

Bonnie & Sam

Saving Mr Pinto



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An offer

Sam slurped her hot chocolate and looked out the window at Drover sheltering from the wind behind the shed in her paddock. Sam's family was just her and her dad. Bill was the local policeman and Drover was his horse.

The phone rang. 'Bags not answer,' Sam said. 'It'll be your mum, wanting to pick you up.'

Bonnie lived on a big farm out of town. If she didn't go straight home on the school bus, her parents had to drive in from Peppermint Plain to collect her. As she went to Sam's house nearly every night after school, this meant a lot of trips for Chester and Woo. But it wasn't Woo on the phone. It was their riding instructor.

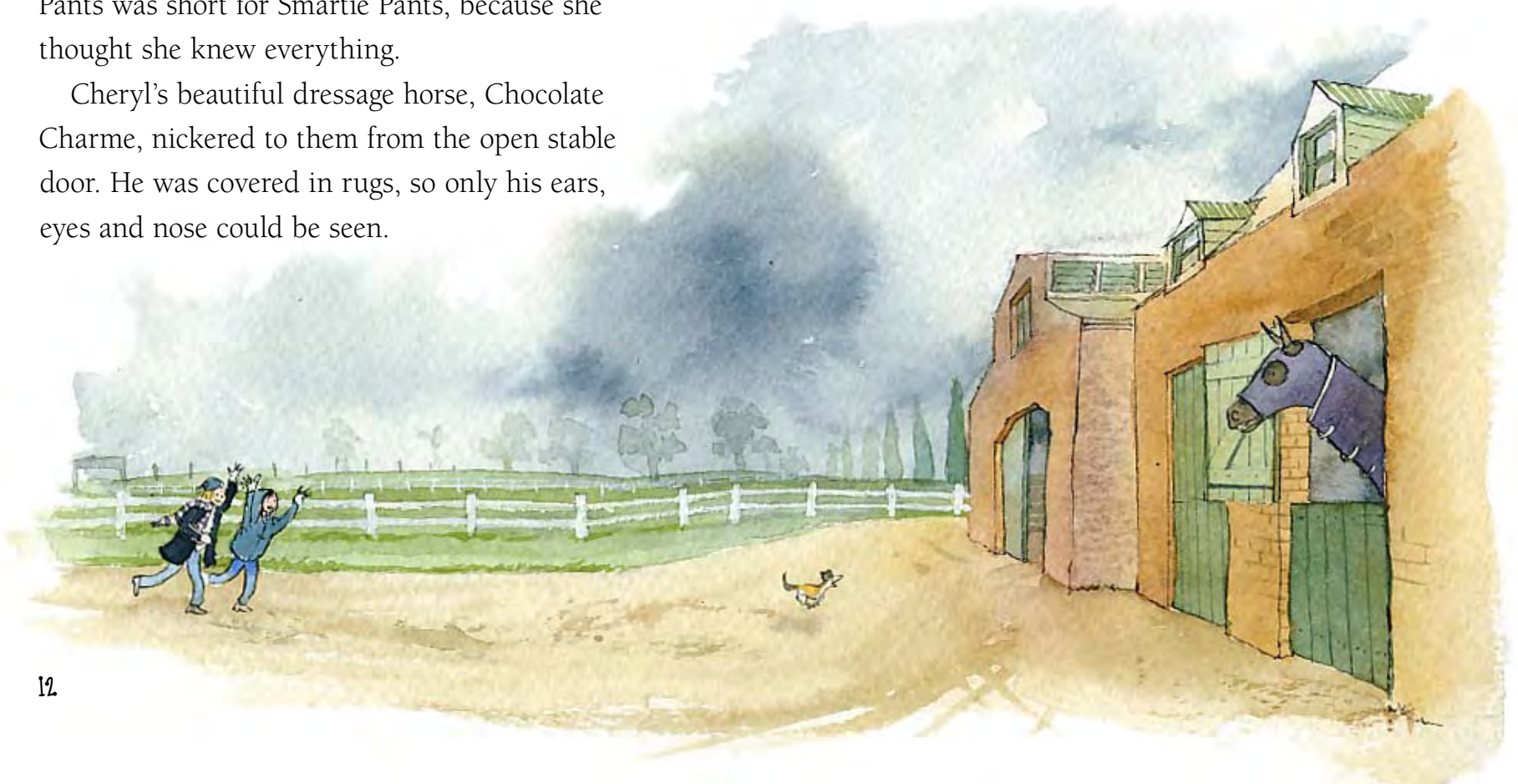
'Yep, yep, sure. Yes, we can come right away.' Bonnie hung up the receiver. 'That was Cheryl,' she said, her voice excited. 'She wants us to go to her place *now*. She's got an offer for us.'



Cheryl Smythe-Tyght lived with her mother and an elderly blue heeler, called Burl Ives, on the outskirts of Currawong Creek. Everybody called their farm Tidytown because it was so neat: white fences, red sheds, green grass, straight rows of trees, and a smooth gravel drive that Bonnie and Sam raced up. Sam's little dog, Pants, ran ahead. Pants was short for Smartie Pants, because she thought she knew everything.

Cheryl's beautiful dressage horse, Chocolate Charmé, nickered to them from the open stable door. He was covered in rugs, so only his ears, eyes and nose could be seen.

'Hi, Chocko!' they called to him. From time to time the girls picked up horse poo in his paddock and Cheryl paid them in riding lessons. Riding Chocko was different from riding any other horse. He was big, powerful, graceful, and had beautiful manners as well. When they rode Chocko they felt like princesses.





‘How are my two lovely girls?’ called Cheryl’s mother. Kath had ridden show horses all her life and she liked anyone who loved horses as much as she did. She hugged them both into her fluffy purple cardigan with white stallions embroidered on it. ‘Come on, Cheryl,’ she said impatiently. ‘Ask them!’

Cheryl looked at Bonnie and Sam very seriously. ‘What I’m going to ask you will be fun, but it’s also hard, responsible work.’ Bonnie looked at Sam and tried not to laugh. She always got the giggles when anybody gave her a talking to. But Cheryl said, ‘I’m going to the Royal Show next week. Mum’s sister, Auntie Lil, usually comes and helps Mum strap for me, but she’s broken her wrist and I need some extra help.’ She looked at them both for a long time and Bonnie had to fight the giggles again. ‘Would you two like to come and help?’

‘Woohoo! Woohoo!’ yelled Bonnie and Sam. They had dreamed of going to the Royal Show since they were little girls. ‘YES!’ they both shouted at once.

‘There’s something else.’ Cheryl put her finger up, to quieten them.

‘I entered you in the Royal Show Junior Girl Rider, Bonnie, ages ago, after you won at the Gardenhope Show.’

on the train

Bonnie and Sam waved to Woo as the train creaked slowly out of Baxter Station. The railway line didn't go as far as Currawong Creek, so Woo had driven Mrs Puller and the girls to catch the train at Baxter.

'See you next week!' Woo called to them. Pants looked at them sadly from the car. She hated to be left behind.

Mrs Puller held her cake tin tightly on her lap. At every Royal Show for the last fifteen years she had won a prize for her fruit cake. She was famous in Currawong Creek for her fantastic wedding cakes. Now she stared at Bonnie and Sam through her pointy glasses.

'You won't misbehave, will you?' she said. 'I'm not used to children. Mr Puller and I were never blessed with little ones.'

Sam felt awkward. She knew Mr Puller had died last year and she didn't know what to say, but Bonnie leapt right in. Woo had taught Bonnie that people like to talk about their loved ones.

'No, Mrs Puller, we'll be good,' said Bonnie. 'Tell us about Mr Puller. Did he used to go to the show with you?'



It was as though Bonnie had unplugged Mrs Puller. Story after story came tumbling out: the time Mr Puller won the woodchop, when Mr Puller dropped the cake, Mr Puller and the runaway pig and Mr Puller's pasta disaster.

In the city

Bonnie and Sam's eyes were on stalks as the train passed through the city. In Currawong Creek everybody looked pretty much the same, but here the streets were crowded with people of all shapes and sizes, wearing clothes and hairstyles that might have been from another planet. The train moved on again, wobbling across a mesh of silver tracks.



‘We’ll be there soon,’ said Mrs Puller. ‘Make sure you’ve got all your bags. I know how forgetful you young people can be.’

Just before the showgrounds, the train stopped to let another train past. Sam stared idly at the leaning fence beside the railway tracks. Bulging graffiti spelt something she couldn’t read. It was everywhere, writing you couldn’t understand. Bonnie was thinking the same thing.

‘It’s like yelling but not saying anything,’ she said. ‘Maybe it’s a secret language that only the graffiti writers know.’



Suddenly Sam saw something move behind the fence. ‘Look, Bon! There’s a pony in that backyard!’

Bonnie leapt to the window so she could see through the gap in the fence. The pony took a step forward and they could both see it clearly – a tiny grey thing, with all his ribs showing.

‘He’s starving!’ Bonnie’s voice cracked with emotion at the sight of the poor pony. He had a dirty rope tied around his neck.

‘He’s tied up to the clothes line, Bon,’ said Sam. ‘Look, you can see the top of the Hills Hoist above the fence.’

Mrs Puller wriggled over so she could see, too. She didn’t let go of her cake tin.

‘Oh, the poor little thing,’ she cried. ‘Who could treat an animal so badly?’