

**Dream Rider**  
**Wilf Voss**

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## Prologue

"Well if you have just joined us you do so at a pivotal time for the equestrian team." The commentator paused looking down at the arena, the coloured jumps had been arranged and it was obvious that everything was ready. "There is just one rider left and that is Caroline Gibbs, she has the chance for both the individual and team gold medals. All she has to do is to jump clear. This is truly a unique situation and what a lot of responsibility Caroline has on her shoulders right now as she prepares to ride."

Caroline was oblivious to the commentators words as she sat on her horse in the collecting ring, Mozart playing in her earphones, an idea from the team trainer to block out anything that could disturb her before she rode in such a nerve racking environment. She closed her eyes for a moment allowing the piano notes wash over her. She knew that she could do well, she had ridden well throughout the previous rounds and she had a wonderful horse, together they were unstoppable. She felt a hand on her knee and opened her eyes, her groom looked up to her smiling. Caroline pulled the earphones out from under her helmet and handed her iPod to her.

"You can do it..." The girl was close to tears in just another couple of minutes it would be over, she paused, gulping in air. "Good luck!"

Caroline smiled taking up the reins and rode into the arena. If she had not been aware of the near deafening sound she was now, she briefly glanced up at the stands all filled to capacity and the many cameras which would be beaming the event around the world. It had been said that this had one of the largest audiences because of the unique situation that Caroline found herself in with the two gold medals in her grasp.

She cantered her horse on allowing the cheers and applause to bolster her, then there was the sound of the bell, a hush fell over the stadium and it was time for her to perform. She pushed the horse on and towards the first jump. It was a simple upright; she approached counting the strides before pushing on. There was a moment when she was hanging in the air, and then clear one jump cleared and ten more to go.

Caroline pushed on clearing jumps, she knew that she had to be quick but could not make a stupid mistake she just had to jump clear. She took a tight line into the next jump... 'Slow down' she said in her mind, she was showing off trying to trim strides on the approach, the jump was clear but it had been close.

It was now onto the last approach, it was towards a simple upright. She pulled the reins checking her horse's progress towards the simple fence, this was it, jump this clear... She put the thought from her mind.

Caroline counted the strides, four, three, two... Suddenly something was wrong; there was someone in front of her. She blinked there was a woman standing in front of the jump, she was facing away from the approach, seeming to study the fence. There was only one stride left, she was about to hit the woman who seemed to be oblivious to her approaching. The horse started his take-off stride, Caroline stared at the woman who was unflinching she could not hit her.

It was a split second decision; Caroline hauled on her horse's reins as he took off and leaned out of the saddle to the side dragging the horse to the right. The horse was unbalanced and hit the wings of the jump landing heavily, its legs buckled beneath it and Caroline felt herself

hitting the ground hard before the full weight of the horse slammed into her body.

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"...And at the last moment she seemed to pull out of the jump. Team captain Sebastian Bowen-Smyth was unwilling to comment..." The television was re-showing the show jumping and in particular Caroline's spectacular last jump.

Caroline slowly opened her eyes, the light blinding her as she blinked and tried to fathom where she was and what was happening. Caroline attempted to sit up but found that she was unable to move. Even her head was prevented from moving, her neck held in place with a solid brace.

"Oh, you are awake. What a shame..." Caroline froze she recognised the upper class drawl of Sebastian Bowen-Smyth. He sounded angry, this was not difficult or unfamiliar as he was always angry with Caroline, she had risen through the ranks from the lower classes as he had once sneered at her. She did not fit into the moneyed nature of the team and he had made it his aim to ensure she knew her place even if it was that she was one of the best riders. She could hear footsteps moving around her bed and the scent of Sebastian's aftershave before he appeared in her line of sight.

"Do you want to tell me what you were doing?" He paused, his usual sneer playing across his face, Caroline stuttered to afraid to answer. "No?" He sniffed. "Shall I tell you? I think that you tried to sabotage the team, I don't think you wanted to share the gold and wanted it all to yourself."

"No..." Caroline's voice croaked her mouth dry.

"Shut up!" He snarled. "I am not asking you Miss Gibbs. I know that you hated your team mates," He paused. "It is just good news that you are unlikely to be able to ride again."

"What?"

"Oh have they not told you..." Sebastian stared down into her face; a sudden smile crinkled his features. "You are not going to be able to walk again!" He laughed shaking his head. "Serves you right you stupid girl..." Caroline started to sob. "Oh shut up you snivelling bitch!"

"But the woman..." Caroline blinked. "There was a woman standing in front of the jump..." She gulped. "I had to stop, if I had hit her..."

"What are you babbling about?" Sebastian snarled. "There was nobody there. What are you trying to say?" He paused. "You pulled your horse through a jump for no reason." Caroline felt a sudden pain as Sebastian grabbed her neck brace and dragged her into a sitting position. "Look!" He gestured towards the television, which was high on the wall in the corner of the room. The screen showed the jumping again and a slow motion review of Caroline's last jump. She watched as the camera tracked showing her dragging her horse into the side of the jump. She gasped, there was nobody there. Sebastian let go of her and her body slammed back onto the bed. "There you vindictive bitch. You saw what you did. You had a clear jump and you blew it." He stood up. "You know they had to put it down?"

"What?"

"The horse... It had a broken leg. It had to be shot in front of the crowd." He stopped with his hand on the door. "Just think of the shame you have brought on us all. I pity you..." He paused and turned stepping back into Caroline's view. "I have a word of advice for you Miss Gibbs." He snarled. "Go away. And by that I mean get out of the UK. You will be a hunted

person; you know the police are standing outside this room, for your protection." He laughed. "I should send them away, let the public at you." He stood up. "So my advices, get out, go and hide because you are no longer welcome here." He reached across to Caroline's show jacket and ripped the union jack badge from the pocket. With that, he stepped out of the door slamming it as he left.

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Caroline tossed and turned in her bed, sobbing silently as she slept, Jacqui her roommate lay quietly snoring. In the shadows the woman stood unseen a smile playing across her face.

## Chapter 1

Sunshine, warmth, the smell of horses, the sound of brushing and the laughter of grooms as they mucked out and swept down the yards. Adam Bishop stood at the foot of the yard and paused for a moment looking across the stable blocks, the horses and the staff. It never failed to make him happy, this was all his, even the responsibility for paying the bills in a recession, keeping staff and customers happy and constantly trying to make ends meet was pushed from his mind when he took the time to pause and take it all in.

An outside observer would probably see without Adam's rose tinted glasses and see the ramshackle stables some with peeling paint and rusting hinges, the unremarkable riding school horses and the slightly shabby nature of the whole yard. However the staff were happy, the horses were well looked after and the contingent of clients and liveries kept coming back even if some of them could no longer afford weekly lessons.

Thirty-two years old, well-built and slim, brown haired and admired by the female staff and customers, spending his life working outdoors had left him tightly muscled and tanned, his regular uniform of tight black jodhpurs, long leather riding boots and polo-shirts often drew longing glances and lost moments. But he was obvious to his admirers as he was devoted to his wife Kate who often joked that he missed the effect he had on women around him. There was little jealousy and almost a sense of pride from her when she saw others spending time watching as he walked across the yard, however she was clear with others that he was hers. It was an unspoken understanding on the yard, hands off, look but don't dare touch.

Kate was chief riding instructor and co-owner with her husband. She was thirty with messy blond hair and a similarly toned body borne of many hours each day riding horses and working hard. Although her face was always free from make-up she had a natural tone and warmth that made those that spent considerably more time and money on their appearance green with envy, however they would console themselves by looking at her short, cracked nails and rough hands.

Adam and Kate had met some years before when they had both been instructors at the yard, thrown together by fate before a romance grew between them and fate and circumstance had allowed them to take the reins literally as the owners of the yard. It had been a great moment and both of them could remember it well; they had been married at the local church and had held the reception on this very yard. However, since then the responsibility had hit home, it was like growing up. The fun and simple life of waking, working and playing had been hit with paperwork, accounts, cash flow, health, and safety. Adam took the lions share by mutual arrangement and would spend many hours struggling with regulations and bank statements wishing he had spent less time staring out of school windows and more time learning maths. But for now, that was behind him with this moment of clarity as he took in the sights, his small empire.

His reverie was brought to an abrupt end as he was knocked from behind by a wheelbarrow slamming into the back of his legs. He stumbled as the barrow toppled spilling its stinking contents over him as he lay on the yard.

"Oh shit!" Caroline scrambled to right the barrow. "Shit! Shit..." She took Adam's hand and helped him up. "Are you okay?" She started to brush him down. "Look. I am so sorry."

Adam smiled pushing her away. "Okay, no harm done." He paused. "Are you okay?" Caroline stepped back turning slightly and looking down. "What's up Caroline?" Adam took

her hand and drew her closer. Caroline shivered involuntarily. "If something is wrong, you know you can tell me..."

Caroline glanced down at her boots. "Sorry. I have just been really tired for a few days. I haven't been sleeping too well." She paused. "I have been having nightmares." She shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry, I am just being stupid." She grabbed the handles of the wheel barrow and started to walk away. "I'll sweep that up."

"Caroline wait a moment..." Adam shook her head as she walked away. Caroline had been a member of staff and a good friend for as many years as he could remember. They had worked together as grooms and now she was one of the team of riding instructors. She was a hard working local girl, twenty-six years old with mousey brown hair which she pulled back into a ponytail. She had always been slightly flighty, always a little nervous but she was well respected by the rest of the staff and loved by her customers. Adam always ensured that nervous or unsure riders were taught by Caroline, she had the patience and caring nature to ensure that they built confidence.

"Morning scruffy!" Kate grabbed Adam round his waist and they kissed deeply, he held her in his arms. "You left early this morning, didn't want to wake me up then?" She laughed. "And what have you been doing?" She brushed wood chips and straw from his legs. "Been having an early roll in the hay have we?" She hardly finished her sentence when Adam grabbed her around her waist tipping her up and hefting her onto his shoulder. "Oi!" She laughed.

"Go on say that again..." Adam laughed as he strode across the yard until they were standing beside the muck heap. The heap was steaming and stood in a morass of thick black mud. He teased her pretending to drop her in a particularly deep puddle.

"Okay! You win..." Kate laughed, kicking her legs. "Put me down, I have my best jods on..."

"Put you down?" Adam paused looking innocently towards Kate.

"No..." She shrieked. "Don't you dare!" She struggled as he lowered her until she was just inches from the mud. "Adam!" He laughed and swung her from his shoulder and back onto the yard. She slapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, you would have regretted it if you had dropped me." She laughed.

"Promises, promises!" He laughed and kissed her lightly. "When are you teaching today?"

Kate glanced at her watch. "Oh shit! About five minutes ago! That's your fault!" She ran across the yard where there were five horses being mounted by customers, Caroline was holding a piebald gelding for Kate to mount. "I am so sorry!" The women laughed, they had been kept amused by Adam's antics. Caroline gave Kate a leg-up and they walked their horses across the yard and towards a bridle path onto the moor.

Adam waved as Kate rode off and walked towards the office, there was work to be done. How he wished he could just spend his day riding and mucking out but there were important things to attend to.

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'Mr Bishop - I feel we need to have a conversation'

Adam shuddered as the machine stopped and informed him that this was the end of messages. The voice was so familiar to him and it chilled him to the bone, it needed no number or further information he knew that he was being summoned and that he dare not refuse. He hit the delete button and slumped down into the chair.

At that moment the door swung open, Adam nervously looked up but it was just Jacqui, one of the younger grooms. She had left school last summer after having spend many years working as a helper during the weekends it was a natural progression to become a member of the team full-time. "Kate forgot her phone!" She grabbed the mobile from the desk. "Are you okay?" Adam looked up.

"Yes..." He paused. "Sorry, I'm fine Jac's, just a bit distracted that's all." He smiled and watched as she stepped from the room and dashed across the yard where Kate was waiting. Adam smiled she he watched the other riders laugh and joke with Kate, she was blushing as they rode out onto the moor. It seemed to be a day for distraction.

Adam sat back down at the desk, he felt it was best to immerse himself in work. He grabbed a box file and started to sort through receipts and invoices.

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Caroline turned the corner, she glanced up at the woman who was standing beside one of the stables, pausing, there was a moment of recognition but Caroline could not think where she had seen the woman before. She shook her head and stepped towards her. "Hello, can I help you?"

The woman turned round slowly. Caroline felt a sudden urge to run away, a chill running down her body. "Hello... Caroline."

"Do I know you?" Caroline stuttered.

"Not yet..." The woman smiled. "Oh but you will..."

"I'm sorry?"

"Don't be..." The woman reached forward and touched Caroline's cheek. Caroline pulled away, stepping back quickly as if from an electric shock. The woman laughed. "Oh Caroline... We are going to have such fun!" The woman turned and started to walk away.

"Are you okay?" Caroline jumped as she was touched on the shoulder, she span around and saw Sarah standing on the yard beside her. "Sorry, you were just standing there, you seemed to be lost in your own world."

"Do you know who that woman was?"

"What woman?" Sarah frowned. "There was nobody here?"

"She was just here..." Caroline's voice faded.

"I have been here for a minute or so, there was no one here Caroline."

Caroline shrugged. "Sorry Sarah, just me being daft."

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Kate turned around in the saddle and saw that her riders were all keeping up. She enjoyed this group, they came once a week for a hack across the moor, supposedly an hour but over time Kate had ensured that they would stay out riding for at least a couple of hours. They were good company and there was always laughter and good conversation between them as they rode. The path in front of them opened out into a vast expanse of moorland. Kate took a deep breath, she had lived and worked around this part of Dartmoor all of her life but it still impressed her. She felt free when she was out here in the open with miles of open country before her. Of course it could be dangerous out here, the weather could change at a moment's



notice and there were cliffs, mine workings and bogs which presented hazards to the unwary but that was part of the attraction. There was laughter from behind her, Kate pulled her horse across and rode beside the rest of the riders.

"Go on..." She laughed.

"Oh we were just laughing about you and Adam this morning..." Sue smiled putting her hand on Kate's thigh. "You are so lucky to have him."

"He has his moments you know..." Kate smirked. "He snores terribly you know..."

"Yeah! Well if you decide to push him out of your bed, just send him to me!" Sue winked, there was loud laughter from the other riders. Kate blushed.

"No chance ladies!" She laughed. "I've told you before. Hands off!" She pushed her horse on into a canter. "Come on girls, race you to the top of the ridge!"

The five women cantered and then galloped towards the top of the hill pulling up their horses at the ridge. They were all laughing and joking as the conversation moved on to a terrible blind date from one of the other women and deeply descriptive discussions of the date's failings in bed.

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Caroline splashed cold water on her face, the meeting with the woman had left her shaken. She stared into the cracked mirror, she was looking gaunt and gray, she looked at her bloodshot blue eyes, there were bags beneath them showing her lack of sleep. She sighed, turning ready to face the world when she froze. She span back towards the mirror, blue eyes? Surely she was not going totally mad? She leaned forward staring into her eyes which had been brown. She suddenly felt a wave of fear flooding her body, she felt as if she was watching the world as if it was a film, her reality slipping away.

"Hello Caroline..." She spoke, watching her lips move and her voice filling the small bathroom but aware that this was not her. "It's time for me to play now..." She laughed manically.

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The postman pushed the office door open and dropped a pile of post onto the desk. Adam looked through it, at the bottom of the pile was a grey plastic mailing bag addressed to Sarah. "Caroline...?" Adam stood up pulling open the office door. "Could you do me a favour please and give this to Sarah?" He handed Caroline the bag.

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Adam picked up the telephone and dialled a number without looking. There was a click and it started to ring, he hesitated and started to put the handset down when he heard a voice.

'Hello...'

The voice was harsh and spoke with an unseen authority. Adam shuddered. "You called me..."

"Mr Bishop?" There was a pause. "Now why do you think that I would need to talk with you?" Adam stuttered. "Oh come on, I am sure that you know. But I don't like to do these things over the telephone. It has been sometime since we met, I think it would be good to see you again."

"Please..." Adam sobbed.

"The usual place. Eight o'clock." A pause. "Please don't be late Mr Bishop. I cannot abide lateness. It makes me, angry." The conversation ended with a click and Adam replaced the handset. He slumped onto the desk tears pricking his eyes.

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"Hello Sarah, Adam gave me this for you."

Sarah took the bag excitedly. "Oh great it's here." She ripped open the plastic bag, taking out a pair of blue jodhpurs. "I have been waiting for these. They have a sticky bum... It's supposed to improve your riding position." She smiled. "I can't wait to try them on."

Caroline stood smiling for a moment. "Sticky bum?" She laughed.

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Sarah checked the list and saw that she was riding Major. She grabbed her riding hat and crop and stepped out onto the yard. Caroline was leading Major from his stable. "What do you think?" Sarah twirled around showing off her new jodhpurs.

"Very nice, they suit you!" Caroline laughed. She held onto the far stirrup as Sarah mounted up. "I hope the sticky bum works well." Sarah laughed as she led her riders out of the yard.

Caroline watched as they left, she could not help herself giggling and had to stop herself before anyone saw her.

Sarah felt that there was something wrong but put it down to her new jodhpurs. She was certainly sticking in the saddle, in fact she was stuck to the saddle, the description for the sticky bum jods has said that they helped you stay in place in the saddle but this was pretty full on. She pushed her horse into a trot and was worried to find that she couldn't even do rising trot.

She was clearly distracted, Penny, one of her riders called out to her. "Are you okay?"

Sarah shook her head. "Look this will sound weird but I am stuck in the saddle."

"I know you have a really deep seat, and those new jodhpurs must be helping."

"No Penny." Sarah tried to stand up in her stirrups. "I can't move at all..." She struggled. "I am completely stuck."

Penny laughed. "Come on! Don't pull my leg!" She stopped as she saw the panicked look in Sarah's eyes. "You aren't joking are you?"

"Sorry guys!" Sarah frowned. "We will have to go back to the yard. I have a problem..." She sheepishly turned her horse around and led them back to the yard.

Adam glanced at his watch as he saw Sarah leading the ride back, he walked out of the office and went over to her. "You're early, is there something wrong?"

Sarah leaned down and whispered to Adam. "I'm stuck..."

"Stuck?" Adam shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"I can't move." She tried to move in the saddle. "Adam I am completely stuck. Help me please."

Adam grabbed one of Sarah's boots and tried to pull it away from the saddle and then did the same with her left knee, but both were stuck firm. "Ah..." He paused. "You are stuck."

"Thanks. Now could you do something to help me?" She shook her head.

"I am not sure what to do?" He paused. "Let me have a think..."

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Adam and Kate had tried everything from brute force to large quantities of washing-up liquid but Sarah was still firmly attached to Major's saddle. They had lifted her off the horse and placed the saddle on one of the fences surrounding the yard when Major had become too fidgety. Sarah was blushing with embarrassment as a small group of staff and customers gathered watching what was happening to her.

"Look I am sorry, we have tried everything." Kate sighed. "I think we had better take you to casualty." She paused. "Sorry Sarah."

Kate and Adam lifted Sarah with her attached saddle from the fence and laid her down in the back on the Land Rover. "I am sorry this is not the best way to travel, but at least it should be reasonable comfortable with the rugs in there." He shut the back door and sat behind the wheel. "Okay back there?" He paused. "Sorry I know it's a stupid question."

It was clear from the shocked and amused faces of the nurses in accident and emergency that Sarah's predicament was unusual. They were sympathetic and tried a number of options before eventually having to cut away the leather of the saddle. "It seems to be some form of epoxy glue." The doctor frowned. "We have tried all of the solvents we have and have removed all we can." He paused. "It's just that the glue seems to have seeped through your jodhpurs and stuck to your flesh. I am very sorry."

"So what happens to me now?"

"Well the skin will wear away over the next few days."

"A few days?" Sarah shrieked. "I have to stay like this for a few days?"

"We will remove as much of the glue as we can, then you can go home. Have lots of hot baths."

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It was dark when Sarah returned to the stable flat. Kate had brought her spare clothes but she was massively uncomfortable in her old jeans with the remains of Major's saddle and her new jodhpurs still stuck to her legs. She dashed past the staff sitting on the sofas and bolted herself in the bathroom, starting to run a bath, she swore as she realised that the meagre supply of hot water had run out. She sat on the toilet and cried.

## Chapter 2

"Who the hell did that to Sarah?" Adam growled.

"And good morning to you too!" Kate smiled, placing a mug of coffee in front of him on the kitchen table.

"Sorry..." Adam sipped the hot coffee. "Thanks... I am just so annoyed."

"I am sure it was someone's idea of a silly prank."

"Silly prank?" Adam snorted. "Sarah hurt, hours in casualty, clients pissed off and let alone a destroyed saddle."

"Okay..." Kate massaged his shoulders. "Look I will try to find out who did this."

"And fire them!"

"Okay Mr Grumpy..." She laughed leaving Adam protesting.

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"And go large..." Caroline yawned loudly.

"Sorry am I boring you?" Tracy laughed.

"Oh..." Caroline blushed. "No I am so sorry..."

"Don't mind me." Tracy pushed her horse into a trot around the arena. "You do look to be a bit tired today, good night?" She smirked.

"I wish." Caroline blushed even more deeply. She had not had a boyfriend since the embarrassed fumbling at school and now she worked in an environment where there were not so many men around. However this suited her quite well, she was so easily embarrassed by the idea of having a relationship and was quite happy to throw herself into her work. "Sorry, can you do a twenty meter circle at A and then..." Caroline stopped, she could see someone standing by the arena fence. They had not been there a moment ago, she didn't recognise them.

"...And?" Tracy circled her horse and returned to the track.

"And?" Caroline shook her head and turned towards Tracy. "Oh, do a diagonal from K, through X to M." She looked back towards the fence but the woman was no longer standing there. Caroline walked towards the fence and looked around, there was nobody there and the only people were on the yard some metres away. She shook her head and turned round and stepped back towards the centre of the arena. She stepped onto the track unaware of the fact that Tracy was riding towards her, she shouted but Caroline was hit by the horse who was cantering around the arena. The horse smashed into Caroline's shoulder she fell heavily onto the sand of the arena floor.

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Kate shook her head she laughed at the antics of her riders, they had just suggested that she join them for a night out. "No, look I am not a night club sort of person." The riders laughed joshing with her. "And I have nothing to wear."

"We can sort that out and give you some proper make-up and those hands, when did you last have a manicure." Sue smiled.

"What's a manicure?" Kate smirked innocently. The women laughed.

"Okay, that's sorted then."

"What?" Kate gasped. "What's sorted?"

"We are taking you out, I am sure I can lend you something to wear and we will get you a beauty session at my salon. Hands, hair and make-up." Sue paused. "We will get you ready to hit the town and do some pulling."

"I am a married woman!" Kate snapped.

"So, you will go home to your husband at the end of the night, there is nothing wrong with flirting." Sue winked at her, Kate sniffed.

"I think you are making fun of me, I am not just some innocent country girl!" The laughter at Kate's comment lasted until they were almost back on the yard.

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Tracy knelt beside Caroline's prone body, she looked up as Adam vaulted the arena fence and knelt beside her. "I don't know what happened, she just stepped out in front of Toby." Tracy wiped her eyes with her gloved hands. "I tried to pull up."

"Don't worry, it was an accident." Adam smiled at Tracy. "Anyway, Caroline is pretty tough." He was reaching down to check her breathing and pulse. She was breathing but clearly unconscious, he knew the dangers of moving her so made sure that she was able to breathe clearly. "There is an ambulance on the way." He paused. "We'll give you a refund for this lesson."

Tracy shrugged. "Look you don't need to as long as Caroline is alright." They both looked down as Caroline gasped and tried to move.

"No, stay still." Adam gently held her still on the warm sand. "You've had an accident, help on its way."

"Oh!" Caroline groaned. "It hurts..."

"I am sure it does." Adam comforted her. "You will be fine soon, they will take the pain away."

Caroline felt a wave of nausea come across her she breathed deeply which caused a pain in her chest. She slumped down deeper into the warm sand. It engulfed her, the warmth was so comforting. Her eyes started to close.

"...Well if you have just joined us you do so at a pivotal time for the equestrian team..." Caroline's mind started to drift she was riding. She could hear other voices but pushed them from her mind she had to concentrate she was about to jump, she let the music wash over her.

"Push them away..." Her groom looked up at her. "You don't need them..." She smiled.

"I don't need them..." Caroline smiled.

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Kate panicked when she saw an ambulance standing on the yard. She quickly dismounted and

ran towards Adam. "What's happened?"

"Caroline has had an accident. She stepped in front of Toby as Tracy was riding him."

"Oh goodness! Is she okay?"

"She's unconscious, she came round for a moment but then seemed to go again." Adam paused, he was looking ashen and scared. The ambulance was almost ready to leave. "I had better go with her."

"Look let me..." Kate took his hand. "She may prefer a woman with her. I'll make sure she is okay." Adam nodded. Kate stepped up into the back of the ambulance, they were just shutting the doors when she stood up. "Hang on...!" She released her chin strap and took her riding hat off and handed it to Adam. "Call her mum, her number is in Caroline's file." The ambulance doors closed and they slowly drove across the yard.

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Caroline slowly opened her eyes, the light blinding her as she blinked and tried to fathom where she was and what was happening. Caroline attempted to sit up but found that she was unable to move. Even her head was prevented from moving, her neck held in place with a solid brace.

"Oh, you are awake? What a shame..." Caroline froze she recognised Kate's voice. She sounded angry, she could hear footsteps moving around her bed. "Do you want to tell me what you were doing?" She paused, a sneer playing across her face, Caroline stuttered to afraid to answer. "No?" She sniffed. "Shall I tell you? I think that you tried to sabotage the yard, I don't think you want us to do well. You hate everyone don't you?"

"No..." Caroline stuttered.

"Push them away Caroline..." Kate snarled. "We don't need you..."

Caroline sobbed, a sudden wave of pain washed over her and she cried out, screaming in agony.

"Oh Caroline, I'm here..." Kate took her hand. "They are going to give you some pain relief, it will make it go away." Caroline looked to the side as there was a sharp prick in her arm, a nurse was injecting morphine into her left arm.

"Kate..." Caroline whispered, her voice croaky. "Please don't hate me..."

"What?" Kate looked deeply into Caroline's pale blue eyes, she could see fear washing over her. "I don't hate you. We love you Caroline. I'll be here for you." Caroline started to close her eyes as the morphine took hold. "Sleep well."

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"Yes, they think she has broken a couple of ribs and has dislocated her shoulder. Thank goodness she had a riding hat on, but as she was knocked out they want to keep her in at least overnight. Did you call her mum?" Kate was standing outside the hospital as mobile phones were not allowed on the ward. Caroline was sleeping deeply with the help of a good dose of morphine. "Okay, well I will stay here as long as I can."

Kate stepped back into the ward followed by a nurse who was spraying air freshener. She blushed, "Sorry I was mucking out earlier..." The nurse stopped her, smiling.

"Oh don't be silly, it's not you! After the meals have been served you need to get rid of the smell of cabbage. Ugh!" She paused. "You were here with Miss Gibbs weren't you?" Kate nodded. "Her mother is here, she is by her bed."

"Thank you." The nurse went down the yard spraying the air. Kate walked into Caroline's room, beside her bed was a grey haired woman, she looked like she was fifty or older. "Hello? Are you Caroline's mum, I don't think we have ever met." The woman stood up facing Kate.

"No..." She looked Kate up and down. "We haven't."

"Sorry, I am Kate Bishop, I run Redbridge Equestrian Centre with my husband." She paused, the woman sat down sighing. "Is something wrong?"

"No, I am sorry, I have some history with the place, I didn't want Caroline to work there." She looked up. "No offence."

"None taken." Kate shook her head adding 'I think' under her breath. "Have they told you what happened to her."

"Yes, and thank you for bringing her in." The woman looked at Kate, she seemed to be wishing her to leave.

"I would like to stay with her too if I can." Kate smiled. "She is a good friend to us all."

"I suppose I can't stop you can I?" Caroline's mother sighed as Kate pulled up a chair on the other side of the bed.

\*\*\*

Adam pulled up the Land Rover in the empty car park. He glanced at his watch, five minutes to eight. He opened the car door and stepped out into the fresh air urging his legs to stay strong beneath him. He wanted to turn and run away, but he knew that he would make his situation ten times worse. He heard a car approaching and watched as a large four wheel drive car pulled into the car park. Its windows were blacked out but it was soon clear who was inside as two large men stepped out followed by a blond haired woman, she was well dressed in a business suit and what looked like expensive shoes. She stepped towards Adam flanked by the two men.

"Good evening Mr Bishop." Her voice was toneless. "You're early."

"I didn't want to keep you waiting." Adam's stuttered.

"Are you afraid of me Mr Bishop?" Adam shook his head. She smiled. "Liar! But you have every right to be afraid. Unless of course..." She paused. Adam knew what the question would be, he wavered slightly. "You have the money you owe, don't you?"

There was a long silence between the three people.

"I need time..." Adam stuttered.

"Did I ask that Mr Bishop?" She shook her head. "No, do you have the money you owe me, the money you promised that you would repay."

"Business has been so bad..." There was a sudden pain across Adam's back she fell heavily to his knees. Looking up he saw one of the men holding a riding crop.

"Now, Mr Bishop, I am being gentle with you. I thought you might appreciate the irony of the riding crops, my little joke."

"Very funny..." Adam gasped.

"One more time, Mr Bishop." She smiled. "No more little jokes. The money." Adam looked up with tears in his eyes. "Oh dear..." She paused. "Well, this is just a little reminder for you, just in case you forget again?." She turned and opened the car door. "And I will want double by this time next week or it will not be something as gentle as a riding crop."

Adam watched as she sat in the car and closed the door. The two men stood before him raising their hands bringing down the crops onto Adam's back. They left him lying on the rough surface of the car park before returning to the car and driving off.

\*\*\*

"Hello..." Kate stepped into the front room of the cottage.

"Hello beautiful..." Adam winced as he stood up. Kate put her arms around him, causing him to cry out.

"Oh what is wrong with you? Are you okay?"

"Sorry my back is killing me..."

"Oh I am sorry, perhaps you should have a hot bath?"

"No! I think I will just go to bed." He paused. "Anyway, how is Caroline?"

"Oh well, she was fast asleep when I left her. Her mum was with her and the doctors said she will be back home in a few days although she will not be working for a while." She shook her head. "Poor girl, it was such a freak accident." Kate sat next to Adam on the sofa. "What is wrong?"

"Oh, I am just worried about Caroline. Sorry I am distracted."

"You are such a big softy!" Kate laughed.

\*\*\*

"Come on wake up!" Caroline turned round, standing before her was an event rider, she was dressed in a coloured polo shirt and jodhpurs. "Look this is Badminton and I am about to ride in the cross-country, I would appreciate it if my groom stopped day dreaming!" The woman snatched her horses reins from Caroline and, turning to face the horse held her leg out to be lifted into the saddle.

"I am sorry! I don't know what happened." Caroline grabbed the cold leather of her riders boot and pushed her up into the saddle. "Are you okay?"

"I am fine. It is you who seem to be away with the fairies." She leant down in the saddle and whispered into Caroline's ear. "Push them away Caroline." She smiled. "You don't need them. Right I am ready to go, wish me luck."

"Good luck..." Caroline was distracted. "Yes, I don't need them."

The woman rode to the starting box, the starter nodded to her before waving her off. Caroline watched as she galloped away towards the first jump. She turned to walk back to the finish line, she absent-mindedly listened to the public address system.

'A good start over the first, clear and fast away towards the second.'

Caroline shook her head and continued to walk, she didn't know what was wrong with her,



she was distracted, tired. Suddenly she heard her riders name being announced followed by a call for first aid.

'...to confirm Annabel Lloyd-Harrison has fallen at the third fence, the ditch. It looked as if she had a tack failure, almost as if her girth snapped...'

Caroline was running down the course pushing through the crowds of curious spectators. She approached the third jump, the horse was being held by one of the officials. She looked down into the ditch, there was her rider there were two paramedics beside her. Caroline gasped as one of them stood up and shook her head.

Caroline's heart sunk, a chill running across her.

"I think she's dead." Caroline span around, there was a woman standing behind her, she was about the same age as her and wearing riding clothes. "Fall like that?." She whistled. "No, there is no way that she could have survived that." The girl turned and looked at Caroline. "I bet that they will want to talk with her groom, especially as the girth was cut."

Caroline stared at her. "What are you saying?" The woman took a knife from Caroline's pocket. "I bet that is the knife that did it. Why would you do it Caroline?"

"How do you know my name?"

"I know lots of things." The woman smiled. "I know that you did this, you did it to hurt Annabel. Well, you seem to have succeeded."

"I wouldn't hurt her..." Caroline was sobbing. She jumped as a strong grip was placed on her shoulder.

"Miss Caroline Gibbs. I am arresting you for the murder of Annabel Lloyd-Harrison." Caroline pulled away from the police man and started to run. She could hear the police chasing her this was futile, she glanced back and saw the woman waving at her. Suddenly her boots slipped in the slick mud and she was rugby tackled to the ground her face slammed into the grass as handcuffs were roughly snapped onto her wrists. She was dragged to her feet the crowd jeering and shouting, one woman spat in her face. She was bundled into the back of a police van and rapidly driven away.

\*\*\*

Caroline woke with a start, tears running down her face. She looked around, this was not a police cell, she had a drip in her arm and a heart monitor was bleeping quietly beside her bed, there was a woman standing in the corner.

"Hello?" Caroline spoke softly. The woman turned around slowly to face her. Caroline gasped as she recognised the woman who had spoken to her at the event.

"Hello Caroline..." She smiled and stepped towards her bed. "Please don't get up..."

"I must be dreaming."

"No, not." The woman smiled.

"What?"

"Here, let me prove it." The woman reached down and grabbed the needle which was on the back of Caroline's hand, she twisted the needle. Caroline cried out.

"Please stop..." Caroline sobbed. The woman shook her head, reaching down she lowered the bars on the side of the bed, she dragged Caroline's arm until she fell from the bed landing on

her dislocated shoulder, she screamed in agony. The woman knelt beside Caroline smiling. The lights snapped on and two nurses rushed inside. "Oh no. The bars are down. Are you alright, Miss Gibbs, Caroline let's help you." The nurses gently lifted Caroline back into bed. "For God's sake dose her up, she mustn't remember this otherwise the trust will be sued and we will all be out of a bloody job." The sister signed the observation sheet forging the duty doctors signature. "The sleep will do her good anyway."

The pain was slowly subsiding and Caroline felt herself drifting to sleep, she watched as the woman stood beside the nurses.

\*\*\*

Caroline looked around her, it was dark outside the window and the lights were flickering. She pulled back the sheets and swung her feet out of bed and onto the cold floor. Stepping through the door to her private room she saw the ward was silent, the beds were empty. "Hello..." Caroline called out but there was no response. She walked towards the nurses' station, there was a woman standing behind the desk, she had her back to Caroline as she approached. "Hello?" The woman ignored her, "Hello there..." Caroline reached out and put her hand on her shoulder, she flinched, pulling back as she felt an icy coldness through her blouse. The woman slowly turned around.

"Hello Caroline." The woman smiled coldly. Caroline stared at her, a sudden fear washing over her, she had the urge to turn and run but did not know why.

"Kate, what are you doing here?" Caroline stuttered.

"I have come to help you Caroline." Kate walked around the desk and stepped towards Caroline who shifted back from her. "What are you afraid of Caroline, it's me." Kate took Caroline's hand, the chill from her flesh seemed to run through her body.

"Please." Caroline staggered back, stumbling into a wheelchair behind her.

"Go on, sit down." Kate grabbed Caroline's shoulders and forced her into the wheelchair. "You should be resting, you are ill." Kate laughed. "They did this to you." She knelt in front of Caroline. "You should push them away. Go to her. She will protect you."

"What?" Caroline shuddered. "What do you mean? Go to her, go to who. You are making no sense Kate."

"You will see Caroline." She started to push the wheelchair along the ward, pausing to press the lift call button. After a moment the lift arrived and the doors slid open. Kate pushed Caroline into the waiting car and pushed a button for the top floor. "This is exciting isn't it!" She laughed.

The lift car jerked to a halt and the doors slid open again. Kate pushed Caroline out into a corridor. "Where are you taking me?"

"You'll see..." They reached a set of double doors, Kate unlocked them and pushed Caroline through, she struggled as she saw they were on the roof of the building.

"No..." Caroline cried out. "Please no..."

They reached the edge of the roof. Kate pushed the wheelchair to the very pinnacle. "Are you ready for a ride? Just remember what I said. "You need to go to her, or she will take you." Kate smiled.

"Who are you?" Caroline watched as Kate smirked.

"I am a friend Caroline." She paused. "You will know me soon..." With one great shove she pushed the wheelchair over the edge of the roof. Caroline screamed as the cold air buffeted her, she blacked out.

\*\*\*

Adam woke from a bad night's sleep, the pain in his bad had not subsided with the painkillers he had taken but he could not tell Kate about what had happened or what he had done. He realised that he had been stupid but he didn't know what else he could do, it had been a particularly bad month with big vet bills and the feed merchant demanding full payment before he would allow any more fodder to the yard. He had approached the bank but they kindly reminded him that the business was already beyond its overdraft limit as was his personal account.

He had not known what to do, he could not face the thought of losing the stables and as their small cottage was part of the deeds they would lose their home as well as their business. He had panicked and in desperation had responded to an advert in the back of the local paper offering loans.

He had borrowed the thousand pounds but in his haste and ignorance he had not realised that he would be paying over two thousand percent interest. He had tried to reason with the lenders but they had made it clear that they were not open to discussion. He had begged and borrowed the money to pay the monthly amount and had managed to keep them away for almost a year but now it had been impossible, there was no cash left and the bank accounts were again empty.

He knew the beating he had received was just the start, an ironic joke from Ruth Thompson, an amusement for her as much as a warning for him. The next warning would be considerably more harsh.

Kate was asleep as he woke and walked into the bathroom, she took off his t-shirt and looked over his shoulder in the mirror. His back was covered in reddened lines where he had been beaten, the bruises were starting to darken already. He sighed he had no idea what he could do.

Kate rolled over, seeing that Adam was not in bed she looked around and saw the bathroom light on, she glanced and saw the door was slightly ajar. Kate gasped as she saw a part of the mirror and the state of Adam's back. She did not know what to think, he had been cagey the night before and now he came home like this. Adam switched the light off, Kate quickly laid down and pretended to be asleep, her mind spinning with the possibilities of what could have happened to Adam.

\*\*\*

Adam was downstairs in the kitchen when Kate came downstairs an hour later. "Hello..." He gently hugged her, Kate watched the pain in his eyes as she put pressure on his back. She wanted to blurt out and ask him what had happened but she promised herself that she would wait for him. He poured her a mug of tea and stood leaning against the worktop.

"Are you not going to sit down with me?" Kate nodded towards one of the chairs at the worn kitchen table. Adam pulled out the chair and perched on its edge. She paused. "Adam, you would tell me if there was something wrong wouldn't you?"

Kate noticed Adam look down for a split second before answering. "There is nothing wrong Kate..." He smiled coldly. "Why do you ask?"

"No reason..." Kate stood up quickly. "Come on it's time for work."

\*\*\*

"Hello..." Caroline slowly opened her eyes, blinking she looked around. She groaned her head groggy and clouded. "Are you alright?" The nurse took Caroline's hand. "It looks like you had a bit of a rough night." She started rearranging Caroline's sheets which were knotted around her body. "Let me just check your medication." She took the clipboard from the end of the bed and started to read down the page. She paused. "Excuse me."

Linda was confused by the entry for additional morphine during the night, it seemed to be a large dose when the patient had already been receiving pain relief. The night shift were still finishing the hand-over so she approached the night sister.

"Jane, can I ask about something?" She turned and Linda handed her the clipboard. "This is a patient in one of the private rooms, Caroline Gibbs she was a riding accident."

"Oh yes?" Jane shifted nervously. "What about her?"

"It says here that Dr Ransom prescribed morphine last night."

"Yeah I remember she was in pain last night."

"Are you sure it was Dr Ransom?" Linda smiled. "Just want to be sure for the paperwork."

"Of course I am!" Jane laughed nervously.

"Thanks." Linda took back the clipboard and wished the departing nurses a good day.

However she knew that there was something being covered up. Not least as Paul Ransom had spent most of the previous night in the nurses quarters with her last night. The trouble was to reveal this would get them both in trouble as he should have been on call. She walked back and hung the clipboard back on the end of the bed. The patient was fine Linda told herself, if she had even got the morphine. But if the night shift wanted something to get them through the night?. She smiled and walked back to the nurses' station.

\*\*\*

Kate managed to rearrange her work for the afternoon to travel to the hospital. She noticed Caroline do a double take when she stepped into the room, a moment of fear crossed her face. "Are you alright?" Kate took Caroline's hand. "I brought you some grapes." Kate put the bag of grapes on her bedside table. "I hope you like them, I think it is what you have to bring people in hospital!"

"Thanks." She shook her head before smiling warmly. "Sorry I was being a bit silly, I had a nightmare last night. I am really glad to see you I have been bored silly in here."

"So how are you feeling?"

"In pain, but they say it will settle down soon. They have reset my shoulder." Caroline smiled as she watched Kate wince. "Yes, it was painful! And I have cracked a couple of ribs." She paused. "I feel really stupid. Fancy stepping out in front of a horse with a rider I was teaching. I don't think I will live that down!" She giggled.

"No that was just a little silly." Kate paused. "Do you know what happened?"

"Well I just stepped out and Toby caught my...-"

"No..." Kate cut her short. "Why did it happen?"

Caroline sighed looking down. "Kate, I was really tired, I have not been sleeping well." She wiped her eyes. "I haven't slept properly in weeks, I have had these terrible nightmares."

Kate stood up and hugged her. "Oh Caroline I am so sorry."

"Oh this will sound so stupid, I think I was hallucinating." She gulped. "There has been this woman in my nightmares. The same person appears every time, always bringing me down, causing me pain." She paused. "Well, I thought I saw that woman standing by the arena fence." Caroline glanced at Kate.

"I think you need to talk to the doctors about the nightmares, a lack of sleep can do terrible things to you." She smiled. "Did you dream about her last night?"

Caroline paused. "No!" She shyly looked up at Kate. "It was you last night." She laughed nervously. "You were pretty nasty to me..."

"Oh." Kate stopped. "Caroline I am so sorry. But you do know I would never do anything to hurt you." She hugged her again. "I hope you get some better sleep soon, and get yourself fit we miss you on the yard."

The two woman spent some time talking about the yard and horses. Eventually visiting time was over and Kate stood to leave. "I had better go, I'll try to pop in again tomorrow. I guess your mum will be coming in later..." She stopped as she noticed Caroline had started crying. "Oh dear, what's up?"

"No, she won't come and see me again. She told me that she would have nothing to do with the stables and as I went against her wishes and started working there she wants nothing to do with me." Caroline sobbed.

"What!" Kate was indignant. "How dare she? I mean why?"

"She had a bad time at the yard many years ago." Caroline gulped. "Some bad things happened while she was the head-girl. To be honest she hasn't told me all of what happened, but she never returned there and when I got a job there..." Caroline stopped. "She was furious, I had gone against her wishes and she would not have anything to do with me while I was still there."

"But you have worked with us for years..."

"Yes." Caroline looked up with red eyes. "To be honest I was surprised she came in to see me yesterday."

"Look." Kate could no longer hold back tears. "I'll look after you Caroline. You are already like family to Adam and me. We'll always be there for you, even if your mother will not be. You remember that." They both hugged.

## Chapter 3

### June 1974

Linda Gibbs sat sorting through paperwork when the office door was flung open, Hilary one of Linda's more senior riding instructors stepped into the room. Her once blond hair was dripping with thick black liquid which was running down her white blouse. "What the hell has happened to you?"

"Hoof oil!" Hilary snarled slamming her fist on the desk. "Let me make this clear, either she goes or I do."

Linda sighed, it had been obvious who had done this to Hilary. "I am so sorry." She paused. "We would miss you."

"What?" Hilary sat down heavily. "You would keep her?"

"By choice, no." Linda sighed. "You know the situation, she is the daughter of the person who owns the land the stables are standing on and her father has made it clear that we have to employ her to keep her out of his hair. If I fire her he will close us down." She paused. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Well unless you know something that will remove hoof-oil?"

"Washing-up liquid. It worked for me when she did it to me. I'll buy you a new blouse though as you will never get it out of there." She smiled. "Look come round tonight I'll make some dinner and I'll get a couple of bottles of Blue Nun. I know it is not much..."

"Okay." Hilary smiled holding up her hands. "I'll come round later, we can plot how to get revenge on the nasty cow! Now I had better go and try and wash this out before it sets!" She stood up. "Washing-up liquid you say..."

\*\*\*

Susan Thompson was seventeen years old, with fiery red hair and a matching temperament. Her father had got her a job at the Redbridge Riding School and had told her that she would only get her allowance if she stayed there. She hated the work, although she could ride very well the idea of days spent mucking out and grooming was something for staff to do for her, the fact that she was now staff herself frustrated her. So she found ways to find her fun, she realised pretty quickly that the head-girl was frightened of her, or at least of the threats from her father, so she found she could pretty get away with anything. Susan made it her aim to watch others suffer, she took great pleasure in setting up practical jokes, spreading rumours and being totally dislikeable. She was so above these fools that she felt they deserved all they got.

She was particularly amused by the way she had been able to trap Hilary, placing the bucket of hoof oil over the tack room door was simple but effective especially as the metal bucket had caught her in the forehead as it fell. She chuckled to herself, that pompous cow had deserved it even if the intention had been to catch out someone else but the fact that Hilary had been the victim was even better. Now the only thing she had to do was to think up the next thing to do. She smirked, she had been so clever and if everyone hated her well so what!

Susan stepped out of the tack room the yard was quiet. She paused, it was too quiet. At this time of the evening there should be activity with grooms hanging hay nets and checking horses before they went home at the end of the day. She looked around, no clearly her

paranoia was in overdrive, the staff had clearly finished early. She pulled the tack room door closed behind her, it was a bit late to set another trap today, as tempting as it was. She smiled and headed down the yard towards the stables flat.

She lived with a number of the other staff in basic, but adequate accommodation beside the main yard. She remembered how she had argued with her father when she had first arrived, refusing to live in a shared room with some stranger. Of course she did not have to share for long, she soon ensured that there was nobody wanted to share with her by being obnoxious, simple things like taking one leg off their bed or pouring water on the mattress.

She hated being there, but her father had made it clear. She had failed at school and refused to go into the family business so this was the only option. Well, the only option if she wanted to keep receiving her allowance and be part of the family. "Fail at this and you are not my daughter, you can go on your own like I did..." Her father's booming voice had travelled across the yard and caused sniggering and curious looks from the other staff.

Stepping onto the back yard she was lost in thoughts, perhaps she should try to do something by herself, it had to be better than this. She snorted, no there was still fun to be had. She smiled passing an open stable door. There was a sudden movement, Susan shrieked as she was wrestled into the empty stable and flung onto the floor. She landed heavily. her fall broken by the thick straw left from the last horse who had been in there.

"Hello Susan..." Tracy snarled standing over Susan's prone body. "Some of us would like a word with you." Tracy was flanked by a number of the other staff. She had been Susan's only competition, her nemesis who had been at the yard for some years and was a tough girl used to hard knocks having grown up with three brothers. Until recently Susan had left her alone, it was just simpler and saved trouble. However the truce ended last week when Susan had added almost a whole bottle of bleach to a load of Tracy's washing. She had been there to watch as she pulled her best jodhpurs and blouses out of the washing machine all streaked and dyed. Tracy had been devastated and with one look made it clear that revenge would be sought.

Susan slowly turned over and started to get up. "Not so fast..." Tracy pushed the cold steel prongs of a pitchfork into Susan's chest, she slumped down. "Good girl..."

"Now Tracy can I ask what the hell you think you are doing?" Susan snarled.

Tracy laughed. "I am taking you down Susan." She leant on the pitchfork causing Susan to yelp.

Susan grabbed the pitchfork and tore it from Tracy's hand's as she scrambled to her feet. "Yeah..." Susan sneered. "Well you have had your fun now..." She put her hand on her shoulder. "Try harder next time bitch!" Susan started to walk from the stable. Tracy grabbed her pony-tail dragging her back before slamming her head forwards into the stable wall. Susan fell to her knees before slumping onto the straw.

\*\*\*

Linda was busy in the kitchen when she heard the knock at the door. She glanced at her watch thinking that Hilary was early but she was glad to have the company. She crossed the front room and opened the door. "Well, you are early but we can open a bottle of wine while dinner..." She looked up and saw Harry Thompson standing on her doorstep.

"I can assure you that would be unnecessary Miss Gibbs." He pushed past her and into her front room.

"Oh do come in please..." Linda muttered as she closed the front door. "How can I help you Mr Thompson."

Harry Thompson had started his career as a builders labourer and now, thirty years on was a property developer pro ported to be worth many millions. He would gladly tell anyone that he was a self-made man and that he always got his way, this lead to him using somewhat unorthodox techniques to gain contracts or gain planning permission. However it was a brave person who suggested that there was anything improper with his business, those that had done in the past seemed to meet with accidents soon afterwards. Harry was the owner of the land and buildings that made up the Redbridge Riding School and he took great pleasure in ensuring that Linda was aware of this and that her business survived only because of him.

"I wanted to just ensure that my daughter is working hard and that she is being treated well by the other staff."

Linda stammered. "Yes, she is hard working and really fits in well..."

Harry snorted. "Look don't lie to me Miss Gibbs. I know she is a lazy, good for nothing girl. I want her to learn as I did, the importance of hard work and manual labour." He paused. "However, I need to know that she is treated well."

"Is there something that is specifically of concern."

Harry smiled. "My daughter did mention that the head-girl, is it Hilary?" Linda nodded. "Well she said that she was being a bit hard on her."

"I am sure that Hilary is very fair to her, but she does have to pull her weight."

Harry sighed. "Of course. But let me put it this way, I would be unhappy if I felt that she was being mistreated."

There was a knock at the door. Linda's heart sunk. "Excuse me..." She stood up and opened the door to Hilary.

"Hi Kath..." She smiled. "I am glad to say that the hoof oil that nasty bitch put in my hair mostly washed out. I could have killed that horrid cow, I mean..." She stopped as Linda was gesticulating at her furiously.

"And who would that be?" Harry Thompson stood up staring at Hilary in the door way.

"Shit!" Hilary hissed between her teeth. "Sorry..."

"Look it is time for me to leave." Harry stood up and pushed his way past Hilary. "Just remember what I said Miss Gibbs." He glanced back at Hilary before walking down the path and back to his car.

"Oh shit! I am so sorry..." Hilary frowned. "What did he want?"

"Apparently you are bullying his precious daughter..." She laughed. "So bloody good timing walking in the door like that!" She smiled and welcomed Hilary into the room. "Never mind, frankly she deserves all she gets! Now, shall we have a glass of wine to get the evening started?"

\*\*\*

Susan slowly opened her eyes, shooting pains were running through her head. She tried to move but found that she was unable to. She panicked and struggled against the hard nylon net that enclosed her.

"No, I don't think that you will get free all that easily." Tracy laughed and tugged on the rope



in her hands. Susan felt herself being lifted. Looking around she saw that she had been pushed into a large hay net which was now hanging from the block and tackle in the hay shed. She shrieked as Tracy pulled on the rope again until Susan was hanging almost at the roof height, slowly turning on the rope.

"Get me down from here!" Susan yelled. "You bloody cow, get me down!" She fought against the net causing it to swing wildly, eventually she slumped back exhausted.

"Are you quite finished?" Tracy sat on a bale looking up smiling.

"I'll get you..." Susan snarled.

"Well, it seems I have got you first." She stood up walking towards the barn doors. "Good night!" Tracy slammed the barn doors leaving Susan hanging in the dark.

\*\*\*

After two bottles of Blue Nun and conversation into the early hours Linda had invited Hilary to stay for the night rather than walk back to the stables from the village, now a hand on her shoulder woke her from her slumber. She stretched and opened her eyes before sitting up slowly.

"I hope the sofa was not too uncomfortable for you last night?" Linda held out a steaming mug of coffee. "Here, that may help your head!"

"Thanks." Hilary sipped the hot coffee. "How much did I drink last night?"

"Oh you are a lightweight!" Linda laughed.

"Yeah, how often do you think I get out!" She smirked. "Anyway, you were pretty drunk too. I didn't need to know about all your sexual conquests."

"What?" Linda almost dropped her mug.

"Don't worry it didn't take long!" Hilary winked. "And your secrets are safe with me. I will just have to keep you away from the baler twine!"

Linda blushed deeply, stammering to respond. "That was one boyfriend and we didn't go out for long..."

"Don't get all knotty about it!" Hilary smirked and Linda slapped her on her shoulder. "Come on we had better get to work I suppose. Just don't expect me to do too much for a few hours."

The two women got into Linda's car, it was not much more than a rusted shell but it allowed her to get about and in a few minutes they were pulling up at the stables. She slammed the car door and looked at her watch. "Seven o'clock and nobody is down. You see, the cat's away and the mice will have a lie in!" They both laughed before walking around to unlock the feed shed and barn.

Linda swung the doors of the barn open and pinned them back. She was just about to walk away when she heard a noise.

"What's up?" Linda stepped beside Hilary.

She held up her hand. "Shhhh... Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Linda paused. "Yes, what on earth is that?" The two women stepped into the barn. All seemed to be normal until they heard a moaning noise above their heads. Linda jumped. "What the hell!" She looked up and thought she could see something in the gloom above their heads. "There is something on the pulley." She stepped over to the tied off rope and started to loosen it.

"Hang on a minute, be careful!" Hilary shouted but it was too late, as soon as the rope was loose it shot through Linda's hands dropping the hay net heavily on the floor between them both.

"Oh my god!" Linda stepped towards the net and saw that Susan was crammed inside. "Get her loose!" Hilary took out a pocket knife and sliced through the netting. Susan had hit her head when it had fallen and was unconscious, Hilary checked her pulse and breathing.

"She is breathing. You look after her and I will get an ambulance." Hilary ran quickly to the office.

Susan opened one eye slightly, she saw Linda kneeling beside her, she was clearly fretting. This was perfect, let them believe that they had injured her, get them all in trouble. She closed her eyes.

\*\*\*

"Miss Gibbs?" The nurse stepped into the waiting area. Linda had been waiting there while the doctors had attended to Susan. She stood up. "Oh hello. Would you like to come through." Linda followed the nurse back into the main part of the casualty ward, she pulled open a curtain, Susan was lying on a bed, she was awake but looking groggy. "She may be concussed so we would like to keep her in overnight."

There was a commotion that had started outside, Linda heard someone being told that they could not come through, but it was clear that they were ignoring them. The curtain was flung open and Harry Thompson entered the cubical. Linda gasped and started to apologise to him.

Harry ignored her turning to the nurse. "This is my daughter." The nurse glanced at Linda, she nodded briefly. "What is she doing in here?"

"Miss Gibbs brought your daughter in."

"Well, she is not required any more is she?" Harry turned to Linda. "Go away..."

Linda stepped out of the cubical, she paused turning to go back in but thought better of it. She walked quickly out to her car.

\*\*\*

Hilary was waiting when Linda returned to the yard. "How is she?"

"Oh she will be fine. They think she may have concussion so they are keeping her in overnight."

"Thank goodness we can have a night without her." Hilary checked herself. "Sorry that sounds really bad."

"Nov?. I agree. She is someone who is a pleasure not to have around." She sighed. "I need to talk with Tracy."

"Ahh..." Hilary picked up on Linda's body language. "So Tracy put her in a net."

"It is a Damn shame. I want to shake her by the hand, but I know I will have to let her go." Linda sighed.

"Do you want me to tell her?"

"Thanks Hil's. But I guess I had better do this."

\*\*\*

"Daddy!" Susan sat up in her hospital bed.

"How are you Susan?" Harry Thompson sat down heavily in the bedside chair.

"I have concussion and I was pretty knocked about."

"What did you do to cause this?" He ignored her protests. "No Susan, you were not just assaulted for nothing. This is exactly what happened at boarding school, and you said that you had done nothing, butter wouldn't melt in your bloody mouth." He shook his head. "So what did you do the people who did this to you."

"Nothing?. They bullied me." She snapped. "You never believe me...-"

"Because you are always bloody lying. Look I have found you this job to give you an opportunity."

"Opportunity?" Susan's tone changed. "You want to get rid of me so you have dumped me in this shit hole." She snarled. "You're right I may have played a few innocent pranks on them, but I did not deserve this happening to me. I am going to tell the police, let's see how they like being charged with assault."

Harry stood up and slapped Susan hard across her face. "Don't you dare! Have I taught you nothing? We never get the police involved in our affairs."

"Sorry daddy..." Susan rubbed her face.

"You will deal with this. If you can't I will sort it for you. But this is it. No more nonsense from you."

"Or what?" Susan sneered.

"You don't want to find out." Harry stood up and left the ward. Susan was taken aback, but knew better than to try and argue with her father. She pondered what she could do, she smiled to herself, this would of course mean revenge.

\*\*\*

Linda sighed, Tracy was sitting opposite her in the stables office. She had waited until the end of the day, not least because she had wanted to put off the inevitable task. She hated having to let anyone go and especially not Tracy who had been such a promising instructor and liked by the staff and customers.

"Okay..." Tracy lifted her head from her hands. "I know what I did was stupid. But... Grrr!" She clenched her fists. "You know what she did to me, what she did to everyone." She snarled. "You should have done something about her. You sit there treating her with kid gloves and letting her get away with murder! I just took action to put her in her place..."

Linda wiped her eyes. Of course Tracy was right, she should stand up to Susan. Perhaps her father would even respect her for it. However she doubted it?. "I am so sorry, but you have to understand..."

"Understand?" Tracy snorted. "You're firing me. Where the hell am I meant to go until I find another job?"

"Okay..." Linda looked up. "Look if you resign I can let you work some more time here, I'll be as flexible as I can be, take as long as you like and I will write you a good reference. Just do me one favour and keep away from her..."

"That won't be easy."

"Just try." Linda smiled. "I don't want to lose you and you are totally right about what you say I should do something about her and I will, it's just." Tracy started to speak but Linda cut her off, "I am just a coward."

"I wouldn't say that?." Tracy paused. "Look I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done what I did, and I do understand why you have to do what you have to do. I am just sorry to leave here, it is a great yard, I have friends here. I suppose this serves me right."

"There is not one other person who doesn't support what you did to her..." Linda smiled, "In fact if I had been in your shoes..." She left her thoughts wander for a moment. "Let me have a word with a few friends, there are other yards that would snap you up. Let me at least help you out somehow."

"Thank you..."

\*\*\*

Linda had not been able to sleep thoughts had kept running through her mind. By the morning she had made her mind up. She dressed quickly and made her way out to her car. The morning was bright and the sun was already starting to become warm. She only had a short drive to the headquarters of Thompson Construction in the nearby town of Ashburton. Linda pulled up in the car park beside considerably more affluent cars and walked towards the modern office building.

"Hello madam, how may I help you?" The perfectly manicured receptionist did an obvious double take as Linda approached the desk, dressed in work clothes she supposed that a visitor dressed in jodhpurs and riding boots was an unexpected sight in these offices.

"I need to see Harry Thompson."

"Do you have an appointment?" The girl knew that she did not, his diary was clear as he had specifically requested that she clear his diary this morning.

"Will you tell him that Linda Gibbs is here and I would like to see him."

The receptionist promised that she would try and asked Linda to sit down. She called through to Harry's personal assistant, she said it was unlikely that he would see her, but that she should wait. The receptionist quietly hoped that she would be made to wait a long time, just turning up demanding an appointment. She was shocked when the phone rang and she was told that Miss Gibbs should be shown straight through.

Linda stepped into the large office, Harry Thompson was sitting behind a large wooden desk and was currently speaking on the telephone. He gestured to Linda to come towards him and sit down. She perched on the edge of the leather chair and waited while Harry completed an increasingly angry phone conversation before slamming down the handset. He slowly looked up and made eye contact with Linda. She shuddered.

"Miss Gibbs, what a pleasant surprise." He glowered at her across the desk. "I suppose you have saved me coming to see you, but I am rather busy."

"I needed to talk with you..."

"Yes?"

"It's about Susan, and what happened to her."

"Oh yes." Harry stood up and stepped around the desk, he sat on the edge of the desk leaning close to Linda. She shied away nervously. "You want to talk to me about how my daughter was assaulted by one of your staff. How she is lying in hospital traumatised." He paused.

"Am I on the right track?"

"Well." Linda stammered.

"Of course it is." Harry stood up quickly. "Now what did you want to say? I am all ears." He paused as Linda stuttered. "Oh, so you would prefer me to talk to you? Well, this." He pulled a brown file from his desk drawer. "...is the file which contains the deeds to your property. Do you realise how simple it would be to foreclose your tenancy?" Linda started to speak. "Shut up! I am talking now!" He slammed his large fist onto the desk causing the phone handset to rattle in its cradle. "I am permitting you to have the land and buildings at a very attractive rate because you are providing gainful employment for my daughter. If you cease to be able to do this..." He left the statement hanging. "I am a reasonable man, but let me promise you one thing. The next person to try anything like that to my daughter will find a role in my next construction project." Linda lifted a finger to question Harry. "Yes, they will find themselves as part of the foundations of the next bridge across the new dual-carriageway and Miss Gibbs, just in case you think you are immune, I can assure you that you will be there with them!"

Linda gasped, standing quickly from her chair. "Are you threatening me?..." She stuttered.

"Yes, Miss Gibbs." Harry sat down at his desk. "I am glad that you at least realise that."

"I will tell the police." Linda had expected any number of reactions from anger to surprise but she had not expected Harry to laugh loudly when she said this.

"Go on!" He wiped his eyes. "But remember two things. Firstly, I own the police. The chief constable and myself are members of the same lodge and I am benefactor of the police benevolent fund."

"And the other thing?"

"Nobody will care if someone unimportant like you disappears. They will think you have just moved on, you will be forgotten, neglected. At least I am offering you the opportunity to be a pillar in our Society." He laughed. "Do you get it, pillar?." He shook his head.

"Okay?. You have had your joke. Ha ha, let's make fun of the country girl."

Harry looked up with an evil glint in his eye which chilled Linda to the bone. "You can believe it is a joke if you wish. Just make sure my daughter is safe, you have had more than enough warning. Now, I am a very busy man." He pressed a button on his desk and the doors behind her opened. Linda saw the two men step behind her and grasp her arms.

"Ow!" She yelped. "Okay?. I'm going." She was lifted from her feet and carried out of Harry's office and through the reception before being dropped on the floor in the car park. She sat for a moment considering the conversation she had just had before noticing the receptionist giggling at her. She stood up, brushing her jodhpurs down before driving quickly away.

\*\*\*

Tracy watched the taxi pull up, she paused before realising that it was Susan in the back seat. "Shit!" It was too late to go away as she had been seen so she approached her. "Look... I am really sorry, what I did was stupid and I am leaving."

Susan smiled coldly holding her hand out. "No hard feelings. It was a joke." She started to crush Tracy's fingers, digging her nails into the back of her hand. "I can take a joke Tracy." She let go of her hand, Tracy pulled back rubbing her fingers. "The question is..." Susan started to walk away pausing to turn and face Tracy for a moment. "Can you?"

Tracy watched as Susan opened the door and stepped into the stables flat. She did not like the sound of her comments, but pushed them from her mind.

\*\*\*

"So tell me again what he said to you?" Hilary poured another glass of wine.

"Well, he threatened me." Linda paused before taking a sip of the chilled liquid. "Thanks. Something about being part of the foundations of the A30."

"Do you think he really means it?"

"Hil's he is a powerful man, and to be honest I would not put anything past him. It was just the way he said it, he had no fear that he was threatening me and seemed to take no pleasure in the fact that he had frightened me. It was so..." She paused. "Matter of fact. It was like it was something that he did everyday of the week."

"Wow..." Hilary gulped down her wine.

"He is dangerous, I know that before it was the fact I could lose my home and business now, if I believe him I could lose my life." She shook her head. "Let's just keep Susan safe and encourage her to go off and trouble someone else."

"I'll drink to that..."

\*\*\*

Susan herself was busy, this despite the fact that the other staff had gone to bed some hours before and the yard was dark and quiet. She had already doctored the riding out list for the next day and was now busying herself in the tack room. Once she was satisfied that she had finished what she had to do she silently closed the door and walked in the shadows back to the flat.

\*\*\*

Tracy looked down the list, she was riding Pegasus. She sighed, he was a thoroughbred and one of the few horses that could not be trusted, he was prone to take a dislike to certain individuals and in his eyes Tracy was someone that deserved hatred. She was a good rider and his antics did not greatly concern her, but it would take almost all of her attention to watch for him jumping and shying. At least she had a good group of riders for her hack, they could mostly look after themselves. She grabbed the saddle and bridle and headed to his stable where the biting and kicking display would start while she tried to tack him up.

It was some minutes later and sporting a bruise on her upper arm where Pegasus' teeth had made contact even through her thick jumper that she led Pegasus out onto the yard. She got a leg up and sat in his saddle watching as the other riders gathered around her. She smiled, tapping the horse with her crop as he tried to kick out at one of the grooms. "Come on then!" She called out and they led out onto the moor.

Tracy was going to take one of the usual tracks, over their time at the stables each instructor found routes which would take one or two hours as required and include some walking, trotting and some faster riding. On this track this meant that the group would gallop up the hill to Cabbots Ridge, a long and gently rising path with a good viewpoint at the top. She raised her arm to indicate that they were about to start and pushed her horse on.

Pegasus snorted and bucked earning a crack of the crop, with this he shied quickly catching Tracy unaware, she sat the movement well but realised that her position was moving. She felt

the saddle slipping beneath her and in a flash she was falling. There was nothing that she could do as she fell landing heavily on the path winding her but more seriously putting her in the path of the other riders.

Although they tried to pull their horses up it was impossible as Tracy was so quickly in front of them. The riders pulled up and rushed back to her prone body. Tracy was badly injured having fallen and been trampled and bore the marks of steel horse shoes across her arms and head. One of the riders remounted and galloped back to the yard, the others tried to make Tracy comfortable.

Pegasus had bolted and would not be found for some hours, his saddle was missing and was eventually found a short distance from the accident, when investigated it was found that the girth straps had been cleanly cut almost all the way through and had given way.

## Chapter 4

### Present Day

Caroline stepped out of the taxi and opened the gate, already Kate was opening the front door. "Hello!" She glanced at her watch. "I wasn't expecting you for another couple of hours!"

"I got bored and discharged myself." Caroline smiled. "Just so glad to be out of hospital!"

"I know, I hate being in hospitals myself!" Kate laughed. "Here, let me take your bag and you come on inside. It will be nice to have someone else around the house." Kate showed Caroline into the front room. "Now, you will be in the spare room, it isn't massive..."

Caroline smiled holding up her hand. "You know the room I share at the yard, this is luxury in comparison!"

"Well you stay as long as you want." Kate paused. "I'll let you settle in and then we will have some dinner as soon as Adam has come home."

\*\*\*

Caroline closed the door and dropping her bag on the floor slumped onto the bed. It's softness compared to the hospital bed was amazing and she snuggled down pulling back the duvet and getting comfortable. Perhaps just a few minutes sleep would make her feel so much better. She closed her eyes and was fast asleep in moments.

\*\*\*

Adam locked up the office and pushed the keys into his jacket pocket. It had been a long day and he was glad to be going home. He started walking down the driveway when he saw a black Range Rover approaching, he paused as the vehicle stopped and the doors opened. "Sorry, we are closed now-" Adam's sentence was cut short as the passenger door swung open.

"I know that you are, and if you don't pay me you will be closed for good." The woman smiled coldly.

"What are you doing here? You told me I had a week to pay you..."

"I did didn't I." She sneered. "I lied."

"I..." Adam paused. "Look I don't have your money yet."

The woman laughed. "I know that." She pulled out a collection of papers waving them towards Adam. "Your bank statements, your credit card bills, the outstanding invoices."

"Where the hell did you get them?" Adam lunged forward, trying to grab the papers.

"Ah, ah!" She smiled. "I own you Mr Bishop, don't you ever forget that." She paused. "And I also know that you are not going to give in if I hurt you. You are just like some dumb toy, I can beat you or try to hurt you but you will just keep bouncing back." She smiled. "But the people you love..."

Adam blanched - "If you touch Kate I'll..."

"You'll what?" She laughed. "Go on, I do love such bravado! But it is so misplaced. Let me



make this clear. You find a way to pay me or you will regret the consequences." She turned on her heel stepping back to the Range Rover. Adam leapt forward grabbing the door.

"Look please! Anything..."

"Try pleading." She sneered. "Yes, down in the dirt, kneel down and plead to me. Beg like the worthless worm you are..."

Adam paused before slowly kneeling before her. "Please, don't hurt Kate..."

She shook her head, climbing into the car and slamming the door. Adam watched as the window whirred down. "I pity you?. Here is some advice, two things. First, get the money." She closed the window, Adam stared up at the darkened glass before it opened again. "Oh and second?. Get up you snivelling bastard."

He watched as the Range Rover sped away spraying him with grit.

\*\*\*

Kate opened the cottage door as Adam arrived. "You're a bit late..." She paused looking into his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing..." Adam was tired, he felt a weariness that went further than purely physical exhaustion. He sighed, how could he have put Kate at risk, all for money. "I'm okay..."

"Alright..." Said in a tone that meant anything but. "Okay, I've made dinner and Caroline is here too, she discharged herself from hospital." The conversation rapidly lightened up, Adam and Kate were soon discussing the day, the customers they had been teaching and the horses conditions. After a few minutes Adam excused himself and softly climbed the stairs to get changed before dinner. He glanced across to the spare room, the door was ajar and he could hear Caroline moaning and struggling in bed.

"Caroline?" He stepped towards the door pushing it gently. "Are you alright?" There was a sudden movement and the door was slammed shut. Adam staggered back. "Wow sorry!" He said to himself. "Dinner will be ready soon..." There was silence in the guest room. Adam went downstairs and waited with Kate for Caroline, after another ten minutes he went back upstairs. He knocked on the door. "Caroline?" When there was no answer he slowly opened the door. Caroline was lying fully-dressed on the bed. "Hello Caroline..." She stirred, stretching and smiling.

"Oh hello. Sorry I must have dozed off." She smiled.

"No doubt after the last time I came up you must have gone back to sleep."

"Last time?" Caroline frowned. "Now I must be more tired than I imagined. When did you come up before."

Adam laughed. "Well, ten minutes ago you slammed the door on me!" He smiled at Caroline's puzzled face. "Oh come on sleepy head, we better get downstairs or we will both be in trouble!"

Caroline smiled and they both walked down to the kitchen where Kate was dishing out bowls of chicken pasta. "Hello, do you feel better now?"

"Yes thanks Kate." Caroline sat down and started to wolf down the warm pasta hungrily.

"Wow this is great! Better than the hospital food."

Kate smiled. "I am glad you are enjoying it! Here have some more bread!" They relaxed around the table, the conversation again falling back to horses. Caroline polished off her bowl of pasta before tucking into seconds. The evening passed with them sitting in the front room

chatting and laughing, before, just a couple of hours later Caroline became drowsy and was soon fast asleep in the armchair.

"I suppose we had better wake her to go up to bed!" Kate smiled and stood up. "Caroline. Wakey, wakey!" She gently rocked Caroline's shoulder, her eyes snapped open causing Kate to step back in shock. "Are you okay?"

"Oh yes..." Caroline snarled loudly. "This will be so much fun..."

"Sorry?"

"You will be..." Suddenly Caroline slumped forward groaning. She looked up timidly.

"Kate?." Her voice was now quiet, broken. "Help me..."

"What?" Kate knelt in front of her.

"The girl?. Please help me..." Caroline grabbed for Kate's hands gripping them tightly. "Don't let her take me..." Caroline gave Kate one last frightened look before collapsing.

Kate stepped back with her hand to her mouth. "Adam, can you tell me what the hell just happened there?" She sat down heavily beside Adam. "What was that?"

"Caroline is ill. She shouldn't have left the hospital." He stood up.

"I suppose you are right." Kate shrugged.

Kate was still concerned the next morning. Adam had called the hospital and driven Caroline back where she was admitted. She had not woken to be put into the car and stayed unconscious until he watched her being wheeled away on a trolley.

\*\*\*

Kate had called the hospital just a few minutes before but had been told that, as she was not next of kin, the data protection act prevented them passing on any details. She had slammed the phone down. Caroline was family, not in the eyes of the hospital but she was as close.

Visiting time was still some hours away and Kate had work to do, she was glad of the distraction but could not push away the uneasy feeling as she grabbed her hat and crop and left the office to take out her usual hack.

\*\*\*

"Come on then." Harriet was one of the five ladies Kate regularly took out on a hack. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing..." Kate smiled.

"Bollocks!" Harriet laughed. "We just had a conversation about famous horse people we would sleep with and you didn't get all prudish as usual. There is something wrong." She winked at the other riders. "Is it man trouble?" He held up her gloved hand with her little finger outstretched.

"What?" Kate blushed. "Oh god no!" She laughed. "Okay, sorry I have been distracted. It's Caroline."

"Something you are not telling us lover?" The group laughed raucously. "Playing for the other team now are we? Well, she is a pretty girl. A bit shy but if that is what you like..." The ladies laughed loudly for a moment before Harriet held up her hand. "Woah?. Kate are you crying?" Kate wiped her eyes quickly, looking away. "Oh shit Kate, you know we don't mean

anything by what we say. It is only a joke..."

Kate gulped. "I'm sorry. No, it's not that. Caroline is ill..." She went on to describe the events of last night and that she was in hospital still. The ladies listened in silence.

"Oh I am sorry Kate." Pat rode up beside her and put her hand on Kate's thigh. "Look, she will be fine. She had that accident and then discharged herself from hospital. She has probably had a bump to her head or something. She is tough, she will be right as rain in no time, just you see."

"Thank you?." Kate smiled. "I am just being silly?. I am really sorry. Come on, let's have a good gallop up to the ridge!" She pushed her horse on with the others following behind.

\*\*\*

"Okay Miss Gibbs." The doctor smiled warmly. "Tell me again about the woman, the one that you are saying is trying to take you?"

Caroline looked up. "I think she is trying to hurt me. She is trying to turn me against my friends." The doctor scribbled notes on his pad. "I can't sleep, she comes for me when I go to sleep." Caroline sobbed.

"Alright, please don't distress yourself." He handed her a box of tissues. "I believe that you are suffering from depression, but I would like you to stay with us for a few days so that we can assess you and find out exactly what is wrong and to start to help you."

"Stay?" Caroline gasped. "But I want to go home."

The doctor sighed and pulled out a series of pieces of paper. "Now I really want you to make the decision to stay in hospital. If you will not consent I will be forced to detain you under section four of the mental health act."

"What?"

"I want to help make you better Caroline. Sadly you are in no fit state to go home at the moment, you need some time and our help." The doctor smiled. "We will have you as right as rain in no time."

Caroline slumped in her chair, the nurse helped her stand and led her back to her bed.

\*\*\*

"Penny for them?" Kate sat down next to Adam, she had been watching him from the doorway of the tack room, he was cleaning a bridle and had spent at least five minutes polishing the same throat lash.

"What?" Adam looked up with a start. "Oh sorry..." He smiled. "Things on my mind."

"Want to share them?" Kate smiled.

"Oh Kate..." He took her hand. "I have to do the accounts paperwork, there is a load of health and safety stuff that has come through to be completed." He shrugged. "I didn't expect all of this when we took over the yard."

"Look, please don't worry too much..." She smiled. "We will get through it." She hugged him and stood up. "I have to dash, see you a bit later!"

Adam smiled faintly. He didn't dare tell her about the debts or about the text message he had received a few hours earlier. He pulled out his phone again and pulled the message up. 'Tick

tock Mr Bishop. Shame if someone you cared for had an accident...'. He slammed the phone down.

\*\*\*

Kate stepped into the hospital, she had called them earlier and found that Caroline was in the psychiatric ward which had unnerved her, the actual experience was even worse. The ward was distant from the main hospital buildings and was clearly secure with bars on the windows and security on the door.

"Can I help you?" The security guard looked up.

"I am here to see Caroline Gibbs."

He looked down at a clipboard in front of him. "And you are?"

Kate was prepared, when she had called the staff would tell her nothing about Caroline as she was not next of kin. "I am her mother, Linda Gibbs."

The guard looked up, looking Kate up and down before he pressed a button below the desk. The door buzzed. "Through there, ask for her at the nurses' station."

Kate walked quickly through the grey painted corridor towards the nurses' station. "Can I help you?" The nurse smiled warmly.

"Hi..." Kate stuttered. "I am here to see Caroline Gibbs."

"Ah yes..." She reached down and pulled a file out of a cabinet beneath the desk. "Can I just ask who you are?"

"I am her mother, Linda."

The nurse closed the file and looked up at Kate. "Really?" Her smile faded briefly.

"Look, I need to see her. She is like family to me. I am Kate Bishop, my husband brought her in." Kate pleaded. "Please help me here, Caroline needs me."

The nurse smiled. "Look, I really shouldn't let you see her. In fact I should call security and have you removed." She paused. "But, Caroline has been asking for you all afternoon, in fact she has been quite distressed so I think it would do her good to see you."

"Thank you..."

"She has been sectioned under the mental health act." Kate gasped. "I know, but please don't worry it is not as bad as it sounds. She will be kept in for at least three days to allow us to assess her." The nurse smiled. "She is in good hands. Let me take you through to see her." The nurse let Kate through the secure reception area to a locked door. She held an electronic tag up to a reader and clicked the door open. Eventually they reached a door, the nurse unlocked it and held it open. Caroline was sitting up on the bed staring out of the barred window. "I can only give you half an hour. Just press the call button when you are finished."

"Thank you, I really appreciate it." Kate waited until the nurse shut the door. "Hello Caroline." She walked towards her. "How are you doing?"

Caroline turned around, her eyes red. "Kate!" She leapt towards her hugging her tightly. "Thank you for coming." She sobbed. "I'm not mad..." She paused. "Am I?"

Kate paused. "Caroline you are unwell. The nightmares you are having the woman you are seeing. The doctors are going to help you. They will make it go away." Kate smiled. "I want to have our Caroline back as soon as possible. Come on, sit down. Let me tell you what happened today."

Kate sat and chatted for well past the half hour that the nurse had suggested. It was only when she looked at her watch that she realised how long they had been talking. Caroline had become more animated and relaxed as they had talked. "Look I had better go. But I will come back tomorrow." Caroline looked crestfallen. "Come on. You will be out of here really soon." Kate hugged her again before pushing the call button. "The nurse opened the door and Kate said her final goodbyes to Caroline. She had only walked a few steps before bursting into tears.

"There, there..." The nurse took her hand. "Lots of people get overwhelmed when they first come here." She opened a side door revealing a small sitting room with a sink and fridge. "Look it's my break time, come and have a cup of tea with me before you go."

"Thank you..." Kate sobbed, accepting a tissue from the nurse. "I am sorry..."

The kettle clicked and the nurse poured two mugs of tea. "I have put two sugars in, it will help. Don't worry about being upset, this is a very frightening place." She paused. "Caroline will recover, she has had an MRI scan today the doctors think it could be related to her accident, she may have had a head injury which was not obvious when she was in before."

Kate sighed. "I hope she is okay. She is so important to us all. Our yard is like a family everyone is worried about her. We all just want her to be well."

"She will be in good hands with us. I will look after her and I know the other staff will too."

\*\*\*

"Adam?" Kate stepped into the cottage, she looked around but it seemed that Adam was not at home. The sudden bleep of his mobile phone made her jump. She looked down at the phone, she trusted Adam totally but he had been acting strangely over the last few days. Curiosity made her pick it up. She knew that she should not read his texts but still found herself pressing the menu button, she gasped as the words flashed up on screen.

'Pay the money you owe now or we will harm your wife. Do I make myself clear?'

Cold fear flooded her body.

"Hello there..." Adam opened the front door and stepped inside, she reached to hug Kate but was shrugged away. "Whoa?. What's wrong?"

Kate turned around slowly, she had scrolled through his messages and seen the others he had been sent. "What the hell is this?"

Adam pushed past her and sat down heavily on the sofa with his head in his hands. "I was stupid..."

"What?" Kate snarled. "Tell me why someone is threatening to injure me."

"I took out a loan, we needed the money to pay the bills. Kate I needed to pay the feed bills, the wages..." He looked up at Kate. "I thought they were above board, I found them on the internet and it looked professional."

"And?" Kate stared at Adam.

"They suddenly demanded payment, when I couldn't pay they doubled the interest rate, tripled it. They threatened me."

"So we go to the police..." She gasped as Adam unbuttoned his shirt and turned to show her his back. The welts had turned into black lines of bruises which criss-crossed his back covering almost every inch. "This was the last warning."

"You didn't tell me..." Kate whispered.

"I was trying to protect you?. I thought that I could handle it."

"You should have told me..." Kate picked up her bag, turned on her heel and walked out slamming the door behind her."

Adam slumped in the sofa.

## Chapter 5

**June 1974**

Linda wiped her eyes and put the telephone receiver down.

“How bad is she?”

“It’s bad Hilary.” Linda sighed. “She is in a coma...” She sobbed, shuddering. “She has pretty bad head injuries and a number of broken bones.”

“Good grief!” Hilary sighed. “I am so sorry. Poor Tracy, what a terrible accident.”

“It wasn’t an accident!” Linda suddenly snarled.

“What?”

“The girth was cut. It was a brand new one, I had just bought it a week ago. It had been cut.”

“What on earth?” Hilary gasped. “But who would do that?” She stopped. “Oh god no!”

“Yes...” Linda slumped down in her chair.

“She has to go...”

“She should be arrested, but the police just said it was an unfortunate accident and that I had better be careful accusing people.”

Hilary raised her eyebrows.

“I am going to sack her.” Linda. “This could be the end for the yard you know.”

“You are doing the right thing.” Hilary stepped across and hugged Linda.

\*\*\*

Linda stepped into the tack room, she gestured to the assembled staff. “Leave us for a moment please.” They started to put down the tack they were cleaning. “Not you.” Linda grasped Susan by the arm. “I need to speak with you.”

“No, piss off.” Susan sneered.

Linda slammed both her hands into Susan’s shoulders knocking her to the ground.

“Oh we are being big and strong now.” Susan stood up brushing the seat of her jodhpurs.

“But if you want a fight...” She laughed.

“You hurt a friend of mine. “

“Yes?” Susan shook her head. “I am sorry I don’t know what you mean.”

“Shut up. I want you out of here.”

“Okay, I will leave you alone.” She reached for the tack room door handle. Linda pushed the door shut.

“No, you are fired. Leave and don’t come back.”

“Okay... You know I will have to tell my father.”

“Is that some sort of threat?” Linda shook her head. “I can’t let you get away with this, I know that the police will not touch you but I know what you did. If that means I lose the stables, well so be it.”

“Oh you may lose more than that.” Susan smiled.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I will make sure you lose everything.”

“Oh shut up!” Linda sobbed. “I want you gone by the morning.”

\*\*\*

Linda locked the office. “Come on, let me take you for a drink and some supper. I don’t think you should brood alone at home and I don’t want to be around Susan tonight” Hilary smiled.

“Okay.” Linda paused. “Look, I should have got rid of her a long time ago, you were right. And if I had...” She burst into tears.

“Come on...” Hilary hugged her. “She is leaving now. You did the right thing.”

Susan watched from the feed shed as they left. She smiled, Linda was a weakling but it seemed the worm had turned, well the stupid bitch would get all she deserved. She looked around, the staff would be upstairs having dinner and then they would be busy with other matters. She chuckled to herself fingering the empty box of laxatives in her pocket, their beef stew would have them fighting for the toilet tonight, a nice leaving present for them.

Susan pulled out a key to the office, she had stolen Caroline’s key some weeks before and had a copy made, she smiled she would get her revenge on Linda, she pulled open the steel vet cupboard and started rustling through the bottles and packets until she found the one she was looking for. She grasped the small brown bottle which she had seen weeks before, it was pesticide and years old, no doubt banned and thoroughly unsafe by the number of grim warnings and the word poison moulded into the neck of the bottle.

She gingerly took out the bottle and unscrewed the rusted lid, she could see the white powder contained within. She placed the bottle on the desk and pulled out an apple, quickly she took a knife and cut out the core leaving a hole which she filled with the white powder before shoving the core back in.

“Perfect!” She giggled. She shoved the empty bottle back in the cupboard, slamming the door shut before leaving the office.

The night was warm, the sun slowly setting and the horses were hanging their heads over their stable doors or tugging at hay nets. She approached the back yard and the last stable in the block, the horse within snorted as it saw her.

“Hello Magpie.” Susan sneered. Magpie was Linda’s horse and as such Susan had often been cruel to the piebald gelding. “I have a treat for you, ugly animal.” She held out the apple. The horse turned away, walking to the back of his stable. “Look it is a lovely apple.” She pulled the bolts aside and swung the stable door open. “Come on!” Magpie raised one of his rear legs to try and kick her. “You nasty bastard!” Susan slapped the horse. “Here, take the bloody apple.” Magpie stared at the offered fruit and turned back to his hay net. “Oh you ignorant brute! It’s fine.” She raised the apple to her lips and took a bite. “There..” She offered the apple again to Magpie, he snuffled and crunched the apple.

Susan smiled. “You stupid horse.” She spat out the mouthful of apple.

\*\*\*

Linda woke, she rubbed her eyes glancing out at the weather, it was sunny and already the day was warm. She bathed and dressed, pausing to eat a bowl of corn flakes before stepping out to her car. It was a short drive to the yard, when she arrived she found a handful of staff



preparing feeds.

“Morning!”

Claire looked up, she was pale and groaned as she stood up to greet Linda.

“What is wrong with you?”

“Food poisoning I think.” She grasped her stomach. “Most of the staff were sick. Oh it was horrible.”

“Oh I am so sorry...” She paused. “Let me feed Magpie and then I will help you out. We can muck out later if necessary.”

Linda grabbed one of the feed bowls and walked across the yard, she leant over the stable door. “Hello sleepy.” Magpie was lying down in his stable. “Come on...” She pulled the door open. “Get up then...” Linda stopped throwing down the feed bowl. “No... No!” She knelt down and looking into her horse’s glazed eyes. “Magpie!” She felt his chest and realised there was no movement. She screamed out in anguish.

\*\*\*

Susan laughed. She was watching from the shadows. She shushed herself as other members of the staff came running Oh this was wonderful, she had found a way to hurt Linda so totally, she could see her weeping all over a stupid horse. Claire spoke quickly to Linda and then ran back across the yard.

Linda walked out of the stable and fell to her knees sobbing, Hilary came running towards her. “Oh God Linda I just heard.”

“Oh Hilary...” Linda sobbed. Hilary hugged her briefly before stepping into the stable. She came out a few minutes later.

“Have you called an ambulance?”

“Yes, but I think it is a bit late.” Linda looked up.

“Come on.” Hilary helped Linda stand up, let’s go somewhere else, away from here.”

Susan watched as they walked away giggling to herself, an ambulance for a horse. Oh dear they had both finally gone totally mad! She stepped out of the shadow and onto the empty yard. There was the stable, she glanced inside there was the horse, laid out, tongue lolling from his still mouth. She smiled. Oh this was the perfect revenge.

It was then that she noticed something behind the body of Magpie, she shrugged, stepping into the stable peeking around the dead horse. It was there she saw the other body. She cried out.

\*\*\*

The ambulance left the yard and Hilary closed the gates. She had hung a closed sign across them, apologising that lessons today would be cancelled. She could see Linda sitting in the office, she sighed and walked back across the yard.

All was quiet, she had sent the other staff away, the horses had been fed and could be left to have a day off in the circumstances. The back yard was silent, they had moved the other horses to the paddock, she could not bring herself to walk back to Magpie’s stable and stood motionless in the middle of the yard.

Susan stared at Hilary, she stepped out from behind the door and walked towards her. Hilary ignored her, her head down tears spilling onto the concrete of the yard, when she was just a

few feet away she suddenly looked up, looking wildly around the yard. Susan stood in front of her, mouth open ready to speak, not that she was sure what to say.

Hilary shuddered as if suddenly cold despite the warmth of the day and walked forward. Susan gasped as she suddenly was upon her and then in a moment walking behind her. Susan span round, Caroline was walking up the yard.

Susan stood silently suddenly realising what had happened, what she had done.

\*\*\*

Linda opened her cottage door, she had refused company, stating that she needed to be alone. She was exhausted and pushed the door open, dragging off her boots before stepping into her front room intending to slump on the sofa and consider her day. She flicked the light switch but there was nothing. She sighed, the evening was still quite light and she could not face dealing with a power cut on top of everything else.

She walked into her front room and hit a wall of darkness.

\*\*\*

Linda woke with a start, she was in agony. She scrambled to her feet and found that she was in a confined space, rough walls on each side lined with steel rods. She panicked trying to fight her way out but it was clear from the distant light above her that she was deep in a hole. She screamed, yelling for help.

A shadow crossed the mouth of the pit. "Miss Gibbs." Linda immediately recognised the voice as Harry Thompson. "Do you remember what I said would happen to you if something happened to my daughter?."

"Mr Thompson, Sir!" Linda pleaded.

"Shut up!" Thompson yelled. "My daughter is dead!" He paused, sighing deeply. "I hold you responsible Miss Gibbs."

"Mr Thompson... I did nothing.. She killed herself." Linda cried out.

"I told you to shut up! I cannot get her back, but I can punish those involved. I can punish you. So you have about eight hours before the contractors start pouring concrete into this foundation pit, after that." He paused. "Well after that I will be able to pass this bridge..." He stopped before saying some words to the men at the top of the pit. The light was extinguished as a board was dropped over the hole.

"Help! For God's sake... Please..." Linda screamed...

## Chapter 6

### Present Day

Jacqui stepped into the kitchen. "Kate?" She paused. "What are you doing here?"

"Hi Jac's." She smiled. "I stayed here last night, it was pretty late and I didn't want to disturb you guys."

"What's wrong Kate?" Kate wiped her eyes shaking her head. "Come on... You can tell me."

"Oh Adam has done something stupid. I got cross... I think I may have been stupid." The words tumbled out.

"Are you okay?"

Kate took a deep breath and sighed. "I will be fine." She smiled faintly. "Married couples go through these sort of things." Kate paused, it may well be the case, Adam and her had argued in the past but not like this. She had never walked out. Perhaps it was the shock of his injuries as much as what might happen to her. She was incensed by his stupidity, how could he go to a loan shark to get money and now they were both at risk. But how much was it her fault, she had left him to do everything to do with the business, perhaps she should have helped him more. "What do I do?"

Jacqui turned around, she was in the kitchen making tea. "Sorry Kate, did you say something?"

"No..." She took a deep breath. "Nothing."

Adam was just across the yard unlocking the tack room. He had seen that Kate had left their car in the stable's car park so it was likely that she was around, but he felt it was better to give her just a little more time. He realised how stupid he had been but at the time had seen no other way out. Of course with hindsight he would have realised that something was wrong but it was take out the loan or have to admit that they could not feed the horses that week.

Recession had hit them hard - prices had gone up just at the time when people had started cancelling lessons and going from full to do it yourself livery. He had suggested selling horses but the market value was almost nil, nobody was taking on average riding school horses and more importantly they felt that they were part of their expanded family and parting with any of them would be impossible.

He stepped into the tack room, he knew that the saddles and bridles needed repair or replacement, they were all showing their age and considerable use. He picked up a bridle, glancing at the fraying stitching. It all took money...

Kate watched as the last of the feed buckets were taken out. She threw down the scoop and started to close the feed bins pausing as she noticed a shadow crossing the feed shed's doorway. She turned and saw Adam standing in the doorway. "I'm just dropping this back." He dropped an empty feed bucket on the floor and turned to leave.

"Adam!" He paused still facing away from Kate. "You're not even looking at me now?"

He turned slowly and stepped into the room. "I am sorry... What I did was stupid but I never thought it would come to this."

"No..." Kate sighed. "You didn't think did you? But I guess you never do..."

Adam paused. Common sense told him to walk away, but he had to respond. "What are you trying to say?" He stepped towards Kate. "Come on you've started so why don't you finish?"

"What the hell were you doing? Why didn't you talk to me... Your wife! You just go off and get a loan from a loan shark and put us all in danger. What did you think you were doing?"

"Saving our business..." Adam sighed. "But you wouldn't know that would you? You take no interest in the business side, leave all of that to me. Don't think that you can suddenly take an interest when it suits you."

Kate lunged forward before Adam realised striking him hard across the face with the steel feed scoop. He staggered back in shock crashing to the floor amongst the feed sacks. He lay shocked reaching for his jaw.

Kate dropped the scoop and dashed towards him. "Adam I'm sorry..."

He struggled to his feet away from Kate as she offered her hand, pushing against the feed shed door. The door did not budge, he pushed hard but there was no movement. "The door's stuck."

"Good." Adam flinched as Kate grabbed his shoulder. "Oh don't be stupid, I'm not going to hit you."

"Again..." Adam muttered, he sat down on the pile of feed sacks.

Kate strode towards the door pushing it hard. "It's locked." She kicked the wood. "Who the hell would have locked the door?"

"Sorry I don't know." Adam sighed, his head in his hands.

Kate sat down on the sacks next to Adam. "I'm sorry..."

"No you are right, I was stupid..." He was cut short as Kate put her finger on Adam's lips.

"Shhh..." She smiled. "Listen to me... I am sorry. You did what you thought was right."

"But..."

"Adam for god's sake shut up or I will hit you again. I am trying to apologise here." She paused. "I'm scared Adam, threats from a loan shark, it just frightened me."

"I am scared too..." Adam sighed. "I don't know what to do?"

"Can we pay them back?" Kate glanced across to Adam. "Okay, I am guessing that is no? Can we ask them for extra time to pay? Is that no also." Kate sighed. "Okay, we will find a way, but we do it together, okay no more secrets."

"Thank you..." Adam stood up and hugged Kate. "No more secrets."

"Now how the hell do we get out of here?"

\*\*\*

Jacqui picked up her mug of tea, took a slurp before stirring in another spoon of sugar. It was a short break between lessons, was going to have to work through lunch as she had a private lesson. She sighed and drained the end of the mug. She yawned, catching herself unaware, thinking that she must be more tired than she thought. She stood up, blinking as the tack room seemed to move around her. She reached out to steady herself as her knees crumpled, the mug fell from her hand smashing on the floor.

\*\*\*

After two hours trapped in the feed shed, Adam and Kate had been released by the staff preparing the lunchtime feeds.

"Kate, Hi!" Penny Davidson stepped into the office.

"Penny, Hi!" Kate smiled. "How are you?"

"Look I am sorry but I am here for a lesson and Jacqui is not around?"

"What?" Kate stood up. "Let me ask." Kate walked out onto the yard, it was quiet as the staff were eating lunch, she could not find Jacqui anywhere. "Look Penny I am really sorry, I really don't know where she is?"

"Okay..." Penny glanced at her watch. "Look I am on my lunch break, I don't have long. I'll have to come back next week."

"No Penny..." Kate smiled. "I'm not too busy. Let me give you your lesson." Kate grabbed her riding hat and walked out of the office with her.

\*\*\*

Adam looked at his watch as Kate walked down from the arena. "Hello, I didn't think you were teaching, you have a hack to take out now."

"I know!" She frowned. "I had to take one of Jacqui's lessons. Have you seen her?"

"I haven't... I'll ask the girls to find her. She must have forgotten that she was teaching."

"Thanks." Kate mounted her horse, greeting her riders."

Adam walked around the yard, checking the tack room, stables and even the staff flat but there was no sign of Jacqui. He presumed that she had go out for the afternoon, somehow confusing her day off. He shrugged his shoulders.

The afternoon passed and the staff gathered to make up the evening feeds for the horses. Once the bowls had been filled and passed around the yard the grooms moved to the barn to make up the hay nets for each of the horses. Sarah pushed open the doors of the barn leading the group. She gasped as she saw something in the gloom.

Jacqui was facing the staff, she had been tied to one of the supporting beams opposite the barn doors with large amounts of baler twine. She was shaking her head but her words were lost as she had been gagged with wad of bandages.

"What the hell?" Jane shook her head. "What is going on?" She stepped forward. Jacqui grunted and moaned through the gag, shaking her head more vigorously. "Sorry? What?" Jane broke an almost invisible thread of fishing line, there was a clank as this triggered a flood of black liquid which engulfed Jacqui. Jane leapt back. "Christ! What the hell!"

The staff stared as Jacqui was now before them covered in gallons of thick black ooze. "Hoof oil..." Sarah sighed. "I couldn't find any earlier on, now I know why. Come on let's get her free." She ran towards Jacqui releasing another trip wire. They were both covered in a flurry of woodchips which stuck to the hoof oil like glue. The silence was broken by the sound of a camera.

"Oh that's one for Facebook!" Caroline laughed.

Jacqui's gag was removed by Sarah. "You!" She snarled at Caroline. "You did this!"

"Oh now, let's not be hasty. Do you really know who did this to you?" Caroline walked into the barn amongst the staff. Jacqui stammered. "Are you sure it was me? I mean how would you? You were asleep at the time!"

"What the hell did you do to me?" Jacqui snarled.

Caroline walked up to Jacqui dipping her finger in the hoof oil on her hair. "I bet that is going to be hard to get off."

"Tell me you bitch!"

"Oh Jacqui..." Caroline pulled out a small packet of sedatives. "Magpie always hated being clipped, always needed to be sedated. I always wondered what would happen if it was used on a human."

"If I could get you now!" Jacqui yelled and swore fighting against her binding.

"Oh can't take a joke can we?" Caroline mocked. "Oh boo hoo!" Caroline turned on her heel and started to walk out of the barn. Sarah dashed after her grabbing her shoulder.

"You don't think you are just going to walk away now do you." Sarah swung her fist towards Caroline. She ducked, grabbing her fist and twisting Sarah's arm until she cried out. "Ow... ow, you're hurting me!"

"I know..." Caroline smiled. "I intend to. Don't cross me Sarah..." Caroline forced Sarah onto her knees and left her there crying as she walked out of the barn. Some of the staff started to follow her.

"Leave her!" Jacqui rubbed her wrists as she was cut free from the twine. "She's not worth it..."

\*\*\*

"So then she dropped Sarah to the ground and just left." Kate paused. "What the hell do we do?"

Adam looked up. "Wow..." He paused. "I don't know what to think? Part of me is impressed that Caroline did it." Kate glared at him. "No... I don't mean it like that. But it is so out of character and what the hell was she doing, tying up Jacqui, setting traps. I just don't get it."

"Neither do I." Kate frowned. "It is not the Caroline we knew. Not the shy, timid Caroline."

"She has been different since the accident."

Kate sniffed. "Look, I am scared." Adam stepped over and hugged her. "What is wrong with her?" The conversation was cut short by the shrill ringing of the telephone bell.

Adam walked across the room and picked up the phone. "Hello..." He paused listening. "Sorry you'll have to speak up, there is a hell of a racket going on." He stopped before slamming down the phone.

"What's up?"

"It's Caroline, she's smashing up the kitchen in the flat!"

\*\*\*

Adam and Kate could hear the commotion from outside the flat and as soon as they entered they could see that Caroline was standing in the centre of the kitchen, the rest of the staff were hiding in the front room trying to avoid flying bottles and cans that Caroline was hurling across the room towards them. Every cupboard door had been flung open and the contents scattered across the kitchen which was a mess of ketchup, soup and flour.

A can of baked beans slammed into the wall beside Kate's head. "Caroline what the hell are

you doing!" Kate yelled from the doorway.

Caroline stopped dead. Turning to face Kate. She was smiling manically. "Hello Kate..." She slowly picked up a carving knife from the block on the counter, she held it aloft the blade shining in the light. "Pretty isn't it?"

Kate stepped forward slowly. "Caroline..." She spoke softly.

"Kate no..." Adam hissed grabbing for Kate's shoulder. She shrugged him off and stepped closer to Caroline.

"Look Caroline whatever is wrong we can talk about it..." Kate smiled.

"Oh yes, it would be lovely to talk." Caroline sneered. "We could have a nice cup of tea and a chat..."

"That's right." Kate smiled. "Now if you just give me the knife."

Caroline lunged forward, in a split second Kate felt herself falling, a pain flooding across her chest. She landed heavily on the floor winded for a moment. There was a sudden silence in the kitchen, Kate looked up to see Caroline standing with the knife in her hand, Kate noticed dark liquid dripping from the blade, the silence was broken as Kate realised that some of the staff were screaming. She sat up slowly. "I'm okay..." She tried to speak but there was a sudden realisation, her blood ran cold as she saw Adam lying on the kitchen floor.

He was lying on his back beneath him was a pool of dark blood which was growing slowly. His face was pale and his breathing laboured. Kate quickly knelt beside him. "Adam..." The word came out as a wail. She touched his chest and felt the warm flow running from him. He looked up, struggling to speak. Kate touched his face. "Someone call an ambulance!" The staff members remained in place, sobbing and screaming. "Now... Get an ambulance!"

\*\*\*

Kate had to be physically lifted from Adam's side to allow the paramedics to attend to him. She was helped to her feet by a young WPC. Tears were running down her face as she watched Adam being taken away on a stretcher. "I need to go with him." The WPC nodded and helped her down the stairs to the waiting ambulance. Adam was lying still on the stretcher on the far side of the ambulance, Kate reached out and took his hand.

\*\*\*

The stable staff watched the ambulance leave before slowly filing back into the flat. Jacqui looked around. "Where is she?" She stormed through the flat opening doors, checking every room. "Where the hell is she!"

"Look, the police will get her." Sarah took her hand. "Leave it now..." The staff quietly gathered on the sofas in the living room.

\*\*\*

"Mrs Bishop?" The nurse stepped into the relatives room.

Kate looked up, eyes red. "Yes?"

"Would you like to see him?"

Kate nodded, she stood and followed the nurse through the corridors of the accident and emergency department, pausing outside a curtained cubical. The nurse pulled the curtain open and ushered Kate in. Adam was lying still on the hospital bed, Kate rushed to his side.

"It looked worse than it was..." The nurse stood on the opposite side of Adam's bed. "The knife hit one of his ribs, that pushed the blade out of his body. Half an inch either way and..." She stopped, leaving the words hanging.

"Adam?" Kate took his hand, the slow beep of the heart monitor punctuated the silence. He remained still and silent. Kate reached up and wiped her eyes.

"He was pumped with a lot of morphine." The nurse glanced at Adam's notes. "Mrs Bishop, it will take time but he will recover." She took Kate's hand. "Look you have had a long day, he will be sleeping. I can get some transport arranged to take you home.

Kate shook her head. "I want to be with him."

"I understand. He will be moved to the wards soon, you will be more comfortable up there, it is a lot quieter."

\*\*\*

Adam woke dazed and in pain. He cried out confused by the oxygen mask on his face and the tubes running into the back of his hand. "Shhh..." Kate placed her hand on his shoulder. "I'll call the nurse." Kate pushed the call button.

"Hello..." Adam pushed off the mask.

"How are you?" Kate shrugged. "Sorry stupid question..."

Adam smiled faintly. "Bloody sore..." He paused. "Sorry..."

"What?"

"For scaring you. For getting injured."

"Adam, you saved my life!" Kate sighed. She leant over and kissed him.

\*\*\*

The taxi pulled up outside the cottage, Kate thanked the driver and stumbled out of the car. Adam had quickly fallen asleep after they had talked, Kate had stayed for sometime before the nurses told her that she had better go home, not least as she had dozed off in the chair beside his bed.

She was exhausted, fumbling with her key in the front door. She wanted to have some sleep before returning to the hospital later, she would have to ignore the yard and hope that the staff were coping in their absence.

Kate pushed the door open, dragging her boots off she stepped onto the stairs. Suddenly she froze, there was the sound of movement from the kitchen. Kate gently pushed open the door to the front room and crept in grabbing the poker from the fireplace as she passed through.

Kate edged into the kitchen, she saw the woman standing with her back to the door. Kate raised the poker. "What the hell are you doing in my house?" she screamed at the woman.

Kate gasped as Caroline turned around. "Kate... Please help me..." She shuddered. "Help me..."



"Help you?" Kate felt a flood of anger course through her body. She swung the poker towards her catching her on the arm. Caroline yelped in pain staggering back. "You tried to kill Adam!" Kate paused as she saw a flicker of confusion in Caroline's eyes.

"What?" She sobbed. "What have I done?" Caroline looked up, I don't remember anything until I was standing in the kitchen, Adam was on the floor." She stopped. "Oh God! I had a knife..." She lurched forward.

Kate panicked and swung the poker hard, it connected with Caroline's skull with a sickening crack. Caroline hit the stone floor hard bleeding heavily from her head, she was silent and still.

Kate dropped the poker with a clatter staring at Caroline's body. "Oh God!" She felt a sudden cold flush her body. "I've killed her..." Panicking she turned and walked out of the room blindly.

\*\*\*

Adam woke with a start. "Hello..." Kate was standing over him as he lay in the hospital bed. "What's wrong?"

"Why should there be anything wrong?" Kate laughed nervously.

"Kate I know you too well..." Adam smiled faintly. "What has happened."

"I've killed Caroline." Kate blurted.

"Wow, my concussion must be pretty bad. I though you said that you had..." His voice faded as Kate started crying.

"I hit her with the poker."

"Whoa... Start from the beginning."

"I left here and when I got home she was waiting for me, she was in the kitchen."

"So this was self-defence?" Adam paused. "Did she attack you?"

Kate paused. "No, she was just there... She looked scared. Oh God Adam what have I done?"

Adam blinked. He was still on a strong dose of powerful painkillers, this must be some hallucination. He smiled, yes he was imagining this and the next time he woke Kate would be with him and it would all be okay again. He felt his eyelids getting heavy, he let them close and he slipped from consciousness.

\*\*\*

Kate parked the Land Rover and walked towards the cottage. She had no idea what to do as she slowly opened the cottage door, tears running down her face. The house was silent. She closed the door behind her and walked into the front room, the kitchen door was still open, she could see the poker lying on the stone floor where she had dropped it.

Kate apprehensively walked towards the door, nudging it open slowly. She gasped as she saw that the kitchen was empty. Looking around she noticed that the back door was ajar. Kate opened the door and stepped out into the garden, there was dark spots of blood tracing a line along the garden path. Kate slowly followed the marks to the top of the garden.

In the top corner of the garden was a small shed, it housed some garden tools but was otherwise unused. Kate pulled the door open. Caroline was slumped on a box in a dark corner of the shed, Kate walked towards her. Caroline was silent, her eyes closed. Kate reached out and touched her.

Caroline woke suddenly her eyes flicking open, blinking in the bright light. She cried out as she saw Kate reaching for her. Shocked Kate staggered back falling heavily on the old tools and empty sacks stacked in the corner of the shed. "Caroline, you're alive!" Kate sobbed. "I am so sorry..."

Caroline shook her head. "What?" She frowned. "What's wrong?" She looked confused. "My head hurts... Have I had an accident?"

Kate paused, pulling herself to her feet. "Caroline..." She stopped. "I hurt you Caroline. I am so sorry?"

Caroline smiled. "You hurt me?" She laughed. "Don't be silly."

Kate chewed her lip. "Do you not remember what happened?" Caroline shook her head. "Okay... Come into the house, I think I had better get your head sorted."

\*\*\*

"Mr Bishop?" Adam opened his eyes and saw two police officers standing beside his bed.

"Hello Is this about my wife?" Adam spoke nervously as he struggled to sit. "She said it was self-defence." One of the policemen helped him with his pillows.

"No Mr Bishop. We need to talk to you about what happened at the Redbridge Equestrian Centre when..." He double checked the name in his notebook. "Miss Caroline Gibbs attacked you."

"It was an accident." Adam spoke firmly.

"Really? We have a number of eye witnesses which state that she attacked you with a kitchen knife."

"I remember that she slipped and caught me with a knife." He smiled faintly. "It was an accident."

"Why are you protecting her Mr Bishop?" The officer cleared his throat. "She could have killed you."

"Officer, I am very sorry that you seem to have wasted your time. I clearly remember that Caroline slipped while carrying a knife." He paused. "Can I help you with anything else?"

"Mr Bishop." The policeman sighed. "We can still press charges. we have witnesses who saw what happened..."

"And they will all tell you that she slipped. That it was an accident."

"Okay!" He put his notebook away. "The case will be assessed by the Criminal Prosecution Service. Good day!" Adam smiled as he watched them walk away. He could hear the swearing and cursing as they left the ward.

\*\*\*

Caroline sat down heavily at the kitchen table. Dr Newton walked with Kate into the front room. He pulled the kitchen door closed behind him. "Look I shouldn't have done it but I have patched up her head. Kate she needs to go to hospital, she may have concussion and can't remember what happened to her." He sighed. "As long as you promise me that you will take her to hospital. I don't need to know how she was injured."

"I told you I just found her here." Kate protested.

"Of course." Dr Newton paused looking into Kate's eyes. "If that is what you say I will believe you."

"Yes." Kate smiled faintly. "I will take her to casualty when I visit Adam."

"Ah... Of course, how is he?"

"He is okay. The knife missed his heart." She stopped. "It was meant for me."

"Which is another good reason why you shouldn't be protecting her." He sighed. "She should be back in hospital. Kate, she needs to get well, doing this you are not helping her. Despite what you think you are doing."

Kate looked away. "I understand." She sighed. "Thank you."

"Look Kate, I am an old fool, I am helping you because I have been your doctor for years. I should...-"

"I appreciate what you are doing." She cut across Dr Newton. "Caroline is almost family for us. I trust her, I know she will not try to hurt me."

"I hope that is right Kate." He paused. "Have you told Adam your news?" Kate looked away. "I am guessing that is no... Don't leave it too long Kate." He sighed, knowing that Kate was single minded she would not be told what to do. He opened his car door and drove back to the surgery.

Kate stepped back inside, Caroline was at the kitchen table. "How are you feeling?"

Caroline shrugged. "Sore, but better thank you." She looked up at Kate. "I owe you so much. Thank you for helping me." She paused. "Tell me again what happened."

Kate looked away. "What is there to tell?" Kate sighed. "You had been acting weird, not yourself and then. Well, we got a phone call from the yard saying that you were smashing the place up. We drove there and you were..." Kate stopped, looking into Caroline's eyes. "You don't remember this do you?" She shook her head. "Okay, you had destroyed the place and then you lunged at me with a carving knife."

Caroline shuddered, starting to sob quietly. "Oh God! I am so sorry." She looked up, tears running down her face. "I would never hurt you, or Adam. I don't know what has happened. It is almost as if I have been missing for weeks." She sighed. "It is weird but I could not tell you what I have done for days on end. People look at me, staring, accusing and I just don't know what I am supposed to have done. They tell me some of the things but I don't remember them." She stopped. "It was not me Kate. You must believe me!"

"I wish I could. But it is you, I have seen you Caroline. Being nasty to people, hurting people." Kate shook her head. "If it was anyone else they would have been out weeks ago."

Caroline wailed. "What have I done?" She sniffed. "Kate I don't remember any of it. It has almost as if I have been living in a dream." She stopped. "A nightmare really. I just seem to wake in the morning and then remember nothing until I go back to bed. I am so frightened."

Kate sat down. "I have to take you to hospital. You are likely to have concussion, that needs to be treated." Caroline nodded. "I think I should take you back to the ward you were on."

Caroline stood quickly knocking her chair to the floor, she grabbed hold of Kate's shoulders. "No!" She sobbed. "Please don't leave me there... I hated it." She stared into Kate's eyes. "It would kill me to go back there Kate, please."

"But what can you do? I don't think you can go back to the yard." Kate sighed. "I'll give your mum a call."

Caroline shook her head. "No..." She sat down heavily with her head in her hands. "Did you know, when I was in hospital you were the only person who visited me. Mum has disowned me. She never wanted me to work at the yard and told me that anything that happened in my own fault."

Kate shook her head. "What?" She sighed. "How dare she! What the hell is her problem?"

"It's a long story, but one of the grooms poisoned her horse."

"What? Oh that is horrible..." Kate sighed.

"Oh it was worse. Mum found the girl the next morning, she was dead next to the horse." Caroline wiped her eyes. "It shook mum up a lot, as you can imagine."

"Oh Caroline, I am sorry." Kate paused. "Look I have to take you to casualty to get you properly checked, but I promise I will not send you back to where you were. You can stay here. At least until you are feeling better."

"What?" Caroline looked up. "Are you sure." She stopped. "I can't." She stood up supporting herself on the back of the chair.

"Caroline, what's wrong?"

"I can't stay. After what I have done."

"No Caroline..."

"I attacked Adam." She shuddered. "I could have killed him..."

"Caroline..."

"No." She stopped. "Thank you for everything, but I really can't ask you to help me." She staggered, gripping the table for support."

"Whoa..." Kate grabbed her. "Let me at least take you to casualty, then let's take it from there."

"Okay..." She sniffed. "I don't deserve this..."

\*\*\*

"Hello there..." Kate sat down next to Adam. "How are you feeling now?"

Adam smiled. "Hello... A little better." He paused. "I had the strangest dream. I dreamt that you told me you have hurt Caroline." He smiled faintly. "Weird eh..?"

"Yeah weird dream..." Kate's voice trailed away. "I have just brought Caroline to casualty to have her checked over."

"Oh is she okay? What has happened to her?"

"She will be fine..." Kate looked away. "Tell me how you are feeling..."

\*\*\*

"Miss Gibbs?" The nurse pulled back the curtain surrounding her bed. "I have a couple of people who need to talk with you." She stepped aside and two men stepped into the cubical.

"DCI Jones and DC Peterson." They both showed Police identity cards. "We have a few questions we would like to ask."

"Okay." Caroline looked up. "About what?"

"There was an incident at the Redbridge Equestrian Centre."

"Oh yes... I work there."

"Yes... You attacked one of the owners."

Caroline looked confused. "Did I?"

"You attacked Mr Adam Bishop with a carving knife."

Caroline shrugged innocently.

The nurse stepped in. "Gentlemen do you realise that Miss Gibbs is suffering from concussion, and amnesia."

"What?"

"She was admitted with a head injury earlier today."

"A head injury, how did that happen?"

The nurse looked down at Caroline's chart. "A riding accident apparently."

"Right. We'll back!" The two police officers stepped out of the cubical.

\*\*\*

Kate stood up as Caroline walked into the reception area. "Hello there... How are you doing?"

Caroline smiled. "Sore, but better now thanks." She paused. "Look as I said before, I can't impose on you and Adam. Not after what happened..."

"Caroline, stop it!" Kate grabbed her holdall. "Look you've been in hospital the least I and do as a friend is to look after you."

"Why?" Caroline stopped. "Why should you be a friend? I hurt you, I really hurt Adam..." Her voice trailed away.

"Caroline the doctors have told me that you are a lot better." Kate smiled. The doctors had said that Caroline seemed to have stabilised but had wanted her to stay in for much longer. She could tell by the look the doctors had exchanged that they felt she was mad taking her in. But they had to admit that all the tests they had run seemed to show that whatever episode she had suffered had passed. They had still given her a collection of pills and tablets that they demanded Kate ensured she took every day. It was a small price to pay to get Caroline back.

Still at the back of her mind she wondered herself what she was doing. Here was the woman who had attacked her husband and she was welcoming her into her home. Adam had refused to press charges and had said it had all been an accident but Kate knew that the look in Caroline's eyes had shown that her actions were anything but accidental. But that was a look that was not there now. Kate told herself that she was on the mend and if her mother would not take her in where would she go? She could not put her out on the street, Caroline was like family to her.

Caroline smiled coyly. "Thank you." Kate reached out and hugged her as tears filled her eyes.

"Come on, don't be silly." Kate looked away trying to stop herself blubbing like a baby.

"Let's go..."

They walked across the car park, the cold air made Caroline's teeth chatter after being cosseted in the warmth of the hospital. Kate stopped beside her scruffy Land Rover, fumbling with the keys and opening the door. "Thanks..." Caroline took a bridle off the front seat and

cleared a space in the foot well, pushing aside empty feed sacks and a grooming kit. Pulling the door closed she felt an immense relief wash over her, she would be away from the hospital and back home.

"Right, I'll get the heater on and warm us back up!" Kate turned the key. "Come on..." She willed the cold engine to start as it chugged and turned over. It caught with a roar and a cloud of black smoke. They were soon started, driving out of the car park and back towards Redbridge.

They both fell into a familiar conversation about the horses and goings on at the yard and the journey passed quickly. All too soon they were parking up outside Kate's cottage. "Are we not going to the yard?" Caroline unclipped her seat belt.

Kate froze for a second. "I thought you would rather stay with me for a while, at least until Adam is out of hospital."

"Thanks, but I would rather be back at work... It would help me take my mind off things."

"Ah..." Kate turned to face Caroline. "I think you need to give that a bit of time."

"What do you mean?" Caroline scowled. "I'm fit and well..." She stopped. "It's the others isn't it?"

"I am sorry Caroline." Kate gulped.

"I understand. I would not want me back..." She shook her head, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

"Give them some time. It will not take long, but just enough for them to know you are okay." Kate took her hand. "You upset them a lot before. But they care about you, they have been asking after you, wishing you well."

"They must hate me?"

"Oh goodness no..." Kate sighed. "You scared them. The person you were was not the Caroline we knew. Jacqui has already asked to see you as soon as you are here, she wants to catch up. I just think we need to take it slowly."

"We?"

"I am on your side Caroline..."

## Chapter 7

### July 1974

Hilary ran down the corridor of the hospital, she turned the corner into an open ward and saw Linda lying in a bed beside the window. "Linda! Oh goodness." She embraced her. "How are you?"

"Sore..." Linda sighed. "Look it could have been worse."

"What the hell happened?"

"Do you want the truth or what the police are saying?" Hilary raised her eyebrows. "I have been charged with trespass for being on the work site of the new by-pass and the fact that I had 'fallen' down a foundation pit was my own fault and I was lucky that the weather had been too bad to pour concrete in the morning." She shook her head. "And that just shows the power Harry Thompson has around here. I don't know exactly what happened, I was at home when suddenly I found myself in that pit and he was there telling me..." She burst into tears.

"I am sorry." Hilary passed her a handkerchief. "How did you get out?"

"I screamed until I was hoarse, one of the workers found me and helped me get out. When I tried to tell them what happened they charged me."

"But you are okay now?"

"I am not under several hundred tons of concrete, for now." She shuddered. "I have to leave, I can't go back to the yard."

"No..." Hilary paused. "Harry Thompson has been around, saying how he is going to redevelop the land. I was scared, I didn't know where you were, he said you had left."

"Well now I am going. As soon as I am out of here I am selling up. The cottage, the horses, whatever I can get. I have to." She paused. "I am sorry Hilary and for everyone, but there is nothing I can do. I don't think I could go back there again anyway."

"I will help you in anyway I can, just promise me one thing."

"Anything, what is it?"

"Keep in touch with your old friends wherever you go." She smiled faintly.

"Always..."

\*\*\*

"Lot number three, three six, is comprised of five saddles and bridles. Can we start the bidding at ten pounds?"

Hilary turned and stepped away from the small group of bidders, the stables were quiet now that the horses had gone to market, this was the final step, the sale of the remaining tack and equipment, everything offered with no reserve. This was not going to make a fortune for Linda but no doubt enough for her to live on for a while if she was frugal.

She walked down the row of empty stables, pausing at Magpie's box. She sighed, shaking her head. The stable was empty now, the straw removed and the concrete swept clean, if only she could sweep away the memories so easily.

"Lot three, three, seven, ladies and gentlemen..."

Hilary could hear the distant sounds from the auctioneer from the tack room, she had never had to arrange an auction but she had offered to take care of everything for Linda, she realised that she would never step foot back on the yard, this was a closed chapter in her life.

Linda had sold her cottage, it had sold remarkably quickly to a rich London family who wanted somewhere to spend weekends in the country, she had bought a tiny, dilapidated farm house hidden in the middle of Dartmoor.

Hilary had paid off the last few staff just yesterday, there had been tears, this had been a happy yard once despite what Susan had done. They would all be going to different places, the nature of the horse industry meant that they would be scattered far and wide, all promising to keep in touch but quietly knowing that this would be the last time they would hear from each other.

Hilary looked up, a young lady was walking towards her.

“Miss Jones? Hilary.”

“Yes, hello?” The woman held out her hand, Hilary shook it.

“I am from Baileys Auctioneers. I need Linda Gibbs’ address for our records so that we can send the cheque on to her.”

“You can pass the cheque to me, I will send it on to Linda.”

“But I do need...” The woman stopped mid-sentence. “Alright, but Mr Thompson will find her. I hope you realise that.”

“I am sure he will. But this is over. She has not gone into hiding she has gone away. Tell your boss to leave her alone.”

“Mr Thompson is quite insistent.”

“I am sure he is. Just tell him he has broken her. This was her life, that has gone. Susan killed her horse, destroyed her business and destroyed Linda.” Hilary stared at the woman. “Linda did nothing but try to help Susan. Please tell him to leave her alone now.”

The woman smiled coldly. “I will pass on your message.”

\*\*\*

“Here you are.” Hilary handed over the cheque. “Not much for all your work I am afraid but...” Linda smiled.

“It is enough, with what I got for my house and the horses.” She reached down and took out another cheque. “This is for you.” She pushed the piece of paper across the table.

“What?” Hilary picked up the cheque. “No... No, this is too much. You don’t have to do this.”

“Hilary I have left you with no job and you were there for me every step of the way.” She smiled. “Call it a gift. Please don’t insult me by refusing it.”

“Okay...” Hilary smiled, folding the cheque and putting it in her pocket. “Thank you.”

“So what will you do now?”

“I think I have had enough of working with horses. I start in an office typing pool next week.”

“You, a typist?” Linda giggled.

“Oh shut up!” Hilary smiled. “I learnt it at school. Mum wanted me to be able to do a proper



job!”

“I give it six months. You all cooped up in an office.” She paused. “Take the money, do something with your life. For me.”

“You’re right...” Hilary sighed. “I will miss the outdoor life. Perhaps I need to think about it.” She smiled. “I will have plenty of time to do that, back living at home with mum and dad. I just can’t wait for the ‘I told you so’. So what about you?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think I could face working with horses again right now but it is just about all I know. I have a bit of money, I will take some time and see what happens. It’s a big world out there.”

“It is.”

## Chapter 8

### Present Day

Kate paused, she could hear the happy chatter of the staff in the tack room, she had called them together to have a discussion and she was not looking forward to the reaction. She pushed open the door and stepped into the muggy warmth. “Hi guys!” The staff shared greetings, smiling and laughing. “I need to talk to you about Caroline.”

It was as if a switch had been thrown, the room became quiet, Kate was aware of the number of people staring at her. Jacqui cleared her throat. “No...”

“What? Sorry?”

“No Kate.” Jacqui paused, looking around the room to the nods of agreement. “We don’t want Caroline back. It is nothing personal but...” She stopped. “Kate she is not well, to be honest we are worried for you.”

“Jacqui...” Kate frowned. “She is our friend.”

“Kate, she was...” She paused. “She almost killed Adam. Please, take her back to the hospital.”

“She has been discharged.”

“I speak for all of us Kate. I am so sorry, we love Caroline dearly, but we don’t feel we can have her back at the yard. It is her or us.”

Kate sat down heavily. “Okay, I hear what you are saying, I am sorry but I can totally understand.” She looked up. “Will you at least visit her; she is terribly lonely when we are not there.”

Jacqui nodded. “Yes, of course.” She smiled. “We are not trying to be difficult. Of course, we will go and see her. She is still one of us, just not well at the moment. We know it is not her fault.”

“Thank you...” Kate stood up and left the room. As she closed the door, she heard the happy hubbub start again.

\*\*\*

“Hello...” Kate pushed open the front door. “I’ve been shopping; do you think you could help me bring it in?”

“Of course.” Caroline stood up and started to help Kate with the shopping bags. “Would you like me to cook tonight?”

“Oh that would be lovely.” Kate smiled, loading bags onto the kitchen worktop.

“To be honest, anything to keep me busy.” Caroline stopped. “Did you ask them?” Kate sighed. “Ah... That doesn’t sound good.”

“Caroline, they are just not ready yet.” She took her hand. “After what happened...” Kate paused. “Sorry, they were frightened, it will take some time. They have promised to come and see you. Let them build up the trust again.”

“Okay.” Caroline frowned.

“I know it is hard for you.”

\*\*\*

Dinner had been uneventful and soon afterwards, both Adam and Kate were stifling yawns. Adam glanced at his watch and announced that it was time for them to go to bed. "We will see you in the morning Caroline. Sleep well."

Unlike Adam and Kate, Caroline had done nothing all day, she could understand their exhaustion from rising early and working long hard hours in the open air. Caroline had sat on the sofa, bored gazing out of the window and wishing she could be back at the yard. She sighed.

Slumped on the sofa she was dulled by the soporific television programme, yawning and her eyelids heavy she dropped off to sleep.

It was pitch-black when she woke with a start, Susan smiled looking around the front room, this was not where she wanted to be, it was time to be proactive, it was time to go home and finish what she had started.

Moving carefully around the room Susan opened the front door quietly smirking, Adam and Kate could not stop her, Caroline was a weakling and had stepped aside easily.

It was only ten minutes later that Susan was standing silently on the main yard.

\*\*\*

The yard was waking up with grooms starting to feed the horses and muck out. Susan had kept herself out of sight but now felt the time was right to return. The back yard was quiet the horses had been fed but the staff had started mucking out on the main yard as was usual.

Susan walked across the silent yard towards the last stable in the block; she leant over the stable door and saw Magpie standing eating his feed. "Hello Magpie." The horse flung his head up, snorting wildly. "Oh you recognise me now do you?" Susan smiled. The horse dashed to the back of his stable.

"Oh now, now..." Susan reached for the stable door.

"Caroline? I wondered where you had ..." Adam stopped dead as he approached Susan.

"What? Who are you?" The girl was wearing the clothes Caroline had been wearing and at a distance looked similar but this was clearly not Caroline.

"Hello Adam..." Susan sneered, pulling the stable door open.

"What are you doing?"

"I thought I would see an old friend." Adam grabbed her arm, Susan snarled and pulled away walking towards Magpie. "Piss off Adam." She reached out towards the scared horse. Magpie rolled his eyes and snorted. "Come here you stupid beast." Susan grabbed a handful of Magpie's mane. The horse suddenly felt nothing but fear of this woman and span running towards the exit. Susan was knocked to the floor by Magpie's shoulder as he charged for freedom.

\*\*\*

Caroline was dazed, she was lying on a floor of wood shavings; it was one of the stables. She had no idea what she was doing her; she had been in Adam and Kate's front room. There were shouts in the distance, she was groggy and not clear what had happened. A shadow passed across the open stable door, she looked up and was about to greet Sarah when she started screaming. Caroline looked confused, Sarah had crouched down in the doorway and was sobbing and screaming for help.

Caroline struggled to pull herself to her feet, her shoulder and ribs were sore and she was dizzy. She eventually got up and walked towards the door.

She stopped dead, Sarah looked up at her. "You!" She growled. "What have you done? What the hell have you done?" She sobbed.

\*\*\*

Kate was finishing up in the feed shed when she heard the thunder of hooves on concrete; she stepped out and saw Magpie galloping towards the driveway. She was about to run after him when she heard screams. A chill ran through her as she followed the sound to the back yard. There was a cluster of staff around Magpie's stable.

"What is going on?" Kate tried to push her way to the front of cluster but was held back by Tracy, she was crying.

"No Kate... Wait for a moment."

"Please Tracy what has happened." She pushed her aside and suddenly saw what had happened. She gasped and found herself buckling at her knees. Tracy grabbed and supported her. "Oh God!" She knelt down.

Lying in the stable doorway was Adam. It was clear that he was badly injured, his head was covered in blood and there was a clear bloody hoof-print on the front of his shirt. Kate cradled his head. "Adam... Can you hear me?" She looked up. "For God's sake call an ambulance!" One of the staff ran back to the office.

Kate was struggling to remember her first aid and was fighting to find a pulse; she didn't know if she should be attempting CPR, she grabbed hold of Adam's still body desperately willing him to breath.

\*\*\*

Tracy heard the ambulance approaching and ran to the main yard to direct the paramedics. "This way!" The paramedics leapt from the ambulance and dashed onto the back yard.

"Hello madam, can you let us get in please." The first paramedic gently ushered Kate aside, she muttered and stood watching helplessly as they worked on Adam. The staff were consoling each other, sobbing and staring at Adam's still form, which lay on the concrete.

It was minutes later that the two paramedics looked at each other; the first stood slowly and approached Kate. "Miss?" Kate turned towards the paramedic. "I am so very sorry..."

It was if her world had collapsed, a sudden pain flooded Kate's body, she screamed and fought to grasp Adam, clutching at his body desperately willing him to open his eyes and recognise her again.

"Kate..." Tracy gently took Kate's shoulders. "Please, let them do what they have to do." She helped her to her feet as the paramedics gently lifted Adam's body onto a trolley.

Kate watched in silence as the ambulance pulled away.

\*\*\*

Tracy had asked the staff to take Kate back to the flat, to keep her comfortable. Kate had fought against them but soon realised that Adam had been taken away. The paramedics had made it clear that she should wait; there was nothing she could do at the hospital.

Tracy watched as Kate was led away. "I know you are there." Tracy stepped into the stable. Caroline walked slowly out of the shadows, head down her body visibly shaking.

Tracy lunged towards her smashing her fist into her face, Caroline crumpled, bleeding heavily from her nose. Tracy reached back and kicked her hard in the ribs, before falling to her knees and sobbing. "You killed him..."

"Tracy, no..." Caroline gasped. "I don't know what happened." She was cut short by another firm kick to her chest as Tracy lunged towards her again, she cried out in agony.

"I am calling the police. You won't get away with this bitch!" She turned on her heel and walked from the stable. Caroline remained on the floor, desperately trying to breath.

\*\*\*

Adam woke with a start, the pain in his chest took his breath away, and he staggered to his feet. Looking around he saw the back yard was silent and cast in half-light. Despite it being a warm summers evening he was chilled to the bone and shivered uncontrollably. He looked around, it was unnaturally quiet, it was then he noticed that the stables were empty. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind, which was fogged with confusion.

He staggered for a step before having to grab hold of an open stable door; he was feeling sick and dizzy. There was a sound and he looked up to see Jacqui walking down the yard. Her head down, she seemed to be crying. "Jac's what's up?" Jacqui ignored him, walking past as if he was not there. "Jac's what's wrong?" He watched as she turned the corner and disappeared out of sight. Adam shrugged, whatever had happened the staff were ignoring him. He sighed, the argument with Kate, his mind ran back to the morning, no doubt he would have to eat some major humble pie as his row with his wife had put everyone against him.

Adam followed Jacqui onto the main yard. He was confused; it seemed to be early evening. He was sure it had been morning, he grabbed his forehead, perhaps he had hit his head, and it would explain his headache. In the distance, he saw Kate looking across the yard.

"Kate..." Adam called across the yard. Kate looked up for a moment, looking confused. "Kate?" She was in conversation with Jacqui and seemed to be ignoring him. He sighed, he should face the situation and apologise. He walked across the yard, strangely limping, as he approached, he was surprised that Kate didn't look up. "Kate. Look, I am sorry. I was stupid." He stopped; Kate had not looked at him and was still talking to Jacqui about the horses. "Kate!" Adam reached out to grab her hand.

Adam fell back. He had reached for Kate but his hand had passed through hers as if it was not there. She had stopped speaking and was looking around looking nervous. "Kate?" Adam spoke but it was clear that Kate could not hear him she suddenly burst into tears, Jacqui hugged her. Adam tried to approach but found that he could not get close to her, as he tried to touch her he found that he could not. He gasped, looking down at his hands.

"You can't touch them..."

Adam span around, there was a young woman standing behind him. "What? Who are you?"

"Oh so many questions and you don't even know the answer to the obvious one." Susan sneered.

"What?" Adam paused, trying to stop Kate and Jacqui who had started to walk away. "Kate, Jacqui!"

"Oh and they can't hear you either."

"What?" Adam turned to face the girl. "What are you talking about?"

"You will find out, but let me save you some effort." She smiled. "You cannot speak Kate

again, and she can't see you."

"What?"

"Is that all you say?" Susan sneered. "What... What?" She aped Adam's voice.

"Why can't she see me?"

"How stupid are you?" She shook her head. "Duur! You're dead."

Adam felt the blood rush from his head, he blacked out and fell heavily to the floor.

\*\*\*

Kate woke from a sleeping tablet induced disturbed sleep, she reached over but Adam's side of the bed was empty, the realisation crept back, she had hoped for just one moment that she had been having a terrible nightmare, she sighed and pushed back the duvet. She had to move, there were things to do, she blinked back tears as she realised that all she would do now would be without Adam.

She dressed and drove to the yard; Jacqui stepped out of the office as she arrived. "Hi, how are you coping?" She paused. "You know you don't need to be here."

"What would I do Jacqui? Sit at home? No, I would rather be busy today try to keep my mind off things."

"Okay, well we are all here for you."

"Thanks Jacqui." Kate watched as she walked away across the yard. This was home but now the stables felt alien to her, she did not want to give up but she could not see a way to carry on working at a place which had been as much Adam's business as hers. Everything would be a memory of him, she sighed. What should she do? There was time to decide but her mind was pretty much made up, she looked over what had once been hers, soon she would look to speak with an estate agent and look to move on.

\*\*\*

Caroline looked up as the cell door opened. "Get up!" She dragged herself to her feet and followed the police officer back to the tiny interview room. She had been in here for many hours, going over and over again what had happened both in the kitchen at the stables flat and when Magpie had killed Adam.

"Tell me again what happened again with the horse?" The detective sipped at the bitter coffee before stirring in another sugar. "What were you doing in the stable?"

"I..." Caroline stuttered. She knew if she told them again that she didn't know they would just shout at her once more. "I wanted to see Magpie. I worked at the stables."

"Okay. You wanted to see the horse?" The officer shrugged. "And the next thing is Mr Bishop us dead, is this a coincidence after you tried to stab him just a few days before?"

"Sarge!" A woman poked her head around the interview room door.

"Interview suspended at thirteen twenty one hours." The police officer stood and left the room leaving Caroline alone. She glanced up at the CCTV camera in the corner of the room. She sighed, she had no idea what would happen to her, and they had spent hours interviewing her, going around in circles asking the same questions. Why had she stabbed Adam, what had she done to Magpie to make him act in the way he did. She couldn't answer those questions or any of the others and she could feel the increasing frustration from the officers. She looked up as the door opened; the officer stepped back into the room. "Well you are very lucky."

"I'm sorry?" Caroline looked up.

"I think you had something to do with that horse, they don't just go mad and kill people normally. And I know you stabbed Adam Bishop but it seems there were no witnesses. Well nobody who would say that you did anything but slip while carrying a knife." He paused. "I know you are guilty as hell but we just cannot get a case that will stick with the criminal prosecution service."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that you will get away with it." He slammed his fist on the desk. "But I will be watching you; if you get as much as a parking ticket I will drag you in and find something to arrest you for."

"I'm sorry." Caroline sobbed.

"Oh shut up and stop the waterworks." He snarled. "It doesn't impress me." He stood up quickly knocking his chair to the floor. "Get out of here, before I change my mind."

Caroline stood up slowly; the officer opened the interview room door and led her through the police station. "So I am free to go?"

"Yes, for now you are. Now get out!"

\*\*\*

Adam stared across the yard. He could see the staff were working, but there was none of the usual energy or laughter. The radio was silent and the grooms walked around slowly, some with tears in their eyes as they mucked out and swept the yard, even the horses seemed subdued obviously sensing the mood of the humans. He sighed, he had spent time trying to make contact with the staff, shouting and trying to get their attention but they clearly could not see him. He was trapped, invisible and silent. He turned and faced the woman who was standing behind him. Susan was sitting on a bale beside one of the stables.

"I wish you wouldn't waste your time, you are wearing me out with all you're running around." She picked her nails. "I told you, they can't see you."

"But why?" Adam stepped towards her.

"Oh, I have to get left with a stupid one!" She stood up grasping Adam's shoulders and walking him onto the back yard. She pointed down to some dark stains on the concrete.

"That." She gestured. "Is your blood. You were hit by Magpie and, well how can I put this." She paused. "You are dead."

"I can't be dead?"

"Why not?" Susan shrugged. "Are you someone special? Superhuman powers, invincible?"

"No, I need to be there for Kate."

"Oh boo hoo..." Susan laughed. "You need to be there for Kate!" Adam lunged at Susan grabbing her around the neck. "Oh what a big man!" She struggled free. "You can't strangle me."

"Why don't you just piss off and leave me alone?"

"Because I like seeing you suffer. I have been here for almost forty years and you are about the only entertainment I have had."

\*\*\*

Kate shrugged. "I am sorry; I have not been able to take this all in."

The funeral director smiled. "I can understand madam. This is a very difficult time for you. We can look after everything for you. I just need a few details."

"Okay." Kate took the form the man was proffering. "I just want it to be good for him. He deserves the very best." She grabbed for the tissues balled in her lap and dabbed her eyes.

\*\*\*

Jacqui looked up as Kate opened the car door. "Sorted?" Kate nodded. "Okay."

There were so few words she could say, she had offered to help Kate, and she could only imagine the pain she was going through. She started the engine and they headed slowly back towards Redbridge. They drove in silence until Jacqui pulled up outside Kate's cottage.

"Thank you Jacqui." She slipped out of the car, turning to walk to the cottage. She paused before she opened the door and stepped back to the car. "Jacqui." She paused, taking a deep breath. "I will come to the yard and tell everyone, but I need you to know. I can't carry on. After the funeral, I will be closing the stables and selling up. I can't face going back there again."

"I understand." Jacqui nodded.

"I will pay you and the staff right up to the end, but..." She stopped. "I just felt it was fair that you knew. I am so sorry."

"Please don't be sorry." Jacqui took Kate's hand. "I understand and I know the girls will."

\*\*\*

"So, who are you?" Adam walked towards Susan. It was the end of the third day; Susan had taunted him as he had continued to try to make contact with anyone on the yard. He soon realised that he could not leave the confines of the stables, any attempt to do so left him so sick that he could not go any further so it became clear he was trapped in this single place. The only person he could communicate with was the sullen woman who was standing before him so he felt he had better at least know something about her.

"Me?" Susan looked around theatrically. "Oh you are finally speaking to me? Oh I am honoured."

"Oh forget it!" Adam turned away.

"No... Please." Susan pleaded. "Okay, it's been a long time but I am Susan Thompson, I worked here a long time ago."

"And?"

"And what?"

"How did you die?"

"Oh wow! Straight in with the tough questions. You don't leave much time for niceties do you?" She laughed at Adam's obvious discomfort. "Look you asked." She snarled.

"I am sorry."

"Well get over it. I am not a nice person, but that is hardly my fault."

"Sorry?"

"People hated me, they deserved what they got."



"Why did they hate you?" Adam spoke softly.

"Why do you care? Piss off!" She turned and quickly walked away from him.

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"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." The priest looked up briefly glancing around the congregation. He was pleased to see that the pews were comparatively full, although Adam had not been a churchgoer it was clear that he has been respected in his own community.

Kate sat silently in the front pew, she wanted to scream and cry out but felt she had to be strong for the rest of the staff, strange how she felt such responsibility for her colleagues even though, in just a few days it would be all over. All too quickly, the service reached a conclusion, Adam's coffin rolled silently towards the hatch in the wall and the curtains slowly closed. So this was it, this was the silent ending as Adam's favourite music played in the background. Kate faced the inevitability; he would never be coming back. Kate's mother put her arm around her shoulder and embraced her, soon she would be returning to her childhood home tonight, no doubt sleeping in the bed she has spent so many years in before she had left home.

Everyone was charming and polite, with lovely things to say about Adam but it was an uncomfortable occasion it was generally agreed that no one should die that young. Kate looked up and saw Dr Newton approaching her. "Doctor." Kate smiled faintly.

"Kate. I am so very sorry for your loss." He sighed. "He was a good man." He paused. "Are you coping?"

"I'm having to." She looked up. "I am closing the stables."

"I had been told, I can understand that. Your mum told me you will be moving back home."

"In a couple of weeks, yes." She blinked. "I will miss the place." Sobs racked her body. Dr Newton embraced her tightly.

"Be strong lassie."

\*\*\*

Kate looked around the quiet yard, Now, a week after the funeral most of the horses had been sold and a for sale sign stood at the end of the driveway, she turned as she heard a vehicle approaching, it was a black Range Rover. The car pulled up beside Kate and a young woman stepped out. "Can I help you?"

"I am Jemma Thompson."

"Yes and?" Kate shrugged and started to walk away from the woman.

"Your husband owes me money and I want payment." Kate stopped dead in her tracks; she took a deep breath before turning around slowly. "Your husband took out a loan with me."

"My husband is dead."

"What a shame." Jemma spoke without emotion. "So now you own me money."

"As you will see." Kate gestured around the yard. "Most of the horses, tack and equipment has been sold. I am in the process of closing down this establishment."

"Well it seems I came at the right time for payment then."

Kate shrugged. "You know, there is one thing we have not sold as yet." She invited Jemma to walk with her; they stopped at a low wall. As Jemma glanced over the wall, Kate pushed her

hard. Jemma squealed as she fell, landing heavily in the sea of black mud that surrounded the muckheap. "Miss Thompson you may have as much shit as you like. Now piss off!"

Jemma slowly stood up, her body covered in stinking muck which dripped from her body. "You have not heard the last of me!"

"Oh, I really don't care. I have lost everything; you can have anything that is left." Kate paused for a moment. She looked around seeing a movement in the distance. "Adam?" She shook her head, mistaken before walking away.

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Adam smiled. "Well done Kate!"

\*\*\*

Adam watched the woman from across the yard. This had been what he had been doing most of the time since the yard had fallen silent. The horses were gone and he had watched, with tears in his eyes, the staff leaving for the last time.

Susan had tried to goad him, telling him how it was all over, how he had failed and how Kate would leave him soon. Adam had done something he had never done before; he spun around and punched the frustrating girl with a powerful right hook. She crashed to the concrete of the yard yelping and moaning that he had hurt her. He had not seen her for some days after that, but eventually she reappeared from out of the shadows from where she had been hiding.

Adam slowly walked towards her, his body leaving no shadow in the early afternoon sun. The woman looked up as he approached. "Okay, tell me, who are you?"

"Sorry?" She frowned. "Am I talking to you?" She reached up and rubbed her cheek, the bruising still visible.

"Just answer the question?"

"Forceful..." She smiled. "My name is Susan Thompson; I worked at this God-awful place until I had to leave."

"You had to leave?" Adam shook his head. "Well you are still here."

"Oh smarty pants." She smiled. "I killed the owner's horse and accidently killed myself. They thought it was suicide but it was just an accident." Susan paused. "Doesn't that shock you?"

"I think death has put me past being shocked. I am just ever so tired." Adam sighed. "So why did you kill her horse?"

"I didn't like her."

"And that's it? You didn't like her so you killed her horse and yourself?"

"It's not like that!"

"So what is it like?"

"Well..." Susan frowned. "Look she was nasty to me."

"In what way? Go on, how was she nasty to you?"

"She..." Susan stuttered. "Look she just wasn't very nice. She threatened to sack me."

"Why did she do that?"

"She just didn't like me!" Susan snapped.

"Really? And what did you do?"

"Me?" Susan looked shocked. "I may have played a few little pranks, but they were harmless."

"So she told you off for playing pranks on people and you killed her horse and committed suicide." Adam shook his head. "That sounds perfectly reasonable to me."

"It wasn't like that... You weren't there..." Susan whined.

"No... Thank goodness for that." Adam walked away.

"Wait... No... You don't understand!" Susan stamped her foot, shouting after him.

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Linda shuddered as she stepped out of the Land Rover; she had offered to come back to the stables one last time with Kate. It was to be the last time for both of them as the land had been sold and would soon become a housing estate and all memories of the yard would be lost forever. Kate had called Linda to tell her the fate of what had once been her life, it meant closure for them both but there was sadness also. Linda looked across the main yard, the stables were empty but it still brought back painful memories even forty years on.

"Are you okay?" Kate stepped beside Linda.

"I could ask you the same. We both lost people here." She gulped. "I have not seen this place in so many years but I can still feel it as if it was yesterday."

Kate nodded, she knew exactly what she meant, she could still see the ambulance leaving the yard carrying away her husband, the many happy years and so many memories were pushed back but she still felt that some part of Adam was still here, she felt some guilt for selling up and allowing the stables to be demolished but there was nothing for her here now, this visit was as much to confirm that as anything else. She walked across the yard and leaned on one of the stable doors.

"Tell me about her." Kate paused. "What was her name again?"

"Susan." Linda sighed. "She was a troubled girl, her father owned this land and so had a hold over me. He was a bullyboy and she was not much better, it was clear that she was here to get out from under his feet and she had to be looked after. I was just her baby-sitter. She was a good rider and, when she wanted to she could be a nice person but so much of the time, she was just a bitch. I never knew what was wrong with her; she was destructive, rude, abusive and just nasty. The fights I had with the rest of my staff, they hated her and I spent my time defending her first because of the stables but more and more it was for her. I just felt sorry for her, it was clear that she didn't know how to act, she had obviously been bullied all her life and didn't know how else to act. I tried to calm my staff, I defended her and tried everything I could to save her, but she threw everything I did back in my face."

"So what happened?"

"It just kept getting worse. I had tried everything." Linda looked up. "I cried myself to sleep almost every night; I didn't know what I could do. Some of my staff took matters into their own hands and attacked her." Linda gulped. "They hurt her, that was terrible but what happened next was worse. I went to see her father, trying to apologise and he threatened me. Then the girl who had led the attack on Susan had an accident."

"An accident?" Kate shrugged. "Do I guess by how you said that you don't believe it was an accident?"

"Her horse's girth was cut and she was seriously injured, she could hardly walk afterwards, it ruined her life. I had to get rid of Susan."

"You think she had done it?"

"I knew she had, she told me she had done it. Of course, the police said it was just an accident, but the Thompson family had that sort of control over them. I sacked her, I just had to and so that night she went out and poisoned my horse. I went into the stable the next morning and found them both dead."

"What?" Kate gasped

"She killed herself also. It was the final punishment, I am sure she knew what would happen, the next thing I knew I woke up in the foundation pit for a motorway bridge, if the weather had not been so bad that day I would still be there. So she had her way. She took away everything I had, she destroyed me."

"I am so sorry." Kate embraced her.

"I just wish I could have stopped her, she was so young and for her to kill herself." Linda sobbed. "I would have done anything to stop her doing that. I had tried everything to help her; all I wanted was to make her better. I really thought that she could change. How stupid was I?" Linda shrugged. "But it was impossible, over the last forty years it was almost like I lost a daughter. I would have done anything at all."

"But with all she did?"

"Can you imagine how I feel? I failed that young lady, I thought that I could have helped her stopped what eventually happened." Linda sniffed. "I have spent years wondering what I could have done differently. It never leaves me, and that is why I never come back to here and I fought to keep my daughter away but I suppose fate brought her here, I never told her what had happened to me her; it had been so long ago. Now it is over, I can't say I will be sad to see this place knocked down. Sorry Kate."

"No I can understand." Kate sighed. "I will be sad to see it gone, but I suppose life has to go on."

Adam watched as Kate as she walked across the yard and stood beside her. Kate's only reaction was to zip her jacket up against the cold and to look nervously around.

"I know you are here Adam." Kate spoke aloud. He spun around standing before her. "I have to leave now, it's all over. I love you and will miss you always." She wiped her eyes. "Thank you for everything, you were an amazing man." She gulped. "Come on Linda, let's go."

Adam reached for her, trying to stop her but his hand just passed through her body, she paused, shuddering. "I love you Kate." He watched as she slipped behind the wheel of the old Land Rover but was helpless as she drove away, oblivious to his presence. Adam fell to his knees sobbing.

Susan looked on. She had listened to all that Katherine had said, for the first time pain reached her heart, Linda had tried to save her. She suddenly did not know what to think, she can't have got her life this wrong? Doubt started to engulf her. Looking across the yard she saw Adam weeping, she had caused this. She pushed the idea from her mind.

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"You know that you won't see Kate again." Susan sneered. "She will not come back, they never do. People leave here and don't return."

"You never left." Adam shook his head.

"I never had a chance." She snapped. "I was trapped here."

"You trapped yourself. I heard what Linda said, she tried to help you, and it didn't sound like someone who hated you. To be honest you sounded like a spoilt brat who just did nothing by made trouble, and then, when you had gone too far, when she had no choice you threw a tantrum and ended up killing yourself."

"Shut up! Shut up!" Susan wailed. "You don't know... How could you know what happened?"

"I can see what happened. You ruined Linda's life; in fact, you ruined all of their lives. And then Caroline, what did you do to her?" Adam snarled, Susan looked away. "I don't know what happened but I am guessing that you are the reason that I am here and why Kate's life has been ruined."

"They hated me..."

"You heard Linda when she was here with Kate, she cried herself to sleep, and she was desperate to help you. I'll say it again it does not sound like hate to me."

"I was bullied all my life, it wasn't my fault!"

"So whose fault was it?" Adam sighed. "You have control over your destiny, I was bullied, it was scary and frightening but I didn't decide just to hurt the people around me, in the end I turned to them and they helped me. You can blame nobody anyone else, your life is your own." Adam grabbed hold of Susan's hand. "But of course you threw your life away. You were the silly girl who didn't grow up; you never had time to learn. How many friends did you have?"

"I never had any friends, who would be my friend?" She frowned. "I just pushed people away."

"I'll be your friend." Adam smiled.

"What?" Susan gasped. "You don't mean that!"

"Why not. It seems that it will just be you and me. I don't hold grudges, life is too short." Adam paused. "Well it was too short."

"But I killed you?"

"Magpie killed me, it was an accident."

"Magpie spooked when he saw me. I saw it all happen; it was almost as if it was in slow motion. I saw him hit you..." She stopped. "Sorry, it was horrible and then you were here. I knew what had happened, and I realised that I had done it"

"What? How did he see you?"

"It had started sometime before, it was Caroline, she was the key. I have always had a link with her; I am guessing it is because she was Linda's daughter. But a couple of months ago I suddenly found myself in her dreams."

"In Caroline's dreams?"

"I know it sounds weird, but this night I was just suddenly there, she was having a dream about the Olympics and I was just suddenly there. Of course, I turned everything bad, the dream became a nightmare and the worse it was the more I was able to control Caroline to the point I had total control over her, even when she was awake. So of course I had a field day, I played stupid pranks and hurt people." Susan suddenly stopped and fell to her knees. "Oh God I hurt you! Oh, I am sorry. I was so stupid."

"I forgive you." Adam smiled.

"How the hell can you just forgive me? Look at what I did!" She sobbed. "I destroyed everything, I hurt so many people. Oh God... How stupid was I?"

"How can I forgive you?" Adam crouched down. "You did nothing wrong, what happened to me was an accident."

"It was an accident caused by me..." She gulped. "I killed you..." Her voice faded away. "I did it all. I hurt people; I killed Linda's horse, the pain and suffering I caused." She collapsed onto the yard sobbing.

"Do you know why?"

"Why?" Susan glanced up. "If I knew that..." She shook her head. "I was stupid, I was a spoilt brat who had always had her own way and I was rebelling in the only way I thought I could." Suddenly the words spilled from her, as if a dam had been breached. "I was just trying to hurt people because I had been hurt myself, I thought that would help. It just made things worse." She sighed. "I have seen the pain I caused, the agony, lives ruined. Good people hurt because of me. I regret that." She stopped and looked towards Adam. "I never regretted my death. I didn't understand it, but I never regretted it, but now." She stopped, looking down at the floor. "The hurt I caused, I regret that. I ruined so many lives selfishly. I would give anything for them to have never met me, for me to have never caused them that agony." She took a deep breath, sitting quietly now on the cold concrete. "I wasted my life, I squandered it and I deserve all I got, but none of the people I hurt did. I am so sorry for what I did to them. Perhaps if I had been a better person, or better still had never existed..." She sighed. "But I am dead already; it is not like I can kill myself again, that didn't work. Even when I was dead I still caused misery to people."

"But you understand now what you did?" Adam smiled faintly.

"Yes." She stood up facing Adam. "I do. I suddenly have the clarity I needed all those years ago. Stupid isn't it, suddenly I get it and it is too late to stop the damage... Thank you Adam!" She hugged him. "Why could I not be like you?"

"You could have been. Too late now I guess." Adam sighed. "I am sure you could have been a nice person if you tried. It is just a shame that you took this long to open your eyes. Pity, all a bit late." Adam looked at Susan who was sobbing and shaking. "Come here." He embraced her firmly.

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Caroline glanced around; the moonlight cast shadows across the silent buildings. She had tried everything, having left the police station over a month ago, she had done nothing but think. She had nowhere to go, the stables had been sold and was soon to be demolished, she could not go back to Kate, it was clear she hated her after what has happened and she had every right to do so. She had spent a month wandering, some time in cheap bed and breakfasts until her money had started to dwindle and then sleeping rough in old farm buildings. There was nothing left of her life, she had nowhere to go and nothing to do. She could apply for a job but nobody would employ her in Devon and it would not be long before her poor reputation leached around the small world that was the horse industry and she knew nothing else that she could do. It had not helped that she had left the stables that night only with the clothes she stood up in, she had so little and now was a dishevelled mess.

This would be the last time she would return to the stables, she had to come back to do what she had to do. Her mind had been made up there was nothing she could do.

Adam watched as a shadow crossed the yard, he looked up and saw Caroline approaching.

"Caroline?"

Caroline paused, she was on-edge and had every right to be, she looked around, and the yard was deserted and had been for some time. She shrugged her shoulders and carried on walking. Soon she was at the tack room; the door was hanging off its hinges and creaked as she pushed it open. The saddles and bridles were long gone; all that was left in the room were a few empty racks and an old chair in the corner of the room. Caroline approached the chair and sat down. Adam stepped into the room; Caroline ignored him, unaware that he was watching her.

She opened her backpack, she took out a small brown bottle and some sheets of paper, she took a final look over the letter and sealed it in an envelope before placing it on an empty saddle rack. She took another, final look around the room before unscrewing the cap of the bottle; she waited for a moment, thinking, considering what she should do before tipping the contents into her mouth and swallowing hard. The liquid burned her throat; she gasped and clutched at her stomach allowing the bottle to drop to the ground. Caroline writhed in agony, slipping from the chair onto the floor.

Adam knelt down beside her, he tried to hold her, to help but he could not. He glanced at the bottle and read the clear warning that the contents were poisonous. "No... Caroline No!"

Caroline looked up. "Adam?" She looked around, screaming out in pain. It was clear that the poison was fast acting and that Caroline had swallowed a massive amount. Adam stood up quickly and ran onto the yard.

"Susan!" He ran across the yard. "Susan where are you?"

Susan appeared from one of the empty stables. "What do you want? I know I don't sleep but I do need some quiet time."

"Susan it's Caroline."

"I've told you, I am sorry. I shouldn't have done it."

"No... Caroline is here"

"Oh goody, a family reunion."

"No. Susan she is killing herself. She has just swallowed a bottle of poison."

"No... It's not my fault" Susan started to walk away. "I didn't kill her."

"Susan please. I need you."

"What?"

"Susan, you told me you controlled Caroline. I need you to do it again."

"No Adam." She cried. "I can't do it!"

"If you don't she will die and it will be your fault!" Adam grabbed Susan. "Please help her."

Susan sighed and followed Adam across the yard, she saw Caroline writhing on the tack room floor. She stalled and turned trying to push against Adam. "No... I can't do it!"

"Susan... Please try for me. Even if you fail, if you have tried I will stand beside you as a friend."

"Okay..." Susan knelt down and took Caroline's hand. Adam blinked as he watched Susan fade before him. Caroline suddenly jolted and staggered to her feet. "Oh God! The pain Adam!"

"Please try, we need to get help."

Caroline staggered and tried to walk across the tack room, but soon collapsed. "I can't move, the poison is too strong." She fell over the backpack and a mobile phone fell out of one of the pockets.

"There!" Adam clapped. "Call an ambulance."

"How?"

"The phone..." Adam pointed to the mobile phone. "This, just dial 999."

Caroline grasped the phone and fumbled to dial the emergency services. She gasped with pain but was just able to give the location and ask for an ambulance before collapsing. Adam was left in silence for what felt like hours, Caroline was still, her breathing ragged and shallow.

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The paramedics approached the yard. "Look this is a deserted location. Let's call it in as a hoax."

"No, let's have a quick look around first." They approached the tack room, quickening their pace when they saw the light of Caroline's torch. They burst into the room. "Here she is." The paramedic quickly checked over Caroline. "She is in cardiac arrest, get the defib." They ripped her shirt open and attached the pads before activating the unit. Caroline's body stiffened and leapt before slumping silent again. They tried once more, her body jerked before the machine started a slow bleep. "We have a pulse."

"Adam?" Caroline whispered, she smiled faintly. "Is that you Adam?" She reached out for Adam's hand. "Thank you Adam."

"We're losing her. Let's move quickly."

The paramedics loaded Caroline in the ambulance and drove rapidly away. Adam was left alone, standing on the yard.

\*\*\*

Caroline coughed, slowly opening her eyes. She was standing on the main yard; it was a warm sunny day. She looked around, the horses were hanging their heads over the stable doors and there was the sound of distant activity.

"Hello." The woman was furtive; she looked around her, avoiding Caroline's eye contact.

"Hello, who are you? Do I know you?"

"No... I don't think you know me. But I need to say sorry."

"Sorry?" Caroline shrugged. "What do you mean?"

"I hurt you. I caused you a lot of pain. I am so very sorry." Susan took Caroline's hand.

"But the pain is over now." Caroline smiled. "I forgive you." As Susan sobbed Caroline stepped towards her and hugged her. "There, there. Come on, let's have some lunch. It's a lovely day."

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Adam was alone.

The yard was silent since Susan and Caroline had left. He walked the silent yard contemplating what had happened. All he wanted to know was if he had managed to save



Caroline.

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"Caroline? Come on beautiful, open your eyes." Linda sat at her bedside, she was attached to a series of machines that beeped and hissed as they kept her alive. It had been almost a month that she had been in a coma. Linda looked up, as there was a cough, Caroline spluttered and slowly opened her eyes. "Caroline?" Linda leapt up; calling for a nurse and helping her daughter remove the oxygen mask.

"Mum?" Caroline's voice was rasping and quiet.

"Shh... Don't try to speak."

Over the next few hours Caroline came back to full consciousness and was able to start understanding what had happened to her, she smiled as Kate joined her mother beside her bed.

"Caroline... Oh I am so pleased to see you are okay." Kate smiled, hugging her frail body. "You scared us!"

"I scared myself. I am so sorry mum!" She blinked and gulped. "I was stupid, I am so sorry."

"Please, Caroline Lets not dwell on what happened."

"Susan helped me. She saved my life."

"Sorry Caroline?" Linda smiled.

"Susan... She saved my life. It was her who called the ambulance. She has been with me, looking after me."

"Who are you talking about dear?"

"You know her mum." Caroline smiled. "She used to work with her, years ago. Susan Thompson I think she said her name was."

Linda's cup of tea slipped from her fingers and smashed on the floor.

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Linda paced the relative's room. "Calm down Linda, what's wrong?"

"Kate, I never told her anything about those times. I certainly didn't tell her about Susan, I never mentioned her name, and now my daughter wakes from a coma saying that she saved her life!"

"She may have heard you talk about her, you must have mentioned it."

"Kate, I promise you... I would never say her name. It would have killed me to do so,"

Kate shrugged. "I can't fathom it."

"And what she said about Adam."

Kate froze. "I know... I don't know what to think about that either."

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"Adam?"

Adam looked up; he had become used to the silence and solitude. "Susan?" He stepped forward and embraced her. "I didn't think you would come back."

"I had to look after Caroline." She shrugged as she registered Adam's surprise. "Yes me!" She

smiled. "She was in a coma, a dream state, I stayed with her, I tried to help her. I just had to make sure that she okay, keep her strong."

"Wow!" Adam smiled. "What has happened to you Susan?"

"I had time to think. I couldn't leave Caroline there like that. She was helpless, I just made sure she was safe and gave her happy dreams."

"Happy dreams?"

"Well, it has been a long time since I rode a horse or had a dream of my own."

"How did it feel?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is nice better than nasty?"

Susan smiled warmly.

## Chapter 9

The evening was cool, Adam and Susan were sitting outside one of the empty stables. "I wonder what will happen when this is all demolished."

"I guess that we will still be here, but just be sitting on a housing estate. I guess it will be busier." Adam smiled. "You never know..." He suddenly stopped speaking. "What the hell?" The scene around them was changing; the empty yard was fading, and becoming faint before snapping back into vision. Now the yard was still dark but there were faint sounds of movement and there were horses visible over stable doors.

"Adam, what is happening?"

"I don't know." Adam looked around; this is not the yard, as I knew it.

"It is my yard." Susan gasped. "Oh God this is where I worked. No... What is happening?" Susan ran across the yard to the rear block of stables, she paused at the middle loose box and looked over the door, inside was a piebald cob. "Magpie?" A noise made her look up, there was a woman walking towards them.

"Susan. That is... Well, that is you?" Adam stuttered.

"It is..." Susan watched as she walked towards Magpie's stable, she had an apple in her hand. "Adam, no... This is where it starts." She cried out. "Don't make me watch this again!" Susan reached out for herself. The girl stopped dead.

"Who's there?" She glanced around.

Susan leapt forward intending to rugby tackle the girl, trying desperately to stop the inevitable happening. She hit the girl hard doubling her over. Adam watched as she hit her and seemingly merged with her, there was a second where there were two Susan's and then just one standing before him smiling.

"Oh God!" Susan gasped. "This is me! Adam, this is me!"

"You mean?"

"I can walk away." Susan stepped back from the stable. "I don't have to cause it all." She paused, staring at the apple in her hand. "There is just one thing I have to do." She placed the apple to her lips and took a bite, swallowing quickly.

"Susan no!" Adam tried to grab for the apple but his hand went right through. "What have you done?"

"Isn't it obvious? I am stopping this." She paused. "I have to do this Adam. I am toxic."

"But you don't have to be. You could be better."

"What if I wasn't?" She smiled. "I have lived, I saw what I did. This is for the..." She gasped, clutching her stomach. "Oh oww! I have something I must do."

"What?"

"I have to say sorry to Linda. I really hurt her." She paused. "Thank you Adam. I owe you my life."

"Thank you friend." Adam embraced her. "Just please do one thing."

"Anything."

"Tell Kate I love her..." Adam faded completely.

"Adam..!" Susan cried out as she was alone on the yard, the pain in her stomach drove her on as she staggered to the office.

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The shrill ringing of the telephone bell cut through Linda's sleep, she lifted her head and glanced at the clock. "Two in the morning. Who on earth is calling me now?" Pulling back the blankets, she left the warmth of her bed and stumbled downstairs before grabbing the telephone receiver. "Hello..." Her heart sank when she heard Susan at the other end. "What the hell are you doing calling me at this time of the night?" She paused listening. "What do you mean, you are going? Look could this not have waited until the morning? What?" Linda stopped. "Sorry?" The word had caught her by surprise, Susan had never said sorry; she didn't think it had been in her vocabulary. "Sorry for what?" Susan started to gabble, pleading with Linda for forgiveness before she left. "Susan, you are making no sense, please go back to bed we can talk in the morning..." There was a gasp and a sigh at the end of the line before the receiver clattered heavily to the floor. "Susan? Susan!"

Linda snarled to herself as she plunged her feet into cold boots, this was no doubt one of Susan's stupid pranks. However, something was stopping her from just ignoring her this time, something about the way she had spoken, the way she had seemed to be telling the truth. She shook her head, she was no doubt being duped, but if she was, my goodness Susan would get it.

Linda drove slowly to the yard, yawning as she opened the door of her old car and stepped out into the cold. The office lights were on but otherwise there was no sign of life. Linda huffed and pushed the door open. "Look Susan, if you are taking the piss out of me..." She cut her words short as she saw Susan lying on the floor beside the desk. "Oh my God!" She knelt down beside her. "Are you okay?" Her breathing was laboured and her pulse weak. Linda stood up. On the desk, there was an open bottle of poison. She grabbed for the phone and quickly called 999.

Adam watched unseen as Linda waited for the ambulance to arrive, he watched as Susan was placed on a stretcher. He heard that her pulse had become weaker.

"Adam..." Susan tried to sit up but was pushed back down. "Adam. I said sorry. It's okay now!"

"Who is she talking to?" Linda looked around.

"She is hallucinating." The ambulance man frowned. "It's the poison acting on her body."

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Susan slowly opened her eyes. The light was painfully bright as she looked around.

"Susan?" The voice faded into her consciousness. She looked around, slightly disappointed that her afterlife seemed to look like a hospital ward. "Susan, how are you feeling?" Susan looked across and saw Linda sitting beside her bed; she was dressed in pyjamas and a ratty dressing gown.

"Linda?"

"Oh God you're alive!" She burst into tears. "I am so glad. I am sorry, if I drove you to this..."

Susan held out her hand grasping Linda's tightly. "No..." Her voice was rasping, her mouth dry. "No... I owe you everything." She gulped, blinking tears from her eyes. "I am so sorry for what I did to you, to all of you. None of you deserved it, you tried to treat me like a friend and I just hurt you." She sobbed, Linda comforted her gently. "I never had any friends and this is how I treated you..."

Linda wiped her eyes. "You need to rest; we can talk about this later."

"No..." Susan paused. "I have waited so many years to apologise to you. I need to try to explain why I did what I did..." Susan sat up in bed and talked. She spoke for hours, talking about impossible things. Linda listened silently taking in every word.

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"She's asleep now." Linda looked towards Hilary who had just walked onto the ward. "Oh you've brought me some fresh clothes, thanks!" Linda took the bag. "She is going to be okay..." Linda paused. "She asked for my forgiveness for all she had done, she said she was sorry for everything."

"And you believed her?" Hilary laughed.

"I really think she meant it Hil's"

"Well, I think she had better prove it. It's all too easy to just say sorry."

Susan listened as they spoke, feigning sleep. It was true; she needed to prove that her intentions were true.

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The day had gone slowly, Linda had promised that she would visit Susan again and had only found out that she had discharged herself when she called the hospital during the afternoon to check visiting times. She was sure that she had gone for good, she had been so keen to apologise and seemed genuinely shy of returning to the yard for fear of meeting people she had previously upset.

Linda could not fathom the change in Susan who the day before had been bullish and nasty but had then tried to take her own life and seemed to be atoning for her behaviour. She had kept saying that she had spent years before she realised that she was being so cruel to everyone. A sudden thought crossed her mind, perhaps she had tried to commit suicide again, and perhaps she had succeeded. In a panic, Linda stood up, unsure what to do or where to go. She picked up the telephone to call the police when she saw a car speeding up the driveway. She recognised the driver and dropped the receiver in fear.

Harry Thompson stepped from his car and flung open the door of the office before approaching Linda. His face was red and he snarled for her to sit down. She slumped heavily in the office chair. Harry stood in front of her.

"I don't know what the hell you did to my daughter!" Linda started to speak. "Shut up and listen to me!" He flung an envelope down on the desk. "I am just glad that I will now on longer have to spend any more time in your company and that our professional relationship is over." He stepped towards Linda, leaning down so she could feel his hot breath on her cheek. "I don't ever want to hear from you again!" He stood quickly pulling the door open, he turned before he left the office. "Don't cross me young lady. I told you before, nobody would miss you and I would take pleasure in dealing with you personally. So don't let our paths cross again Miss Gibbs." He stepped from the office and back into his car leaving in a spray of gravel leaving Linda flustered and sobbing alone in the office.

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Hilary had spent the afternoon consoling Linda; she was incoherent but refused to go home. She believed that she had caused Susan's death and now Harry Thompson had served her eviction and had threatened her life.

It was now dark and shadows crept around the hedgerows, she was sure she saw a movement and looked up to see a lone person walking slowly up the driveway dragging a heavy suitcase. Hilary squinted before gasping. "It's Susan!"

"I know, it is all about Susan." Linda cried.

"No, she is outside." Hilary opened the door and Susan stepped sheepishly into the office.

"Hello..." She looked down avoiding eye contact.

"You have a nerve showing your face here!" Hilary snarled.

"Hil's please." Linda wiped her eyes. "You are alive, we were worried."

"Linda she has made her father kick you out! Stop being so damn nice!"

Susan reached down and picked up the brown envelope that was still sitting, unopened on the desk. She passed it to Hilary. "Open it. Go on."

Hilary tore open the envelope dragging out the papers inside. She paused for a moment reading them before gasping and letting them flutter to the ground. "You..."

Susan smiled faintly. "I had to prove myself." She turned to Hilary. "I heard you this morning in the hospital." Hilary shrugged, embarrassed. Susan waved her hand at her mumbled apologies. "You are right; I was not to be trusted." She smiled. "I hope this proves it." She reached down collecting the papers and placing them in front of Linda.

"What is this?" Linda looked puzzled, reading aloud. "Transfer of ownership. Land at Redbridge, Dorset including stables and outbuildings and associated accommodation and cottage on Mill Street, Redbridge. Transferred from Thompson Construction Limited to..." Linda stopped dead. "This is some joke..."

"No, it isn't a joke." Susan smiled. "It's yours Linda. It is the only way I could think to apologise."

"But, but..." Linda stammered. "How?"

"I persuaded my father." Susan looked down. Hilary gasped as Susan's hair fell away from her face revealing a black eye and a number of cuts and bruises. "I do have a favour to ask."

"What, anything?"

"I need a job." She paused. "You have every right to say no. Tell me to piss off. But I sort of need somewhere to live and some way to get money." She held her chin up. "My father doesn't have a daughter now. He made that clear."

## Chapter 10

"Hello..." Hilary stepped gently towards the person waiting in the shadows. "Are you okay?"

Susan turned round. "Yes..." She sighed.

"How long have you been out here?" Hilary waited knowing the answer. She had watched Susan waiting in the darkness every night for the month since she had returned to the yard. Susan shrugged.

"He's not here..." Susan wiped her eyes.

"Who?" Hilary stepped towards Susan, putting her arm around her shoulders.

"You wouldn't understand." Susan sobbed.

"Try me..." Hilary smiled. "Let's go somewhere warm." Hilary led the way to the tack room, unlocking the door and turning on the gas heater.

They sat for many hours as Susan told her story and how she was waiting for Adam. Hilary smiled. She didn't know how to reconcile the story, it seemed to be too much to be an hallucination or some bad dream.

"I don't think you have to wait for him here anymore." Hilary finally spoke. "If what you tell me is true, he would have wanted you to live your life, be better."

Susan looked across sadly to Hilary. "I think you are right..." She paused. "I would have just liked to say goodbye."

# Chapter 11

## Present Day

Kate woke alone and went downstairs, quickly showering while the kettle boiled. She stood beside the Aga drinking coffee from a chipped pink mug staring at the matching blue mug which hung from a hook under one of the kitchen units. She drained her coffee, placing the mug in the sink before getting dressed and stepping out into the crisp morning.

It took some minutes to scrape the ice off the windscreen of the Land Rover and almost as long to coax the cold engine into life, but soon enough she was on her way. The yard was quiet as she stepped from the car and on towards the stables. It was only now that she allowed the thought of Adam not being beside her to enter her mind.

Ramming her gloved hands into her pockets she walked across to the back yard, there she approached Magpie's stable and glanced in over the stable door. Magpie huffed at her and stood up stretching his limbs before approaching the door nuzzling in her pockets for mints. "You daft old thing." She patted his neck. "You seem to be fine now..." She slipped the bolt across and opened the door, closing it quietly behind her. "You know I just can't sleep alone..." She leant into the horse's shoulder, hugging his neck. Pushing Magpie out of the way she approached the back of the stable. "But I see someone has no such trouble." Kate knelt down on the straw and reached over to the sleeping bag. "Wakey, wakey!"

Adam blinked, opening his eyes. "Oh, hello..." He sounded groggy.

"Now you were supposed to be keeping an eye on Magpie, not sleeping!" Kate slapped his shoulder playfully. "I see he is okay now."

"Yes, I walked him for most of the night." Adam dragged his arm from the sleeping bag glancing at his watch. "He settled about an hour ago and I thought I would get some sleep."

"Well, it is early..." Kate winked, unzipping the sleeping bag. "I don't suppose there is room in that bag for two?" She slipped into the sleeping bag beside him.

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Caroline heard the giggling as she started to bring round the feeds. She leaned over the stable door. "Oh getting up to hanky-panky are we!"

Kate laughed. "Well for one, he is my husband. And..." She struggled to turn around in the zipped up bag. "Secondly, it is impossible to do anything in here. Could you help us, I think the zip is stuck!"

Caroline laughed, dropping the feed bowl in front of Magpie and relocking the door.

"Caroline..." Kate called out. "Caroline!"

Caroline laughed as she walked back down the yard, she would let them free eventually?. But she was sure they would appreciate some time together.

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Adam had volunteered to carry out the late check, he relished the opportunity to have some quiet time alone on the yard. The evening was cold and his breath clouded the air before him as he checked each of the horses. As he approached the last stables he heard footsteps behind



him. He turned around and saw an older woman walking across the yard towards him.

"Hello, can I help you?"

"I do hope so." The woman smiled warmly.

Adam gasped. "Susan?" He stepped towards the woman, she was older than he had remembered, her once red hair was grey and her face was lined but her voice was as strong as he had remembered her. He rushed forward and embraced her.

"Hello Adam?." She smiled. "I have waited a long time to see you again." She chuckled. "I am so pleased to see that you are here. I wasn't sure after..." She stopped. "Well after what had happened." She paused. "I waited for you, in case you were..."

"No..." Adam sighed. "It was strange, as if it had not happened. I had no idea what might happen or even if I was alive?. But I stepped in Kate said hello and?." He looked up. "I am sure you can guess. I was alive and well, Caroline was normal." He laughed. "And you were the world's leading event rider!"

Susan blushed. "That was some years ago now..."

"But you won the Olympics, team and individual gold - twice. You are famous..." He voice faded away. "And..."

"Yes..."

"And I knew all about it?." Adam smiled. "When I went back to Kate I knew that you had done so well, I remembered watching you on the telly when you won gold in Sydney. It was all there." He gulped. "I was very proud of you! I don't know how that could even happen?"

"Well you were a bit harder to find Mr Bishop. At least until you were born." She laughed. "I have been watching you, at a distance for many years. I don't know that can have happened either. I didn't know if you would even know who I was, well at least until now."

"It's been a day for me..."

"Almost forty years..." She shrugged. "But as you say, I kept busy. Linda gave me Magpie, he was the first horse I rode competitively on, she taught me everything."

"Anyway, I have something for you." She reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out an envelope. "You know you were the only person I was not able to say sorry to."

"You know you don't have to say sorry to me..."

Susan smiled. "Never the less. I appreciate all you did for me." She glanced at her watch. "I have to go. Thank you Adam."

"Please stay, Kate would love to meet you."

"I would love to, but I have to be somewhere." She smiled. "I am sure you understand. Goodbye Adam..."

Adam embraced her tightly. "Thank you, good bye..." She stepped back and walked back down the yard into the shadows. Adam paused for a moment before following her, he turned the corner back onto the main yard, it was quiet and he was alone. He shrugged his shoulders and walked back to his car.

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"Hello..." Kate called out from the kitchen. "Good timing I am just putting dinner on the table."

Adam walked into the kitchen, hugging and kissing Kate. "Hi there. You would never guess who I have just met." He paused. "Susan Thompson".

"Susan Thompson the Olympic rider?" Kate laughed. "Stop lying!"

"The very same!" Adam smiled.

"Where?"

"At the yard."

"Wait, you met one of the most famous show jumpers in the world at our stables. What was she doing there?"

"She was there to see me.." Adam paused, noticing Kate's surprise. "We met many years ago."

"You never told me..."

"Ahh..." Adam frowned. "I will tell you the story someday..."

"So what did she say?"

"Very little. She wanted to say thank you and give me this." He pulled out the envelope and handed it to Kate.

"Thank you?" Kate laughed. "You dark horse, what has she to thank you for." She tore open the envelop pulling out a slip of paper. She looked in the envelop but otherwise it was empty. She turned over the paper, looking confused. "Is this all she gave you?"

Adam nodded.

"An old lottery ticket?" Kate frowned. "It is from last week." She paused and opened the lid of the kitchen bin.

"No..." Adam smiled. "Last week you say?" He took the ticket from Kate and walked into the sitting room.

"What are you doing?"

Adam handed her the ticket and opened the lid of the laptop. "Will you just check it for me." He passed Kate the laptop and walked back into the kitchen. He was just taking a bottle of wine from the fridge when he heard Kate's shouts. He smiled and stepped back into the sitting room. Kate was pale, sitting bolt upright on the sofa. "What's up?"

"T..t..the ticket." Kate stuttered.

"Yes?" Adam smiled.

"It's a..." She stopped pushing the laptop into Adam's hands. He looked at the screen and then back down to the ticket. His heart beat faster as he checked the six numbers each one matching.

"Oh..." He gasped sitting down heavily.

"We've won the lottery..." Kate sobbed, she embraced Adam.

The television was on in the background, the early evening news speaking quietly to the room but its occupants were ignoring the story.

"...she had been credited with making equestrian sports popular for the wider population and in her career she had won six Olympic gold medals both for individual and team events. Famed for always riding black and white horses she was known to be both a character and a

great philanthropist with much of her winnings going directly to her own charitable foundation which helped disadvantaged children. - Susan Thompson who died last night after a short illness."

## Epilogue

"Well if you have just joined us you do so at a pivotal time for the equestrian team." The commentator paused looking down at the arena, the coloured jumps had been arranged and it was obvious that everything was ready. "There is just one rider left and that is Caroline Gibbs, she has the chance for both the individual and team gold medals. All she has to do is to jump clear. This is truly a unique situation and what a lot of responsibility Caroline has on her shoulders right now as she prepares to ride."

Caroline was oblivious to the commentators words as she sat on her horse in the collecting ring, she had Mozart playing in her earphones, an idea from Susan the team trainer to block out anything that could disturb her before she rode in such a nerve racking environment. She closed her eyes for a moment allowing the piano notes wash over her. She knew that she could do well, she had ridden well throughout the previous rounds and she had a wonderful horse, together they were unstoppable. She felt a hand on her knee and opened her eyes, her groom looked up to her. Caroline pulled the earphones out from under her helmet and handed her iPod to her.

"You can do it..." The girl was close to tears in just another couple of minutes it would be over. She paused, gulping. "Good luck!"

Susan stepped up beside her. "You remember what to do. I believe in you Caroline, you will do this." She smiled and patted Caroline on the back.

Caroline smiled taking up the reins and rode into the arena. If she had not been aware of the near deafening sound she was now, she briefly glanced up at the stands all filled to capacity and the many cameras which would be beaming the event around the world. It had been said that this had one of the largest audiences because of the unique situation that Caroline found herself in with the two gold medals in her grasp.

She cantered her horse on allowing the cheers and applause to bolster her, then there was the sound of the bell, a hush fell over the stadium and it was time for her to perform. She pushed the horse on and towards the first jump. It was a simple upright, she approached counting the strides before pushing on. There was a moment when she was hanging in the air, and then clear one jump cleared and ten more to go.

Caroline pushed on clearing jumps, she knew that she had to be quick but could not make a stupid mistake she just had to jump clear. She took a tight line into the next jump... 'Slow down' she said in her mind, she was showing off trying to trim strides on the approach, the jump was clear but it had been close.

It was now onto the last approach, it was towards a simple upright it ends as it begins. She pulled the reins checking her horses progress towards the simple fence, this was it, jump this clear... She put the thought from her mind.

Caroline counted the strides, four, three, two... Time stopped, there was a collective intake of breath from almost every member of the audience, the television commentators were silent.

The horse leapt, clearing the top pole with millimetres to spare, they landed. Caroline glanced back, it was clear. The crowd exploded with cheers and deafening applause.

"She's done it..." The commentator gulped back tears. "It's the fairy tale ending we all hoped for..."

Caroline pulled her horse up, patting it firmly. Susan ran up. "I knew you could do it..."

Caroline rolled over, pulling the duvet around her a smile on her face.

## About the author

After a misspent youth riding and working with horses, Wilf has spent many years as an international event manager before spending a year working for the Olympic organisers at London 2012 he is now building on his extensive customer service experience as a customer service manager for a major supermarket chain.

Wilf lives in Royal Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire with his wife Jane, his son Sam and Stewie the dog

## Connect with the author

Thank you for reading this book, I hope you enjoyed it!

I positively encourage feedback, you can drop me an email: [wilfvoss@gmail.com](mailto:wilfvoss@gmail.com) – for more information about me and my writing you can visit my website: [www.wilfvoss.me.uk](http://www.wilfvoss.me.uk)