of bed in a panic, hands shaking as she struggled to pull on her jeans. Her jumper went on inside out. A thousand thoughts tumbled through her brain.

She'd been fourteen when Roland Blue had been arrested and charged with burglary and assault. The fact that he was the world's most unlikely thief had, in a way, made it worse. The dad she knew had only ever been kind, funny and loving. In court, friends and former employers had lined up to vouch for him as honest and loyal.

But he was also lacking in self-confidence and easily led. His most likeable trait, an infinite capacity for seeing the best in everyone, was not always tempered with good judgement.

A few years earlier, he'd fallen in with a bad crowd. They'd convinced him that a multi-millionaire wouldn't miss a few hundred thousand. He'd agreed to join the gang on a robbery. It was unfortunate that he happened to be knocking the millionaire out with a lamp (the man had woken and tried to kill him with a poker) when the police arrived. In the chaos, his accomplices had fled.

After refusing to rat out his mates, Roland had been left to take the fall on his own. Hence an eight-month prison sentence.

Since then he'd been clean. He'd retrained as a tailor, a job that had become a passion. He was so gifted that he'd hand-stitched Casey's top hat and tails for the dressage at Badminton, embroidering an exquisite rose

design on the shoulder and cuffs to remind her of her mother, who'd died when she was two. Roses had been her mum's favourite flower. Casey, who worshipped her dad, flaws and all, could not have been more proud of him.

And now this.

She clattered downstairs and burst into the kitchen. Her first impression was of people frozen in a tableau.

Mrs Smith was leaning against the Aga in her old silk robe, wearing an expression of naked fury. That was the scariest thing of all because very few things in life had the power to upset Mrs Smith's equilibrium. Peter was beside her. He started forward, but Mrs Smith said something under her breath and he stopped mid-stride.

Facing Casey across the table on which the trophy still sat was a large man with blue-black hair and a pockmarked face underlined by several chins. Even unmoving, he exuded a sinister magnetism. His eyes slid over her as if she were of no more consequence than the refrigerator and focused on her father, who wore his rumpled clothes from the previous day.

Flanking Roland Blue were two more policemen – one black and athletic-looking, the other short, stocky and in his mid to late fifties, with an unruly grey mop and pupils the colour of coffee dregs. He had the unhealthy pallor of a man low on sleep and big on caffeine and takeaways, but there was an unmistakable intelligence in his level gaze.

'Detective Inspector Lenny McLeod,' he said, advancing with his hand outstretched. 'These are my colleagues, Constable Dex Higgins' – he gestured towards the black officer – 'and Detective Superintendent Bill Grady. You must be Casey. Apologies for the disturbance. It couldn't wait.'

Casey ignored his hand. Her instinct was to rush to her father's side, but something about the stances of the men discouraged her. 'What's going on?' she demanded. 'What couldn't wait? Leave my dad alone. He's done nothing wrong.'

'That's for a judge to decide,' snapped Grady. 'We have a ton of evidence to suggest otherwise.'

Roland Blue gave a short laugh. 'That's a lie. Evidence of what? That I've been gainfully employed as a tailor and a model citizen? What have you got on me? Did I drop a piece of chewing gum on Hackney High Street?'

Higgins frowned. 'It's a bit more serious than that.'

'A parking ticket? Is that it? Look, if you want a character reference speak to my boss, Ravi Singh. He'll tell you—'

'We already have.' Grady squeezed his bulk into a kitchen chair. 'Can you tell us where you were between midnight and 1.15 a.m. on April 27th?'

A creeping coldness enveloped Casey, as if a winter fog was invading her bones.

'I was at home in Hackney – number 414 Redwing Tower. Speak to Ravi. He and I worked round the clock

for two nights running to finish a jacket for Casey. You can see it if you like.'

'Mr Singh did confirm he was with you on the 26th,' said McLeod. 'But he told us he left your flat shortly before midnight when he became too tired to continue. Apparently, you urged him to go home and get some sleep.'

'This conversation is not going any further without a lawyer present, detectives,' Mrs Smith interrupted. 'You've said quite enough. You're making a monstrous error and I'd advise you to leave before you do any further damage.'

Roland smiled. 'Thanks, Mrs Smith, but I have nothing to hide.' He turned to the men. 'So what if I did? Are you going to arrest me for showing concern for a friend?'

'We're rather more interested in a warehouse raid that took place during the hours when you were alone that morning,' Grady said. 'A raid in which a security guard was shot. He died yesterday. That makes this a murder inquiry.'

Roland went white.

Casey rushed forward with a cry, but Higgins grabbed her arm.

'Leave her alone,' Peter said angrily.

Grady rounded on him. 'One more step, boy, and I'll have you down the cells so fast you won't know what hit you. Now stay where you are and shut up.'

Mrs Smith regarded him with dislike. 'We have the

right to call a lawyer, detective superintendent, *and* to be treated with respect.'

Grady heaved himself to his feet and tossed a piece of paper on the table. 'Call all the lawyers you want, madam. Right now, our arrest warrant takes precedent. As for respect . . . we save that for thems that have earned it. Dex, read Mr Blue his rights.'

McLeod gave Casey a warning glance and steered her in the direction of Peter.

Constable Higgins intoned: 'Roland James Blue, I am arresting you on suspicion of murder. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence—'

'But this is insane! You have the wrong man. Casey, you believe me, don't you? I'm innocent.'

'I know you are, Dad. This is all just some hideous mistake. We'll fix it, I promise.'

'We most certainly will,' said Mrs Smith.

'Enough time wasting,' snarled Grady. 'Cuff him, Dex. Let's get him to the cells where he belongs.' He almost shoved the pair out into the darkness.

Casey's hands fell to her sides. It was as if someone had tugged at a thread and her whole life had begun to unravel.

McLeod glanced at the trophy on the kitchen table. 'I heard on the news that you won the Badminton Horse Trials yesterday, Casey. The youngest winner in history.

That's some achievement. I'm sorry this has spoiled things. Please understand that we're only doing our job. Uh, congratulations.'

The door slammed shut. The car engine roared and they were gone.