

## CHAPTER TEN



1 Mary drummed her fingers on the arm of the chair while she waited for  
2 Laura to tie up Jewel. She couldn't quite hide the little smug smile tugging  
3 at the corners of her mouth.

4 Laura took one look at Mary and asked, "What's up? Something's up. I  
5 know you, Mary, and something's up."

6 "Come with me." Mary led the way into the library. "Shut the door," she  
7 whispered.

8 Laura eased the door shut and plopped into the pink stuffed chair.  
9 "Remind me to tell you what happened with my mother. Now, what has you  
10 so jazzed?"

11 "I haven't even told Papa or Mrs. Tate yet." Mary's smile spread across  
12 her whole face. "I stood up this morning."

13 "Really, Mary? That's fantastic!"

14 "I can hardly believe it."

15 "The riding—do you think?"

16 "Yes. My muscles have gotten stronger. Papa never misses a day to  
17 remind me to do Dr. Krane's exercises, and the ones you taught me to do  
18 in the saddle are helping. But I'm afraid to tell Papa. He's already talking

19 about going back to Florida, and I can't think about that now. I have to be  
20 here with Illusion through it all." Mary sighed. "Watch." With the wheels  
21 locked, she balanced on the edge of her chair. Putting weight on her legs,  
22 she leaned forward. Pressing her feet into the floor, she lifted herself out of  
23 the chair. "No hands." She dropped down and repeated the motion. "Soon  
24 I will ride like a free spirit escaped from a trap."

25 Laura threw both hands up with her fingers spread open as wide as her  
26 mouth. "Oh my, that's boss. Look at you! It's like you're posting in a  
27 saddle!" Laura squeaked.

28 "Incredible, huh? Can you believe it? I can only do it a couple times, but  
29 I'm getting stronger every day. If only Illusion... we would be amazing  
30 together."

31 "We will find you the right horse someday. For now, I don't think we  
32 should sit here and watch the clock tick. That won't help Illusion. Let's go  
33 ride."



34

35 When Laura had Jewel tacked up, she brought the horse out of the barn  
36 and lined her up next to Mary, still sitting in the buggy. "I decided I would  
37 ride with you today on Treasure. He needs something to do, and he earned  
38 a break from being Illusion's babysitter."

39 "Our first ride together. Let's post."

40 "Might be best to start with a slow trot. But the posting trot should be  
41 easier on a horse than in a wheelchair. The horse's motion gives you a little  
42 bounce. I think Jewel could follow behind Treasure, and he would keep her  
43 steady."

44 "I'm so excited."

45 Laura grinned. "Me too. Are you going to slide over or not?"

46 Mary lifted her foot and scooted across the bench seat until she settled  
47 into the saddle. She tucked the fabric of her skirt around her legs so they  
48 wouldn't stick to the leather.

49 "We've got to get you riding pants." Laura pushed Mary's feet solidly into  
50 the stirrups.

51 Mary smiled at the thought of her own jodhpurs. "I could wear them  
52 under my skirt so Papa wouldn't notice. I feel a little guilty riding without  
53 telling him, but soon I'll be able to show him. The more I ride, the stronger  
54 I get. When I can walk, nothing will stop me from saving Illusion." She did  
55 a happy chicken dance with her elbows while she belted out a tune. "I feel  
56 good, da-da, da-da, da-da, da!" Mary smiled as big as the Texas sun. "This  
57 is going to work. I know it."

58 "Oh stop! Even singing lessons won't help you. You're silly today. At least  
59 you're not totally gloomed about Illusion."

60 "I'm faking it some. Illusion is all I can think about, but I'm trying not to  
61 believe the worst." Mary grimaced. "Or watch the nightmare motion picture,  
62 playing in my brain, of Illusion being forced to walk yesterday."

63 "Wasn't that awful?"

64 "It all looks hopeless, and it gets worse every day." Mary took in a deep  
65 breath and blew it out in a puff. "Hurry, get Treasure. We don't have much  
66 time."

67 Laura disappeared into the barn to tack up Treasure and soon trotted into  
68 the arena. The girls rode side by side along the rail. The horses' heads hung  
69 low and relaxed. Jewel's head popped up, and her ears pointed off to a  
70 bushy area when a bird flitted away. Mary automatically lifted one rein to  
71 remind the horse she was working. Except for the hooves scuffing along in  
72 the sand, the girls rode in silence.

73 Finally, Laura shortened her reins. "Let's walk patterns. You and Jewel  
74 can follow me."

75 The girls rode in figure eights, three-loop serpentines, and different-sized  
76 circles.

77 "You're doing fine," Laura said. "It will go even better when you can use  
78 your legs on her."

79 "Let's trot."

80 "If you're sure," Laura said. "Here goes."

81 Jewel followed Treasure along the arena fence. "Grab some mane, Mary.  
82 Don't worry about your diagonals." Both horses eased into a trot.

83 "Wait," Mary called, and Laura halted Treasure.

84 "What?"

85 "I need to unbuckle the straps so I can post."

86 "A colossal bad idea."

87 "I can do it. I feel balanced in the saddle. It's all smooth."

88 "It's a bad idea," Laura repeated and waited for Mary to come to her  
89 senses. But Mary unbuckled them anyway. Finally shaking her head, Laura  
90 squeezed Treasure into a slow trot and asked him to whoa about every ten  
91 steps to look back and check on Mary. "Let the energy of the horse bounce  
92 you up and forward. I'll trot farther this time, so you can pick up a better  
93 rhythm. Call out if you need me to stop."

94 "Don't look back at us. I'm a bouncing bullfrog in a saddle."

95 Laura laughed. "Maybe, but you're still in the saddle. That's what counts."

96 As they started to trot again, Mary's feet slipped out of the stirrups. With  
97 one hand gripping the mane, she dropped the reins and grabbed for the

98 saddle horn. It wasn't enough. The next trot stride pitched her forward.  
99 When her body slapped back into the saddle, she lost her balance. Slipping  
100 to the side, still clinging to Jewel's mane, she called, "Stop! I'm falling."

101 Laura pulled a little too hard on Treasure's reins. Jewel swerved to avoid  
102 running up on him, flinging Mary completely out of the saddle. Mary dangled  
103 around Jewel's neck for an instant before thudding to the ground. Dirt and  
104 skirts flew everywhere. Jewel shuffled backward. Mary lay perfectly still.

105 "Ach... I know what that feels like. Are you all right?" Laura dismounted  
106 and ran the few steps to Mary. Pulling Treasure behind her, she knelt beside  
107 Mary. "Are you all right? Do you hurt anywhere?"

108 Jewel skittered away, dragging her reins, snapping them off as she  
109 stepped all over them. Head held high, the horse pranced about swinging  
110 her mane from side to side. After a loud snort, she wandered to graze the  
111 grass along the arena fence line.

112 Mary groaned. "I'm afraid to move. If I'm not dead, Papa is going to kill  
113 me."

114 "You're not dead. Your papa won't know."

115 Mary took Laura's offered hand and sat up in the dirt. She stretched her  
116 neck, rolled her shoulders, and wiped the dirt off her face. "I think  
117 everything checks out okay. Getting dumped gets me in the riders' club  
118 right?"

119 "You weren't dumped. You fell off in slow motion, which is not the same."

120 "But I'm in right?" Mary asked.

121 "You're in."

122 "I should've kept on the saddle straps, but I thought it'd be okay."

123 "You think? They are on there for a reason."

124 Mary looked around and then at Laura. "Now what?"

125 "There is no way I can get you up on Jewel from the ground. We need  
126 your wheelchair."

127 "You can't push me in the chair in this sand." Mary thought a minute.  
128 "It's too far to crawl."

129 "What if I get a wheelbarrow? We can move you to the buggy in it. How  
130 we are going to boost you up into the seat, I don't know yet. But I'm clever."  
131 Laura snickered. "I'll figure it out."

132 "Do we have any other options?"

133 "Like what? I could go find the groom to help us. But he'll tell my father."

134 "Get the wheelbarrow," Mary moaned.

135 "Jewel seems happy eating grass, so I'll leave her for now." Laura led  
136 Treasure off to the barn. Pushing the tarp-covered chariot out to where  
137 Mary sat, Laura said, "Your carriage, my lady."

138 "Do we have a plan for this?" "We do." Laura whipped the tarp off the  
139 wheelbarrow. "If you sit on the tarp, I can drag you to the fence. Since you  
140 can stand up for a few seconds, you can use the fence to hold yourself up.  
141 I'll squeeze the wheelbarrow underneath you."

142 "I do not believe this."

143 Laura laughed. "Give it a whirl. It sounds crazy, but it might work."

144 "I can't think of a better idea." Mary squirmed and scooted to get in  
145 position. "You are very clever, Laura, to think of this. I wish I was as clever  
146 as you."

147 With a corner of the tarp over her shoulder, Laura dragged it to the fence  
148 like a workhorse in harness.

149 With Laura on one side and the fence on the other, Mary struggled to pull  
150 herself upright. "I'm standing! Get the wheelbarrow. Hurry."

151 "Your feet are on the tarp." Laura bent over and tugged the tarp free. In  
152 one motion, she snatched the tarp off the ground and flung it across the  
153 wheelbarrow. Laura hurried to angle the wheelbarrow down so Mary could  
154 sit in it. Not able to hold herself that long, Mary thudded into the  
155 wheelbarrow. It tipped to the side dumping her into the dirt and pulling  
156 Laura off balance as it went. As Laura tumbled, Jewel exploded in a panic.  
157 Fleeing the scene, her hooves plastered dirt over both girls.

158 "Yes, I feel really clever." Laura spit grit out of her mouth.

159 Mary hooted. "You look like a leopard Appaloosa."

160 "Great. Thanks to my carriage horse that spooks at nothing—ever. You  
161 are a bad influence on her."

162 "Okay, clever one, what now?" Mary spread her arms wide. "It better be  
163 good. The longer we're out here like this, the closer we are to getting  
164 caught. I know my papa. He'll hire a warden-nanny to watch my every  
165 move." Mary moaned and flipped sand in the air with both hands.

166 "This is not my fault!" Laura put her hands on her hips. "Let's skip the  
167 tarp."

168 "That's not a muck cart is it?"

169 "No! You're already filthy anyway. What if you lean toward the fence as  
170 you sit? With the wheelbarrow next to the board, maybe it won't tip over."  
171 The two friends tried again. This time, as Mary kerplunked into the  
172 wheelbarrow, Laura tipped it back quickly. Mary fell backward and smacked  
173 her head.

174 "That had to hurt," Laura said. "Sorry."

175 "It's okay." Mary tugged herself up, slid into the wheelbarrow bucket, and  
176 rubbed the back of her head. "They had team wheelbarrow races at the fair.  
177 We should've entered. We could've been rodeo clowns."

178 Laura leaned in as the wheels hit a patch of deep sand and huffed as she  
179 thumped the wheelbarrow down. "I can't do this. The sand is too deep. I'm  
180 whipped."

181 "I don't know what to do. The buggy might as well be miles away."

182 "We still have to get you up into it somehow." Laura sat cross-legged in  
183 the sand. Her eyes closed.

184 "You're right." Mary moaned. "I've ruined everything."



185

186 Laura's eyes popped open. "You give up too fast. You know I'm clever."

187 "What? Tell me your idea."

188 Laura jumped up and swished the sand off her jodhpurs. "I remembered  
189 something. My mother hired a trainer from New Zealand to start the two-  
190 year-olds once. Jewel was in that herd. He laid them all down to teach them  
191 something—I forget what. But I watched, and I might remember the cues  
192 he used, though I've never done it. It's been a long time, and Jewel might  
193 not remember either."

194 "So what?"

195 "If I can lay her down, you could get on, silly." Laura turned on her heel  
196 and dashed for the barn, returning with an overflow of carrots and a long  
197 training whip. She tossed the carrots to Mary. "Here. Start breaking them  
198 up into small pieces."



199 Laura dragged the tarp to Mary. "We will toss a few onto the tarp so Jewel  
200 doesn't eat sand with the carrots. If she has lots to eat while she is laying  
201 down, maybe she won't get up too fast."

202 "You have crossed over from clever to crazy! I'm not getting on. I need  
203 to get home. Ask your groom to carry me to the buggy." Mary wiped as  
204 much dirt from her arms and face as she could with a petticoat. She shook  
205 out her skirt and spread it neatly around her. But instead of getting the  
206 groom, Laura caught Jewel.

207 "My teacher is coming. I have to get home," Mary protested.

208 "You should have thought of that before you unbuckled your straps. Now,  
209 you have to get back in the saddle. You always do that after a fall so you  
210 don't lose your nerve."

211 "I haven't lost my nerve! I just don't have time. Mr. Gregory will be there  
212 soon."

213 "Prove it!" Laura insisted. "Prove you're not chicken."

214 "I have a knot in my stomach like something bad is about to happen."  
215 Mary clenched her fist and pressed it into her stomach.

216 "See, you are scared. You don't have to ride long. We need to get you  
217 past it."

218 "We don't have time to experiment. You don't know if you can even get  
219 her to lay down. I'm going to be found out for sure."

220 "Oh, we have time. When I went after the whip, I noticed the farm truck  
221 is gone. The groom must have gone to the feed store."

222 "Ugh," groaned Mary as she started breaking up carrots.

223 Laura positioned Jewel as close to Mary as she dared. She tapped the  
224 mare's foot with the whip. The horse lifted the hoof and plopped it right  
225 back down. "She knows I want something, but not sure what." At the tap

226 and with a little downward pressure on the rein, the mare dropped to one  
227 knee, and Laura slipped a carrot into the surprised horse's mouth. Laura  
228 asked the horse to rise again by tapping her hip and repeated the action a  
229 couple times. Soon Jewel dropped to her knees with her rump in the air  
230 when Laura pointed the whip at her hoof. "I don't remember how to get her  
231 to lie down all the way."

232 "Keep feeding her a few carrot pieces. If she starts to get up, tap her leg  
233 so she'll know that's not the right answer. Maybe she'll get tired of holding  
234 her rump in the air and eventually lay down. We can give her lots of carrots,  
235 and I can crawl on her back while she's eating."

236 "How did you learn all that from a book? I need to read more." Laura  
237 shook her head.

238 Soon Crown Jewel flopped on her side, and Laura spread oodles of carrot  
239 pieces on the tarp. Mary grabbed the saddle horn and pulled. Laura put an  
240 arm around Mary and helped tug her into the saddle. Jewel scarfed up all  
241 the carrots and stayed on her belly in the sand. Laura tapped the mare on  
242 the hip with the training whip, but Jewel waited for the carrot vending  
243 machine to dispense more treats. "Oh great. She's found the carrot farm,  
244 and she's not leaving." Finally, Laura handed the whip to Mary to use, and  
245 Laura tugged on a rein. Working in concert, the girls were able to convince  
246 the horse there would be no more carrots and she should get up.

247 "What do ya say we put the straps on this time?" Laura rolled her eyes.

248 "Okay, okay. Let's get this over with quick." Mary rode Jewel, and Laura  
249 walked alongside. After they walked a lap, Laura encouraged her. "You have  
250 good contact with her mouth, so tighten up the reins and try to squeeze  
251 with your legs." Jewel eased into a trot—smooth and slow and collected.

252 "Wow, this is amazing. We should have done this slow trot first."

253 "Yes, but you wanted to post."

254 "I love this. What a floating gait she has."

255 "She wins ribbons with it. Trot to the gate, and we're done."

256 "What already? One more loop around? This is wonderful fun. Can I ride  
257 home like this?"

258 "No way. And not my fault if your papa finds out you missed your lessons  
259 and grounds you for life."

260 "I'm just joking. I do that when I'm scared. Mrs. Tate is going to be so  
261 disappointed in me. Papa is going to be furious. I just know I've messed  
262 everything up and I'm in hot, hot water."