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Fight to the Finish

by
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Based on the original TV series created by
Vicki Lutas and Anna McCleery

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ISBN 978-1-338-30449-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in U.S.A.

18 19 20 21 22
40

First printing 2018

Book design by Jessica Meltzer



Breaking News

Easy, Raven. What is it, boy?” Zoe Phillips stepped back as the big black horse she was grooming suddenly lifted his head and pawed at the floor. He was tied in his stall, so he couldn’t go far. But he pricked his ears toward the door and snorted.

Zoe smiled, admiring how beautiful her horse was. Sometimes she still felt like pinching herself when she looked at Raven—especially when she remembered he belonged to her now. But this was a dream she never wanted to wake up from!

“Zoe!” Suddenly, Becky burst into the stall, breathless and pink cheeked. “There you are!”

“Where else would she be, silly?” Jade stepped into view behind Becky, smiling and shaking her head. “Sorry, Raven, we didn’t mean to spook you.”



“He’s all right.” Zoe gave Raven a pat, then stepped toward her friends. Together, the three of them made up the Pony Squad. “I was about to tack him up for a ride. What’s going on?”

“Something utterly amazing is going to happen—right here at Bright Field Stables!” Becky exclaimed, her blond braids practically quivering with enthusiasm. “I’m serious, Zoe. This is big news! As in, big, big, big!”

“And just when things were getting back to normal around here . . .” Zoe traded a smile with Jade. The three of them had recently helped thwart a crooked race promoter who’d been up to no good. Now that it was autumn, the friends were excited about their upcoming fall break.

But that wasn’t the only adventure that had befallen Zoe since moving from Los Angeles to this little island off the coast of England. Her mother had grown up here, and her grandfather still lived in an old brick house just beyond the stable grounds. Ever since she had met Raven, her world had turned upside down. He’d been almost totally wild then, and she’d been the only person who was able to calm him down. That was how she’d ended up at Bright Field Stables . . . and her life had changed forever.

“Okay,” she said, smiling at Becky. “What’s the big news?”



“Poppy Addison!” Becky cried. “She’s coming! As in, here! As in, soon! As in, O, capital M, capital G!”

Before Zoe could ask who Poppy Addison was and why her arrival was so exciting, they were joined by Mia and Susie. Mia and Susie weren’t Zoe’s friends, exactly, but they both kept horses at Bright Fields, too. In fact, Mia had owned several horses when Zoe had first met her—including Raven. And her wealthy father, Elliott MacDonald, used to own Bright Fields.

But recently the Bright Fields stable hand, Pin Hawthorne, had discovered that he was actually a duke—and worth more money than anyone else on the island! He’d bought the stables from Mr. MacDonald and rebuilt it after a fire had destroyed much of the place. Now Pin was off traveling the world to places he never thought he’d have the money to see.

Where are you right now, Pin? Zoe wondered, her heart thumping at the thought of him. She’d felt a connection with Pin from the start, even back in his stable hand days when he’d been prickly and suspicious. In some ways, things were even more complicated now that he was a duke. It was hard not having him around in person—especially since Zoe still wasn’t sure exactly where they stood, relationship-wise. She couldn’t wait to see him whenever he finally returned to the island for good.



In the meantime, Mia was acting a bit more humble these days—or, at least, she seemed to be trying to. Pin had bought Raven for Zoe, and Mia was back to focusing on her favorite horse, a lovely and talented gray gelding named Firefly. The two of them had been winning at shows together for years, and they had a bond almost as special as the one Zoe had with Raven.

“Did you tell Zoe about the clinic yet?” Susie asked, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement. “It’s happening this fall break!”

“I don’t know why you’re all so eager to tell Zoe about it.” Mia wrinkled her nose as she glanced at Raven. “I mean, Raven isn’t exactly a dressage horse, is he? Besides, clinics aren’t meant for beginner riders.”

“Huh?” Zoe looked from one girl to the next, more confused than ever. “What’s a clinic? And who’s this Poppy person?”

Becky’s eyes widened even more. “Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of Poppy Addison!”

Jade poked her on the shoulder. “Of course she hasn’t. Zoe’s still fairly new to this horse stuff, remember? Plus, she’s American—Poppy probably isn’t as famous over in the States.”

Zoe smiled. That was pure Jade—sensible, rational, always looking for answers. She was as levelheaded and



logical as Becky was happy-go-lucky and creative. And Zoe loved them both exactly the way they were.

“Well, on this island, Poppy’s a total rock star,” Susie declared. “Right, Mia?”

“Absolutely. That’s why my father invited her to do a clinic here when he heard she and her teammates had an opening in their schedule.” Mia shrugged. “Naturally, he made sure I was the first rider signed up to ride.”

Zoe shook her head. “Whoa, slow down, people. Still not fully up to speed on what’s going on here.”

“Sorry.” Jade smiled. “Poppy Addison is a famous dressage rider. She grew up right here on the island—”

“With my dad,” Mia broke in. “They’re great friends. More like family, really—he calls her the little sister he never had.”

Becky nodded. “And now she’s on the national equestrian team! Like, the one going to the next Olympics! Isn’t that cool?”

“Totally cool,” Zoe agreed. “So is a clinic like a riding demonstration or something?”

“Almost. A clinic is more like an extended lesson,” Jade explained.

“Yeah, but only if you think Oxford University is like an extended primary school!” Becky exclaimed. “It’s



definitely higher riding education. Ride-u-cation? Higher-rider-cation?"

"No, Jade is exactly right." Susie jumped in. "A clinic really is like a super-intensive lesson with the best instructors around. Poppy has been traveling all over the UK with two of her fellow riders from the national dressage team. They stop at different stables, and the three of them teach a group of riders over the course of a full day at each place. It's a way for everyone to improve their skills by riding with the best, you know?"

"Oh! Cool." Zoe glanced at Raven, who was nosing at his hay net. "So can anyone sign up to ride?"

"No!" Mia said quickly. "I mean, there are a limited number of spots. So you might already be too late. Besides, it's quite expensive—much more than a regular lesson."

"Well, I've already signed up," Susie said with a happy sigh. "I can't believe the luck of Poppy coming here now of all times! Darcy and I have been focusing on our dressage ever since Junior Nationals, and Marcus says we're coming along well."

Zoe nodded. Darcy was Susie's horse, an elegant bay mare. The two of them were primarily jumpers, but Darcy was what Bright Fields's head trainer, Marcus,



called an all-rounder—a horse that could do just about anything.

“Okay, all I know about dressage is that it doesn’t involve jumping, which means I haven’t paid that much attention to it so far,” Zoe said with a laugh. “It’s basically just fancy flatwork set to music, right? Like the hip-hop routine Becky and Bob did at the County Show?” Bob was the shaggy Irish Cob that Becky shared with her younger brother.

“There’s not always music involved,” Jade said. “What Becky and Bob did was called a musical freestyle.”

Susie nodded. “Only a few dressage shows do that.”

“Right. That’s why Bob and I don’t compete much,” Becky added. “If there’s no hip-hop involved, he tends to get bored and start inventing his own movements.”

“So non-Bob dressage is fancy flatwork *without* music, then.” Zoe smiled and gave Raven a rub on the neck. “Raven and I can probably handle that.”

“Don’t be so sure, Zoe,” Mia said. “There’s a lot more to dressage than just walk, trot, canter. You have to perform a test—”

“That’s sort of like following a course in jumping,” Susie put in helpfully. “A dressage test lays out a pattern of moves you have to ride in a certain order.”



“What kinds of moves?” Zoe asked.

Mia sighed. “If you have to ask . . .”

“Bob and I can show you some moves, Zoe,” Becky offered.

Mia snorted. “Yeah, right. I’m *so* sure that *Bob* is the one who’ll catch a future Olympian’s eye.”

“Thanks, Becky. That would be great.” Zoe traded an amused look with Jade. Bob wasn’t exactly fancy—but he definitely had a lot of personality!

“By the way, you haven’t even heard the best part yet,” Mia added, tossing her long brown hair over one shoulder. “Poppy will be staying at my house while she’s back on the island. She’s even arriving a couple of days earlier than her teammates so she and my dad can catch up.” She shot a smug smile around the group. “Like I said, she’s practically family. It’ll be such fun getting to know her better.”

“Oh, lucky!” Susie cried. “Do you suppose she’ll spend much time here at the yard? It would be awesome having her around for the extra couple of days!”

Becky let out a squeak. “Not just awesome—*horse-some!* I mean, a real equestrian celebrity, right here at our little stables? Wow!”

Mia frowned. “Well, I suppose Poppy will probably want to see the yard. But I’m sure she’ll be a bit busy, so you probably shouldn’t pester her too much.”



“We’ll try to contain ourselves,” Jade said, rolling her eyes.

“When does Poppy arrive?” Susie asked Mia eagerly. “I can’t wait to get her input on Darcy. I’m sure she’ll have lots of amazing tips to help us progress.”

“Tomorrow afternoon.” Mia shrugged. “But like I said, I expect she’ll be pretty busy. You might not see much of her before the clinic, unless she decides to stop by and meet Firefly or something.”

Zoe was a little surprised. Normally, Mia seemed to enjoy having Susie around to fawn over everything she did. But this time she seemed eager to have Poppy Addison all to herself.

Well, Mia was never great at sharing, Zoe reminded herself. But she’ll have to share Poppy with Susie during the clinic—and maybe with me and Raven, too. Because it sounds like exactly the kind of new challenge we need right now!

