

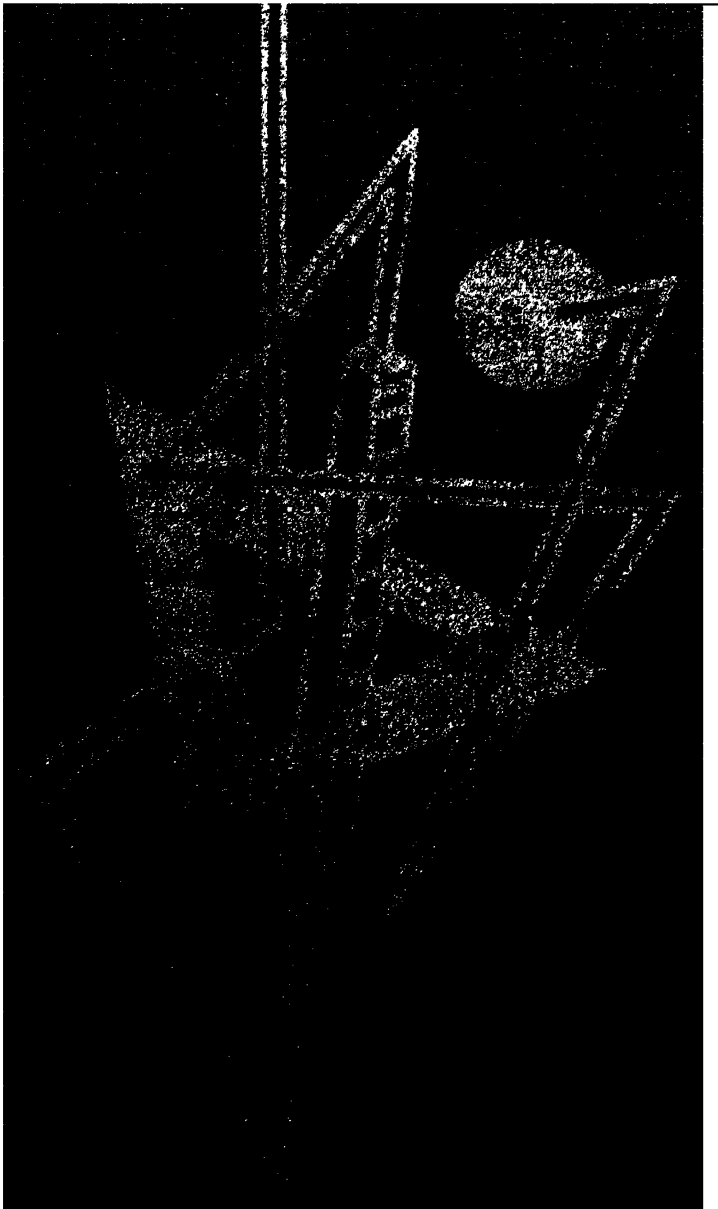


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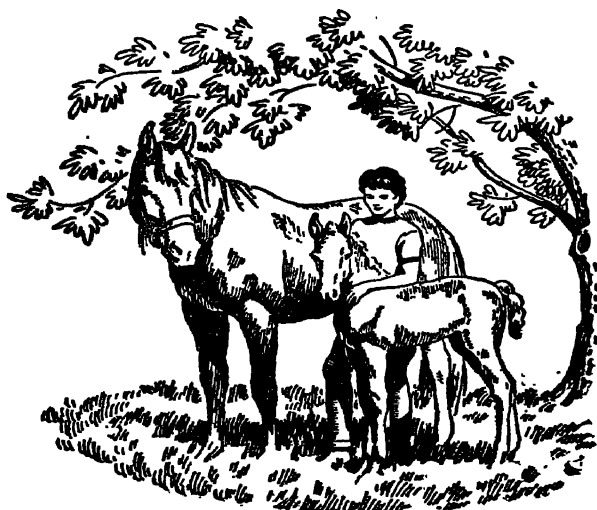








# Scarlet Royal



*by* ANNE EMERY

*illustrated by* Manning deV. Lee

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*Philadelphia*

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*for KATE*  
*who loves horses, too*



My deep appreciation to

*EARL and BECKY KREUTZ*

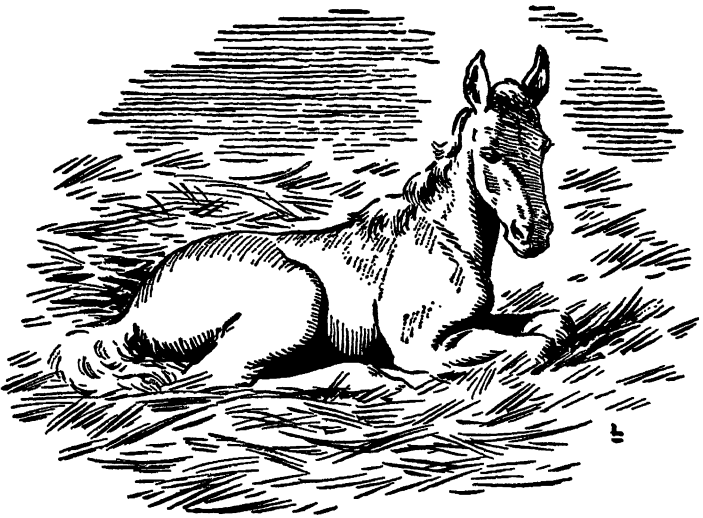
of the Northwestern Riding Academy,  
whose interest and help in writing this  
story have been invaluable



*Scarlet Royal*







## PROLOGUE

MARGO Macintyre rested her arms on the top rail of the brood stall and watched the newborn chestnut foal struggling to its feet. The red mare bent her head and nuzzled her baby who balanced on stilt-like legs for a moment and then crumpled to the floor. With a determined thrust of her finely shaped head, the foal pawed the straw with angry little jabs of her tiny hoofs, found her hind legs under her, and pushed herself upright again. Then she discovered the mare's milk bag and began to nurse, tugging and jerking as if food had been kept from her too long, and she could not take it fast enough.

Margo laughed aloud. "Isn't she wonderful?" she said to her father.

William Macintyre glanced from the mare and her foal, whom he had been watching as eagerly as Margo, to his fifteen-year-old daughter. Her slender figure was bent toward the stall, one foot resting on the bottom rail, and her face was alight with excitement. With her crisp black hair and unexpectedly blue eyes and fair Irish skin, she was a pretty girl, and her father's satisfaction showed itself in a half-smile of tender amusement.

"She's all right," he said. "Look, mavourneen, the length of those legs. And the way she found her dam, fifteen minutes after she was born. She's got her sire's temperament. And the blood lines show, even at this age." He chuckled as he watched the baby's indignant struggle with the milk bag, and sighed with deep contentment.

"It's a long time I've been waiting for this day," he said, half to Margo, half to himself. "When I was a boy in Ulster I made up me mind that someday I'd race me own horses. Hunting is a fine thing, but racing! Ah, there is the thing for a horseman!"

Margo stirred a little, never taking her eyes from the chestnut foal.

"She's got a lot of personality," she said. "I love Red Queen, of course. But her foal is—exciting."

"Naturally," her father agreed. "By Regent, why not? He would not be the race horse he is, without personality. We'll wait a couple of years, until we see how this filly comes through, and then we'll breed a stable that will make the Macintyre name in race history. Perhaps we ought to get another mare——"

Margo glanced at her father from under black lashes,

and smiled indulgently. Racing meant little to her. The only thing in her life that really counted was the horses themselves, riding them, hunting, showing, caring for them, loving them.

But William Macintyre had determined from boyhood that he wanted to have race horses, and to that end he had come to America where fortunes were made more easily than in Ireland. With luck, determination and shrewdness, he had risen from bricklayer to contractor, to builder and real-estate developer, and now he had the money to begin building his dream. Margo knew the story well. Her father loved to tell his children how he had made his fortune by his own efforts.

She could just remember when they had had no money and no horses, but that seemed so long ago as to be part of another life. Ten years ago they had bought this home in the country, Green Meadow, with horses for her father and mother and herself. Since then they had increased their stable until now they had a horse for each one of the family, and their lives revolved around riding, hunting, and now, for her father, breeding this foal of the future, out of Red Queen by Regent.

Madeleine Macintyre, Margo's mother, had come from Kentucky, and she loved horses as much as her husband did. And that feeling, that life without horses was no life at all, was even stronger in Margo than in her parents.

She was in love with this foal.

The baby dropped the bag a moment, and then grabbed it again, with small, whickering noises, tossing and pulling at it until suddenly her small stomach was distended, and she stood quiet, breathing hard from the exertion.

She looked up and saw Margo with curiosity. Then with fresh determination the chestnut foal took a couple of stumbling steps as the mother moved around to her feed box.

"The darling," breathed Margo. She laughed aloud again. The baby was so tiny, so determined, already so willful and strong. Her father laughed with her, chuckling over the ungainly foal who was wobbling stubbornly after her mother on grasshopper legs.

"Let me name her, Dad," the girl begged. "May I?"

Indulgent in his satisfaction, her father nodded. "What do ye think of calling her?"

"Scarlet Royal!"

"Good enough."

"It's a fine foal, Mr. Macintyre," said Dick Elder, coming over to the stall. Dick had taken care of their horses since they had come to Green Meadow. He was an excellent groom, knowledgeable, gentle, fond of his charges.

"I think we've got a winner here, Dick," his employer told him.

Margo and her father strolled away from the brood stall to greet the other horses who were watching for some attention. Counterpoint came to the door of his stall and thrust his head out as his master approached. William Macintyre's own horse, he was a gray gelding hunter of champion stock and superb conformation. Mr. Macintyre had been offered high prices for Counterpoint, but he had never considered parting with him. However, he always felt great pride in the fact that he owned a horse someone was willing to pay thousands of dollars

for. Now he fondled the gelding's head and said to him, "We'll take a ride in a little while, boy. I feel just like jumping myself!"

Gingham Girl stood by her gate watching them amiably. She was a Welsh pony, which Margo's father had bought for her sixth birthday. Margo would never forget the wild excitement of that day, when she was given the pony she had been begging for the past six months. And such a darling, she thought now, affectionately caressing the little horse's head and neck. Sweet-tempered, responsive. They had never been able to bring themselves to part with Gingham Girl, although the older girls had outgrown her, and Molly, who still rode the pony occasionally, had had another horse now for a month.

Mrs. Macintyre's golden dun mare, Daffodil, was calling for her share of attention, too.

"If you'll saddle up Daffodil and Counterpoint," Mr. Macintyre said to Dick, as he left the stable, "we'll be ready to ride in half an hour."

Strolling slowly across the wide lawn toward the low, fieldstone house, William Macintyre gazed from the cross-barred, white-fenced paddock on the west, to the stables, with their runways to another grazing field behind them, and around the white-stoned roadway forming an oval about the house and garden. His pride shone in his down-slanted Irish blue eyes. He said, as he had said a hundred times, "When you think that twenty years ago I was laying bricks—!"

Margo laughed with indulgent amusement. She knew she had a beautiful home, and she loved every inch of the place. But she could barely remember when she

didn't have it, and she took it for granted, as her father never could.

The June day was soft and fresh. On the south side of the stone house, facing them, red ramblers climbed to the roof in a burst of color. Along the white-stoned drive, beds of roses were poised, ready to break into flower. William walked slowly along, looking at them, reading the tags that identified the varieties, examining leaf and bud. Roses were his second hobby.

Connie rode up from the bridle path on Domino, her black gelding hunter. In jeans and cowboy boots, she was wearing a hat with a wide visor to keep the sun off her face, which freckled easily. As she rode into the shade of an overhanging tree, she pulled it off and shook out her red hair.

She was thirteen now, thin and vivid and determined. All the Macintyres had strong personalities, and sometimes when they came into conflict the sounds of battle echoed through the house. It was lucky, their father liked to tease them, that he had given them a mother who was strong enough to cope with a houseful of Irishmen!

Connie slid off Domino, handing the reins to Dick, and asked, "How is Red Queen?"

"A beautiful filly," Margo reported, "about an hour ago. We're going to call her Scarlet Royal!"

"Wonderful!" Connie ran toward the stable to see the foal.

Within three minutes she was out again. "She is a beauty," she agreed, running past her father and sister, through the back entrance of the house. The triumphant crash of a Chopin polonaise sounded from the living

room piano, where Connie was celebrating the birth of the foal in her own way.

William cocked his head as he listened. Connie played the polonaise not extremely well but with great crescendos and smashing chords, and a stirring rhythm, and he was almost as proud of her musical progress as he was of his own achievements.

"She'll make our name proud some day," he said to Margo, nodding toward the house. "That is what you live for, after all: to make your name something to be remembered. That is what Williamstown is going to do for us——"

Williamstown was the housing development William Macintyre was building ten miles west of Green Meadow. It was in the contracting stage at present, and he planned that it would be finished and sold within two years.

"When that day comes," he said in confident anticipation, "not only will we have a town named for William Macintyre, but we'll have increased our money twenty-five per cent. Maybe I'll retire and spend all my time raising race horses!" He spoke with the genial assurance that the luck of the Irish would hold, and that life was yearly offering him more promise.

"You'll need lots of money if you're wanting to get into racing," Margo said absently. "But you can do it, Dad. You can do anything."

Molly came up on Bittersweet, the bay gelding hunter she had been riding for only a month.

"How does he handle?" asked her father, watching his youngest daughter with pride.

"Oh, fine!" she said. She slid down and led the horse toward the stable, where Dick took the reins from her.

Molly was a ten-year-old blonde, with dimples and curves which threatened to become superfluous. She was also tactless and opinionated, and Margo considered her a great trial.

She came back from the stable and said, "That's a nice foal. I suppose Margo has already said Dibs."

Annoyed, Margo pointed out, "After all, Red Queen was supposed to be my horse in the first place."

Molly shrugged. "The way you act, every horse on the place is yours."

She strode equably toward the house, leaving Margo feeling misjudged and her father laughing. He said soothingly, "It's more truth than fiction, at that. You have a way with horses, my girl. You know that. You can ride any horse on the place. Connie cares more for her piano, and Molly likes people and swimming. But for you—it's nothing but horses. Isn't that right?"

Margo struggled between feeling flattered and not wanting to relinquish her annoyance too easily. "Connie does have trouble with Domino sometimes," she admitted, "but I never do——"

He laid an arm about her shoulders, and they walked across the lush green lawn toward the house. "Maybe it's a good thing, mavourneen," he said. "But sometimes I'm not so sure. You ought to be having more fun—dating some of the boys—going with a crowd—having more fun at school."

"Nothing is as much fun as coming home and working with the horses," Margo muttered. "If I got into things

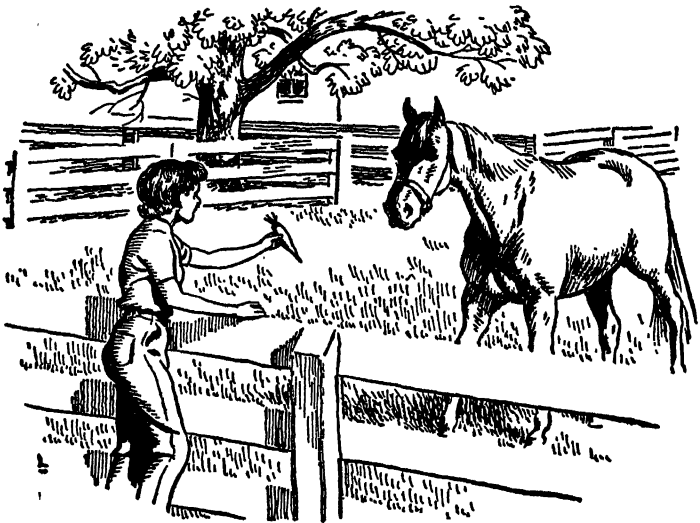


at school, I'd never have time to work Red Queen up to the shows."

He stared across the paddock, with a long, level gaze. Then he shrugged.

"Who knows?" he said. "It's the specialists who go to the top of the field in the end. I can't tell you what to do, Margo. But don't overlook your friends entirely——"

"I'm happy," said Margo briefly. "Does anything else count?"



## CHAPTER ONE

MARGO moved restlessly about the living room, picking up a magazine, leafing through it and throwing it down again, staring at the silver cup in the trophy case, the cup she had won for the second time just two weeks ago Saturday. She winced as she looked at it, and then turned to the big picture window that overlooked the lawn and the paddock, where Scarlet Royal was grazing with the other horses.

The filly was two years old now, fulfilling the promise William Macintyre had seen in her when she was a newborn foal. Indolently she grazed, her coat brilliant in the late afternoon sun. Margo's lips trembled, and she tightened them in a hard line, as her eyes blurred.

It was incredible that her father should be no longer

here with his family, the horses he loved, the home he was so proud of. At least he had seen her win the challenge cup for the second year, he had seen Scarlet Royal taking her ribbons, and on that last afternoon he had seemed relaxed and content.

Margo tried to remember how long it had been that he was worried, tense, almost gray, some days. He had said so often, in the past six months, "You'll bring us through, Scarlet, old girl! You'll hang up records and breed a line of racers——"

None of them had realized then how worn and worried he was, but looking back Margo could remember some of the remarks she had heard about his housing development. She had taken for granted that Williamstown would rise exactly as he had planned, because as long as she had known her father William Macintyre had achieved the things he planned.

But Williamstown had slipped through his fingers. Margo had heard something about rising costs, mortgage restrictions, shortages of men and materials, and again rising costs. She was never quite sure what had caused the trouble, but she knew now that her father had concealed from them a deep tearing worry that had killed him the day after Scarlet had won the challenge trophy that bright May Saturday.

The sound of the piano cut across her thoughts. Connie was playing a Bach prelude with careful precision. For a week after her father's death she had not touched the piano. Since then she played most of the time, usually Bach, as if the finesse and concentration of Bach took

her thoughts out of herself and let her forget for a little while.

At the broad desk back of the couch, their mother sat arranging and rearranging papers with grave preoccupation.

Madeleine Macintyre at forty-five was slim, dark-haired, dark-eyed, and quick-moving. William had always said she was responsible for his success. His daughters laughed affectionately at her energy, and acknowledged that their mother was remarkable. She had always treated her three daughters as responsible members of the family, expected them to carry their own weight, and required from them co-operation and regard for each other. In the past difficult two weeks she had leaned on them more than at any time in her life before. Margo felt that she had grown up very suddenly.

"Where is Molly?" Mrs. Macintyre looked up from her work.

"She's on the terrace." Margo rose, glad to be doing something. "Do you want her?"

"I want to talk to all of you." Madeleine Macintyre sat back in her chair and pushed her hair back with both hands. "You will all have to help me with some decisions."

Margo found Molly looking at the roses. They returned to the living room together, where Connie was still sitting on the piano bench, turned toward her mother. Margo and Molly sat down in the barrel chairs near the bay window, and Margo let her eyes drift toward the paddock for comfort.

Life would be different without Dad. None of them

questioned that. He had been so deeply interested in what each of them was doing, he had been so proud of his girls, that life had lost its warmth when he was gone. Margo thought of the plans they had been making for the summer. He had talked of taking them all on a trip to the West Coast. Someday, he had said, they would all go around the world.

Mrs. Macintyre looked at them soberly, as if she were gauging how much shock they could stand. She spoke abruptly, as if they might as well get it over with.

"Girls, this is something you must all know about. We thought—Dad thought—that he was worth lots of money. Enough to take care of all of us, if anything—should happen." She stopped a moment to control her voice, and then she went on steadily. "We've been working over his affairs for these two weeks now—and there is nothing left."

Margo turned quickly, unable to grasp what her mother was saying. "Nothing? What do you mean, Mother?"

"Nothing," her mother repeated. "He had put everything he had into Williamstown, even borrowed on his insurance, he was so sure it would pay off. And it should have. He couldn't foresee the things that would happen. He left us a small annuity that was in trust and couldn't be touched—about five thousand a year. And we have this property, which he had put in my name. And the horses. And that is all."

"Oh!" Margo sank back, relieved. If they still had the house and the horses and five thousand a year, there was nothing to worry about.

Her mother glanced at her with a faint smile of ironic tenderness for the naïveté of youth.

"The house and the horses," she repeated. "The trouble is, it costs us a great deal to live here. Taxes are three thousand a year. Dick Elder is another three thousand a year. The Smiths, who cook and clean for us, are another three thousand. The food we eat, the clothes we need, food for the horses, heat, maintenance—all the rest of the overhead alone would take more than our income."

Margo sat very still, trying to understand domestic economy that had never been explained to her before. The shadow of the alternative fell across her thoughts, and she grew tight with fear. Connie was studying her fingernails thoughtfully. Molly, now twelve, said, "How can we pay for things?"

"Exactly," said her mother wearily. "I've been trying to figure that out for two weeks. The lawyers have been auditing the estate, looking for something more. But that is all there is. Five thousand a year. And we can't possibly live here on that. So—" her voice picked up the tempo of a general ordering a strategic retreat under fire—"it looks as if the only thing we can do now is to sell Green Meadow. We could probably get a hundred thousand for it, in today's market. And the horses should be worth another ten thousand, at least. Then if we could find a six-room apartment in Chicago, we could manage to live on our income. And Connie could go on with her music."

After a few minutes of silence the girls rallied to their mother's challenge.

"I could earn lots of money," Molly offered with great

confidence. "If we were in the city I could sit with babies."

"Next year is my last year in high school," Margo said. "I could get a job after that. We can get along, Mother."

Connie said, "It would be closer to the Conservatory for my music lessons. We could take the piano, couldn't we, Mother? I couldn't give up my music!"

No, Connie couldn't give up her music. They all recognized that. Connie's career had been as much a part of their father's ambition as Williamstown or Scarlet Royal, and this at least they could do for him.

"Of course we'd keep the piano," Margo said impatiently. "I guess that's the answer, Mother. Connie could go on studying, and the rest of us could help with things——"

"I knew you'd feel the way I did when you understood the problem," said Mrs. Macintyre slowly, as if a spring had broken. "Thank you, girls. You've been wonderful. Well——" she pushed the papers into a pile with a weary gesture—"I'll set things in motion then—tomorrow."

Annie Smith came to the archway between living room and dining room with a loaded tea tray. "I just thought you'd like some tea, Mrs. Macintyre. Being as how we won't be here so much longer——"

She set the tray down on the coffee table before the couch, and went heavily out.

Margo saw the silver service, the dainty sandwiches and cookies, and her throat tightened. Annie had served tea like this every afternoon for years. And by next week Annie would be gone.

"I don't feel like tea, Mother," she said, getting out of the barrel chair, "I'm going for a ride——"

Changing hastily into jeans, she went out to the paddock where the horses were grazing. She had offered to keep up her end. But the thought of leaving her home depressed her unbearably. And she didn't see how she could live without the horses. Especially Scarlet Royal.

She called and snapped her fingers, and Scarlet cantered over to the fence. Not many horses would come like that when they were called, she thought, caressing the satin nose and neck. But Scarlet and Margo had a rare affinity for each other. Now the horse nuzzled her hair, pawing lightly as if she wanted to be closer to her mistress. Margo held out her hand with a bit of carrot on it, and Scarlet lipped the carrot, crunching it as if coming from Margo made it tastier than it would otherwise have been.

Vaulting the fence, Margo rode the horse bareback through the runway into the stable, where Dick Elder was cleaning tack.

"I just thought I'd leave everything in good shape," he said. The help were all sorrowful at leaving the place and the family they had loved for so many years.

Margo felt that she must control herself, not add to their grief by showing any of her own. In her effort she spoke briefly, as she saddled Scarlet.

"I'm going for a ride," she said. "I think this horse likes me."

Dick looked up from the saddle he was polishing. "She sure does, miss," he agreed. "It's all I can do to handle her. She's touchy."



What would become of a touchy horse when she was sold? Margo rode into the bridle path with an aching heart.

The countryside was beautiful in spring. But it was beautiful at any time of the year, Margo thought. It was not only the lovely home she would miss, and the rose garden and the horses. But this widespread countryside, fragrant and green in spring, rich and quiet in summer, smoky with autumn fires and brilliant with autumn colors, clear and still under the winter snows—how could she live at all, shut away from this far-reaching horizon and woodland groves, in the echoing walls of the city?

Low-hanging, green-fringed branches brushed her arm as she turned into the forest preserve, and along the trail wood-violets and buttercups blossomed. Wild roses climbed a broken fence beside a deserted meadow. And through the soft June day the breeze carried the sounds and scents of spring.

She rode for miles, now trotting, now cantering on an open stretch. The last few miles she walked home, to cool the horse and enjoy the woodland. How many more rides would she have? How soon would all of this life she loved be gone from her?

She found her mother still sitting at her desk alone, her head in her hands. An impulse, like that of a drowning person to clutch at any wisp without reason but not without hope, stirred Margo. She hated to worry her mother, who was worried enough. But still—any straw, while they were still at Green Meadow.

“Mother, is there any way at all that we could stay here? I know there isn’t enough money—but isn’t there

any way we could earn more without leaving Green Meadow?" She bit her lip to hold back the passionate protest, "I don't see how I can leave Scarlet!"

Her mother looked up, and Margo could see the same question had been tempting her.

"Well," she said hesitantly, "since I talked to you girls, I've been thinking that myself. It does seem like the final blow to leave here. There might be one chance——"

"Could we?" demanded Margo. "Oh, Mother! I'd do anything—anything at all! Just so it's here, instead of in the city in some gloomy building——"

Her mother poked aimlessly at the paper before her with her pencil.

"I've been doing some figuring," she said. "If we could make some money out of the horses, perhaps . . . We've got the space, we're all expert horsewomen. If we took pupils and opened a riding school, maybe——"

"Of course!" cried Margo in great relief. "Why didn't we think of that sooner? Connie! Molly! Come here again! We've got another idea."

The girls reappeared, eager for any suggestion other than the one they had accepted earlier.

"If we opened a riding school," Margo said, "Mother says there is a chance that we could make enough money to stay here at Green Meadow. But we'd all have to work at it. Isn't it a marvelous thought?"

Connie's face lighted. "You mean we could stay here after all?"

Molly said, "I could teach beginners. How soon can we start?"

"Girls, there is more to this than you think," Made-

leine Macintyre said firmly, trying to hold her own enthusiasm in check. "We will still not have enough to keep Dick. You would have to take care of the horses and stables and tack yourselves. And teach in the classes. It will be very hard work. I mean really hard. And we'll have to give up Molly's summer camp this year. We can't spend that five hundred dollars."

The three girls were gazing at her in rapture. Margo said, "Nothing would be as hard here as it would be anywhere else. Oh Mother! I'd love to take care of the horses, just so we had some horses to take care of!"

"I know I could practice better here where I'm used to things than if I were cooped up in a small apartment, where the neighbors would probably pound on the floor and tell me to stop," said Connie. "I'll take care of Domino myself."

"We'll have to take on more than one horse apiece," Margo reminded her. "There are seven horses and only four of us."

"All right. I'll take Gingham Girl, too," said Connie.

"I'll take Red Queen and Scarlet Royal," Margo said.

"That's good," Molly told her bluntly. "No one else could handle Scarlet Royal. That horse is yours, I guess, whether you said Dibs on her or not. I'll take Bittersweet. But what about Counterpoint? Want me to take him?"

"I'll take Daffodil and Counterpoint," said Mrs. Macintyre briskly. "But there is more to the program than the horses, girls. The Smiths are leaving at the end of the week. We'll have to take care of the house, too."

"Nothing to it!" Margo waved an airy hand. "Vacuuming, cleaning, dusting—what do you want me to do,

Mother? I'll even scrub the kitchen floor, I'm so glad to have this kitchen floor to scrub!"

"I'll make out a schedule," said Mrs. Macintyre. "I'll do the cooking. It's been a long time, but I guess I still can do that. I'll make a list of cleaning jobs. You can each do your own ironing. Well—we'll try it for the summer, anyway."

"Oh, it'll be fun!" exclaimed Molly.

With the inexperience of people who had never been without servants, they all agreed with her. Margo had a reasonable suspicion that there must be more to keeping house than any of them anticipated, else why did Annie and Henry seem to be busy from morning to night? Her mother had a funny expression, as if she suspected the same thing.

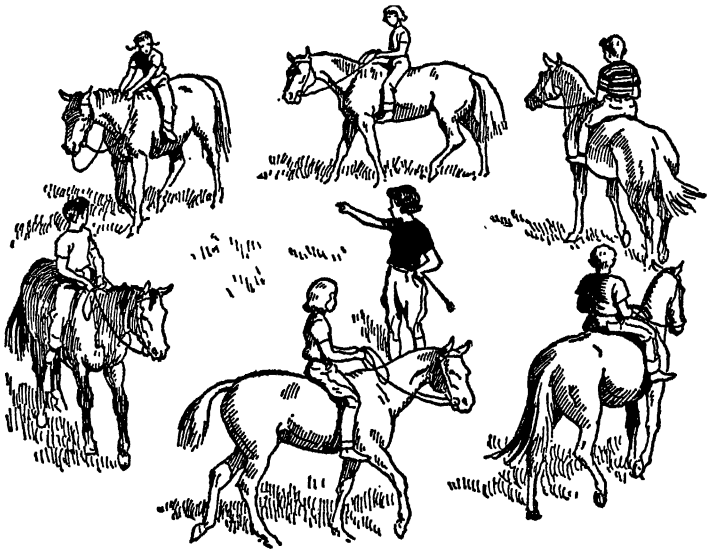
But what did it matter? The main thing right now was that here was a way for them to remain in the home they loved, to continue, even with a difference, the life they wanted to live, and they were all hilarious and excited with the sense of having won a blue ribbon in the face of insuperable odds.

Mrs. Macintyre retired to plan an announcement for the local paper, to make lists of horse-loving friends to be notified, to write a notice for the Hunt Club and communications for the other riding schools in the area. Margo went to the bookshelves and began collecting the books about horsemanship that would be helpful in the teaching of riding. Connie sat down at the piano and struck, for the first time in two weeks, the opening chords of a polonaise. Then she turned around.

“Time to set the table, Molly,” she remarked.

Molly made a face at her, and went toward the dining room to learn from Annie where everything was kept.

The new life was at hand.



## CHAPTER TWO

THE advertisement for the Green Meadow Riding School appeared in the local weekly paper, four days later, offering expert teachers for beginning and advanced equitation classes opening on June 18, limited to six in a class.

Letters of encouragement came in from the three riding schools in the area, offering to send to the Green Meadow school any students they could not accommodate. Many of their friends called to wish the Macintyres success, and tell them of potential pupils.

The Macintyres spent their evenings figuring madly.

They could use six of the seven horses for instruction. Scarlet Royal was too temperamental for a school horse.

The lessons would be priced at twenty-five dollars for ten lessons, in courses of two hours a week for five weeks, during the summer. Private instruction would bring them three dollars a half hour.

Beginning classes from nine to ten and from ten to eleven each morning, advanced classes in the afternoons from two to three and three to four, private lessons from eleven to twelve and four to five, would fill each day. Both Mrs. Macintyre and Margo could give private lessons, as well as one beginning and one advanced class each. Connie must save some time for practicing, so her work would be limited to one class in the morning and one class in the afternoon, two days a week, besides her stable work.

"I'm not sure about using the horses so steadily," Mrs. Macintyre said dubiously. "But without all of them we can hardly operate. Oh well, perhaps for the first five weeks it won't hurt them. We'll just have to try it out. In the fall we can't have classes during the day anyway."

Margo began adding aloud. "On a six-day schedule, this is six beginning classes, and six advanced classes a week. Each class meets twice, you know. If the classes are filled to capacity, that would be seventy-two students, at twenty-five dollars apiece—Mother!" She scribbled rapidly, "That would be eighteen hundred dollars for the first five weeks! Now wait: eight private lessons a day would be—forty-eight a week at three dollars each lesson—another seven hundred and twenty for five weeks. Twenty-five twenty for five weeks. Half our year's income. Why, Mom!"

Awed, the girls regarded their mother as though she

had uncovered a gold mine. Mrs. Macintyre smiled skeptically.

"That sounds good," she admitted. "That was what I figured when I thought we had a chance of doing this at all. But we won't make the maximum. Not right away, anyway. And you must deduct the cost of feeding the horses and caring for them. There will be repair on tack and veterinarians' bills besides feed and shoes. However, if we make anything at all, it's worth the try."

In the surge of optimism that lifted all of them, they scoffed at her pessimism, sure that they were about to make immediately the fortune their father had lost.

The school opened on June eighteenth with an enrollment of twenty students, distributed among the different classes.

"I guess we won't need to worry about the wear on the horses," Mrs. Macintyre remarked. "Jack Culbertson sent us three pupils, including one private one. That was nice of him, although I must say with all the lessons you girls took at his school it was the least he could do!"

Fortunately the summer season was a period of high enthusiasm for riding, and there were more students than schools this year. Margo knew that without that happy circumstance the Green Meadow school might very well not have opened.

The first week was launched on a tide of excitement. The girls found the challenge of earning a living absorbing and stimulating. For the first few days it was fun to take new riders into the paddock and teach them how to approach a horse, how to handle him, to mount and post



to a trot. It was fun for Molly, especially, who felt very superior to her pupils.

But by Friday the reaction had set in. After the teaching was over each day stalls had to be cleaned and tack polished. Before classes began in the mornings dusting and vacuuming had to be done, beds made, and ironing or scrubbing or shopping planned for the day. The housework on top of the stable work was unfamiliar, time-consuming and exhausting. Connie complained that she was almost too tired to practice, and that she had no time anyway.

"You joined in this decision, Connie," her mother reminded her. "There is no choice for this summer. You will have to keep up your end."

Margo had never realized that stable work was so hard, or that she could get so tired each day and still be able to arise the next morning. But in her concern for the future she was able to put her personal discomfort behind her for the time being. It couldn't possibly be as hard as this forever, she kept reminding herself. Someday it must get easier. In the fall, when school began——

Already she was looking ahead to the winter season, when there would be fewer pupils. If the Green Meadow school was to survive, and the Macintyres with it, they must cultivate good will that would carry them past the time that other schools were willing to co-operate. Someday, if they were lucky, they would be regarded as rivals. She was making an effort, such as she had never before felt it necessary to make, to do a good job and to win such confidence from her pupils that they would never want to ride anywhere else.

On Friday morning she awaited the nine o'clock class of three beginners with an uneasy mixture of pleasure that they had some students and distaste for coping with them. It was a beautiful June day, with soft clouds drifting across a clear sky, and a light wind bringing the scent of the woods across the meadows, a day that tempted her almost beyond endurance to saddle Scarlet Royal and ride away, carefree and alone with her horse.

For a nostalgic moment she let herself remember last summer. She had spent days like that then. And when she returned from the trail, Annie was waiting to serve a delicious meal, the house was immaculate and fragrant, there was no work for her to do. She had sat on the back terrace watching the horses and the roses and the wind-borne clouds. There had been hours for swimming at the Fairfield Country Club pool. There had been hours for riding in the late afternoon, or for schooling Scarlet for a show. So much time, so many delightful things that cried to be done.

She sighed and came back to the present. Her class was arriving. There was no time this summer for that pleasant sort of life.

She met her students with a smile of welcome.

"We'll saddle the horses in the stalls," she said, moving them toward the stable. "Jill, you're riding Bittersweet, aren't you?"

Eleven-year-old Jill looked into the stall apprehensively, then up at Margo.

"Speak to him," Margo reminded her. "Bittersweet, how are you, old fellow? Ready for a ride? Nice boy. Here's a carrot." She thrust a carrot into Jill's hand.

“Now go on in. He won’t hurt you. No! Never walk behind him!! Walk around by his head and keep talking to him.”

Bittersweet looked over his shoulder and twitched his rump, switching his tail back and forth against the flies. Jill dodged back.

Margo said patiently, “Take down the saddle. Yes, I know it’s heavy. But if you can’t saddle your own horse, you’ll never know how to take care of a horse, and that’s more important than riding, even. All right, carry the saddle this way. Now do you remember what I told you about approaching your horse on the near side? That means on the left. *This* side. Now go ahead. Be sure you slide the saddle back from his withers. No, here are the withers! All right. That’s fine, Jill. Davy, come on now and see Gingham Girl.”

It had never occurred to Margo that she would have pupils who were afraid of their horses, and their unwarranted fears annoyed her more than any other aspect of their instruction.

Davy Logan, who was small for his age at nine, was not at all afraid of Gingham Girl. He talked to her like an old friend, walked briskly into the stall, and began saddling her ineptly, but without help.

Susy Sanders was riding Red Queen. She was twelve years old, a reluctant rider, whose parents felt that her life would be incomplete without a horse in it, while Susy herself was frankly frightened to approach one. She was tall for her age and scrawny, and of all the horses Margo felt that Red Queen would be easiest for her to handle. She stayed with Susy, helping her to adjust the saddle,

showing her how to put on the bridle, trying to persuade her to stop cringing away from the horse. Then she ran to check up on the other horses, before they left their stalls.

This was the second lesson for these pupils, who had come on Tuesday for the first time, and Margo was surprised to discover how much of the first day's instruction they remembered. They sat facing her, tensely straight, their hands and elbows askew. She went from rider to rider, showing them again the proper angle for heels, the proper position for their elbows, how to hold their reins and hands. Susy was grasping her reins as if they were all that prevented her from falling off, and Margo tried futilely to get her to relax her grip.

"All right," she said at last. "Davy, you lead off. Turn Gingham Girl to the left and walk around the fence. Fine! You remembered how to use your legs and your reins exactly right. Now, Jill!"

Jill's horse turned and followed Gingham Girl automatically. Watching her Margo thought, she's not guiding him at all. He's doing it all. I must remember to have her lead off next time so she has to do something for herself. "All right, Susy."

Susy pulled on her rein and Red Queen looked annoyed. Margo thought, the Queen doesn't like a strange child. She's a wonderful horse, but the best of them can't cope with a rider like Susy.

"Susy!" she called sharply, "don't pull on the rein. That hurts the horse. Just use it gently, the way I showed you, and press with your leg. Very easily. That's fine."

The three children were plodding slowly about in a ring. Thank goodness, Margo thought, she knew the horses so well she could tell what to expect of them. Almost. She was watching Red Queen more closely than the others, wondering in the back of her mind if there was another horse that would be better for Susy.

"Now we're going to trot," she told them, as they brought their horses to a standstill. "Listen very carefully."

She described the gait and the way they must post. "Don't jerk your legs up and down," she said. "Just rise from your knees whenever his near forefoot goes forward. Davy, you try it."

Davy kicked his mount into a trot and posted with fair efficiency. Margo halted him and watched Jill, and her heart sank as the girl bumped across the paddock. She had never realized how hard this kind of work was going to be on the horses. Poor Bittersweet! It must be terribly wearing to feel that off-gait bump all the time. She halted Jill and put Susy through the routine. Susy rose stiffly from her ankles and had to be coached over and over.

"All right," said Margo with careful cheerfulness, "you're all doing very well. Now trot your horses all together, straight down the paddock."

It worried her that the horses were not responding the way they did when the Macintyres rode them, and she watched the horses as much as the riders with concentration that was wearying.

Suddenly Red Queen broke into a canter. It was an easy gait, easier than the trot, if Susy only knew it, Margo thought, moving quickly toward the horse. But Susy,

appalled at the speed with which she was moving, screamed helplessly. Red Queen shied violently from the noise and Susy flew through the air, bursting into tears as she hit the ground with a resounding thud.

Margo called, "Stop your horses," and ran to catch Red Queen's bridle.

Holding the chestnut mare, she lectured Susy and the other two severely on screaming at a horse. "Naturally the horse will throw you off if you scream," she said to Susy. "If you just keep your head and stay on, nothing can possibly hurt you. There was no reason to scream, just because she cantered."

Susy rose from the ground feeling herself tenderly and crept across the grass as if she expected to be hurled down on each step.

"Come on," Margo encouraged her, holding the stirrup, "let's see if you can get up by yourself."

Susy shook her head tearfully. "I don't want to ride that horse again," she wept. "She's too big, and she doesn't like me."

Margo was tempted to ask, "Why should she?" but she controlled her failing temper and said in persuasive tones, "Why, of course she does! The first rule of riding is to get back on when you fall off. Besides, no one ever learns to ride until he's fallen off at least a couple of times. Now you're ahead of all the others. They still have to have their first fall!"

Susy gave her a watery smile. Margo felt that her humor was forced and dull, but it seemed to be working. She went on talking as Susy climbed up again and sat on Red Queen, nervously awaiting another toss.

They had done enough for today. Margo walked them once more around the paddock and told them to lead their horses into the stalls.

There they unsaddled their mounts and curried them. Margo had discovered the very first day that if the pupils groomed their own horses it was not only good instruction practice, but lightened the load of caring for the horses for the Macintyres. Now, watching them wield inexperienced brushes and curry combs, she loved the horses more than ever for putting up so graciously with these beginning strangers.

"All right, class," she said cheerily, as Susy came out of Red Queen's stall looking both fatigued with the effort she had made and pleased that it was over. "That's all for today. See you all next Tuesday! Good-by now!"

She made her voice more cheerful than she felt. She was fed up with beginners. And gloomily she thought, only one week had gone by.

The two girls raced toward waiting cars. Davy lingered by Margo for a minute.

"That's an awfully nice pony," he said wistfully. "I think she likes me. My father says someday maybe he'll get me a horse. But we'd have to find a place to keep it."

"Bring it out here," Margo said on an inspiration. "When will he get it for you?"

"Oh, when I'm bigger," said Davy vaguely. "Good-by, Miss Macintyre. See you Tuesday."

He went off more reluctantly than the girls had gone, and Margo turned toward the house. Connie was taking the ten o'clock beginners, and she herself had to clean the refrigerator and scrub the kitchen floor in the next

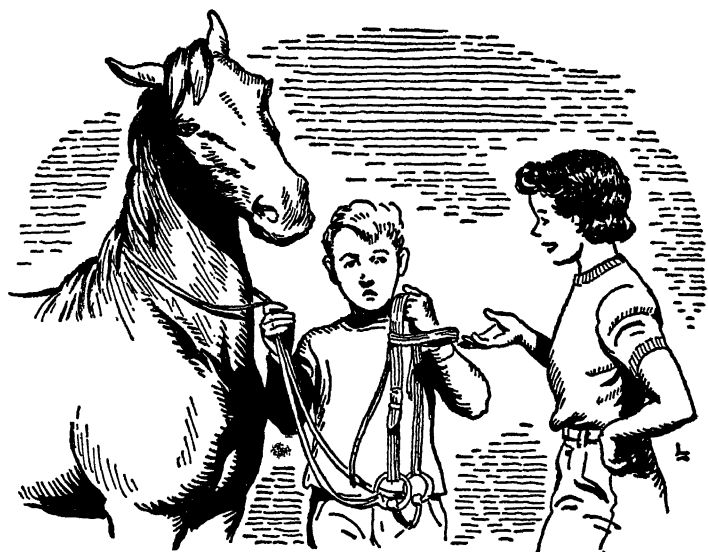
hour. There was always something. Perhaps they could board some horses. But who would care for them?

After supper she saddled Scarlet Royal and cantered off alone on the trail. In the west the sun was low and golden, and the evening sound of insects hummed through the woods. Her irritation and fatigue faded away as she rode. The days were tiring and maddening. But the work was worth while just for the sake of an hour like this. If I were working in some department store, she thought, I'd probably get just as tired and mad at everybody, and I wouldn't have Scarlet to ride it off.

She patted the horse's neck affectionately, wondering how anyone could possibly live without horses. Scarlet was worth any amount of effort, any number of beginners.

But Margo was not quite so certain as she had been a week ago how long they could keep up the strain.





### CHAPTER THREE

SOMEHOW the weeks went by. In the second week they had four days of rain, which meant no riding. But Margo discovered that a lot of teaching could be done "on the ground." She held her classes in the stable, teaching them the parts of the horse and tack, practicing bridling, which took hours of time, doing setting up exercises on horseback in the stalls for balance. She had forgotten how much practice went into the learning of equitation, how many hours she had spent without saddle or stirrups. It became engrossing to relive her own learning days in the experience of her pupils, and to watch them improve, hour by hour.

It was an exciting discovery to find among their pupils

two who had studied for several years, and who looked like winners for the fall show, in which Mrs. Macintyre wanted to have the school represented. It was gratifying to watch fearful Susy become acquainted with her horse in a few weeks, and begin to love riding instead of dreading it. And it was a tremendous satisfaction to have new students apply for enrollment at a rate of two or three each week. Margo found that in spite of the difficulties of the first weeks, she loved teaching and looked forward to seeing each class.

The days were crowded with hard work. But all the Macintyres discovered almost with surprise that at the end of four weeks they were becoming accustomed to a routine that had seemed at first intolerable. Margo recognized a new and satisfying sense of competence in being able to scrub floors, wax furniture, clean the stables, polish the tack, be responsible for the feeding and grooming of the horses. Tasks she had never dreamed of doing two months ago became elementary skills that she was beginning to feel anyone should be able to do.

Sometimes Molly grumbled that she never had a minute to read, but in spite of her complaints she did the work assigned to her regularly enough so that no one else had to do it. Connie worried about hardening her hands with all the stable work. But with all the complaints, they were carrying on.

Margo herself felt closer to her mother than she ever had before. Madeleine Macintyre discussed with her eldest daughter the problems facing them; how to get more students, what pupils could they enter in coming shows, how long could they manage without an indoor

ring, and should they mortgage the place to build one? They decided that the indoor ring would have to wait until they were sure of a continuing future for the school. Margo knew that her mother leaned heavily on her daughter's partnership and support, and for Margo the result was a feeling of being needed, of contributing an important share to the family existence, that was new and deeply satisfying.

Even the hard work, as it became more familiar and routine, became less difficult. By the end of July they could tell themselves with confidence that the Macintyres were getting along all right.

On the last day of the first five-weeks course Molly came down to breakfast with an expression of horror.

"Mother!" she exclaimed. "What do you think? I weighed a hundred and forty-five pounds this morning! I'll just have to do something about it."

Mrs. Macintyre, who had never entirely lost the viewpoint of a Southern belle, said, "I should think you'd better! I've been telling you, honey—if you eat everything in sight you're bound to gain weight."

"But with all the work I've been doing this past month!" Molly was outraged.

"I know. But all the work in the world won't undo three sweet rolls for breakfast, with a doughnut at eleven o'clock and two sandwiches for lunch, and Coke and potato chips every afternoon." Her mother spoke drily.

Molly looked embarrassed. "All right, Mom. Why didn't someone tell me these things?"

"I've been telling you," her mother reminded her. "What are you going to do?"

Molly tossed her blond head nonchalantly. "I'm going to stop eating, that's all. My goodness, I can't go back to school weighing a hundred and fifty pounds! All I want for breakfast is a soft-boiled egg and orange juice. Have you got a diet list, Mom?"

"I'll find one," her mother promised. "But if you just cut out cake, candy, sweet drinks, potato chips and deserts, you'll come out the same way as if you counted every mouthful."

"Reducing is such a bore!" Molly repined. "But so is being fat," she comforted herself, reluctantly rejecting the toast and marmalade that her sisters were eating.

During the morning most of the present students, whose enrollment had climbed to thirty, re-enrolled for the second five-weeks course. A dozen new ones had already enrolled to begin next Monday, and three of the girls reported that they had friends returning from camp this weekend, who wanted to take private lessons before the Junior Horse Fair in September.

By the end of the day Margo was smug with satisfaction. With the progress the school had shown, the work was no longer tiring. Funny how easy it was to do a job when you knew you were doing it successfully.

When she dismissed her second class at four o'clock, Margo had a free hour while her mother was coaching a private pupil in the paddock. She was using this hour daily to work with Scarlet in preparation for the Junior Horse Fair. Besides winning ribbons for the school with their pupils, the Macintyres would ride, themselves, in the open classes. The more blue ribbons they could earn for the school, the better publicity and the higher the

prestige. At this point in the school's development, that was important.

Margo approached the grazing paddock behind the stables and watched Scarlet for a moment before she called the horse.

At two years the filly was a clear, glowing red color, with a fine-boned profile showing the Arabian characteristics in her breeding. Her head was delicately formed, with a long, slender neck sloping gently through the shoulders to a powerful chest. The pattern of veins showed clearly under the fine skin, accenting the sheen on her coat. And her legs, slender, beautifully formed with strong, short cannon bones, ended in small graceful hoofs.

High-spirited and sensitive, she had a will of her own, which amused Margo and annoyed Mrs. Macintyre, who was accustomed to the co-operation of any horse. Margo was convinced that Scarlet loved her, in spite of her mother's protestations that the idea that horses loved people was a ridiculous, sentimental notion. However, Mrs. Macintyre had to concede that Margo could do anything she liked with Scarlet. For anyone else the horse was stubborn and indifferent, retreating from the sight of a bridle, responding reluctantly to cajoling, persuasion, soft words, and carrots, and requiring ingenuity and sheer strength to handle her.

Earlier in the summer, Margo had been in bed with a temperature for three days, and Mrs. Macintyre had undertaken to exercise Scarlet.

She had returned more exasperated than Margo had even seen her over a horse.

“My goodness,” she had protested, “that horse of yours is a problem child. Stubborn as a mule, coy, won’t even take a carrot and come for her bridle without half an hour’s chasing! It’s a lucky thing you can handle her. I wouldn’t want to bother very often!”

Since that day no one handled Scarlet but Margo, and for Margo Scarlet Royal was a horseman’s dream come true.

Now the horse looked across the pasture and saw Margo leaning on the top rail of the cross-barred fence. Immediately she threw up her head and galloped gleefully across the pasture, nuzzling Margo with whickering noises as if she had been lonely.

“Did you want to ride, old girl? Well, fine—fine—we’ll have a few jumps, hm?”

Scarlet followed her docilely into the stable without a lead rein, and Margo saw her mother glance toward them with an expression of amused exasperation. Margo waved and laughed. She enjoyed teasing her mother about the only horse Madeleine Macintyre had ever had difficulty in handling.

Back in the grazing pasture she practiced changing gaits, turning in figure eights at a walk, a trot, and a canter, for a long time. Then she practiced brush jumps, over piles of branches. The hurdles were in the teaching paddock, where her mother was still working with her private pupil, and she would work on them later. She practiced going through the gate and closing it after her, trying to improve her time on that maneuver. For the past two seasons she had hunted with the Millrace Hunt Club, and closed gates dozens of times. But still, with

practice, she might learn to do them even faster, and in a show the time counted.

Her mother was leaving the paddock now. With an impatient sigh Margo rode around and into the other paddock, taking Scarlet through the gate at a canter and immediately over the hurdles, set at three feet six inches.

This jumping she loved more than anything else. As she rose slightly over the horse's withers and gave the take-off signal, feeling Scarlet collect herself almost imperceptibly, they soared through the air as smoothly as if horse and rider were a single personality. She went around the course again without stopping, because Scarlet had struck a rhythm so perfect that she couldn't bear to interrupt it. This kind of jumping, she was convinced, was as exhilarating for the horse as for the rider. Certainly Scarlet acted as if she were enjoying herself.

At the end of eight jumps Margo rode easily around the ring, slowing into a walk before she halted the horse, and then dismounted to raise the hurdles. Scarlet took them so well at three feet six inches that Margo was sure that by September she could go to four feet six. She must ask her mother to watch the horse's way of going, but she was confident that it was perfect.

She raised the first bar one inch and heard a voice close to her say, "That horse looks awfully good."

Turning, she saw the girl who had spoken: Ginevra Cranshaw, the private pupil who had just finished working with Mrs. Macintyre, and who now was leaning on the fence rail watching Margo with concentration.

She was an attractive girl with silken fair hair and wide blue eyes, slim and tall in her black riding habit.

But Margo had never liked her from the first day Ginevra had come to the school.

In the earlier weeks Margo had watched her mother working with Ginevra and had overheard enough of the remarks Ginevra had made to her instructor, the questions she had asked about shows in the area, the way in which she had referred to her own cups and ribbons, to know that the girl was an egotist, determined to win ribbons only for the recognition they could bring her, and interested in horses only as they would serve her in that, ambition.

Now Margo said indifferently, "Oh, hello. Yes, I think this is a good horse," and turned back to her work with the hurdle. As she moved on to the second hurdle, Ginevra said, too casually, "My father paid three thousand dollars for my hunter, Kingpin, and I don't know if he's any better than your horse, there."

Infuriated, Margo tried to ignore her. But she couldn't be rude to one of their best pupils. So she said, "I've never seen Kingpin. Why don't you bring him over someday?"

"Oh, I'll be riding him in the September show," Ginevra assured her. "But I don't know about him. I've only had him a couple of months and I don't think he does as well as your chestnut. She's got a very smooth way of going."

Something in her calculating tone chilled Margo, and she turned away abruptly, with an irrational fear that this girl was a threat to her security. She had a sudden sharp revulsion against Ginevra, hating her violently, wishing she'd go away and stop staring at Scarlet Royal.



"I guess it's too late to work any more tonight," Margo muttered defensively. "I'll have to get inside and help Mother with dinner."

She took the lead rein and walked toward the stable, sure that she could feel the surprise in Scarlet's manner that this exhilarating exercise was so suddenly ended. When she looked over her shoulder, prepared to wave a perfunctory farewell to Ginevra, the girl was walking toward her car, switching the grass with her crop, her head bent in thought.

At dinner that night Margo brought up the subject, anxious to ease her mind, if she could, of her irrational dislike of Ginevra.

"Who is this Ginevra Cranshaw, anyway?" she asked her mother. "She was hanging over the fence watching Scarlet tonight. I can't stand her. And where did she come from? I don't remember seeing her before this summer——"

Mrs. Macintyre was buttering a baked potato and Molly watched her hungrily.

"Couldn't I have even a little potato, Mother?" she asked. "I was simply starved before noon today. I've never been so hungry."

"If you want to cut down gradually and get used to it more easily," her mother said, "take half a potato and no butter."

"No butter!" cried Molly incredulously.

"None," said her mother firmly. "Use salt instead."

"Oh, if I can't have butter, there's no point in eating potatoes," Molly said grumpily. "Please pass the salad

again." She helped herself to tossed green salad with a heavy sigh of resignation.

"Why, the Cranshaws came here about six months ago," Mrs. Macintyre answered Margo's question. "Ginevra came on in June, when her private school in the East was out. They bought a place about five miles from here, and they brought her saddle horse with them. A very fine horse, I guess. Then they bought a hunter for her after they moved. Jack Culbertson sent her here; his time was filled, by the time she wanted lessons."

Margo ate silently. None of this information was especially terrifying.

"I don't know why, but I can't stand her," she repeated.

"I'm really rather sorry for the girl," said her mother. "She's not happy, in spite of having more money than she knows how to spend, I guess. Her father is a very important man in steel, and he travels a great deal, she told me. And her mother—you've heard of Viola Cranshaw, haven't you? She's a championship golfer, and she's away a great deal of the time, too."

"I don't like her attitude about ribbons and trophies," said Margo.

"I don't either," her mother admitted. "It's hard to like her, although I can understand why she has this driving urge to excel. I think she feels she must do something to keep up with her famous parents. Apparently her father is really devoted to her, in spite of never being home. He'll do anything she wants, when it comes to her riding. He doesn't ride, himself, and he thinks it's remarkable that she's so good. She has really had excellent

teaching. And she's won several silver trophies and blue ribbons in the Eastern shows, with the saddle horse. The forward seat is new to her, but she applies herself with great concentration."

"I wish she'd get the rest of her teaching somewhere else," Margo brooded. "I hate to encourage people like Ginevra to ride. It goes against the grain."

"But don't forget that Ginevra is helping us to pay the bills, now," Madeleine Macintyre reminded her daughter. "No other private pupil is paying us for an hour a day, and that is important to the school. Besides, she's the kind of person who thinks that whatever she has is the best possible choice, just because it's hers." She glanced at Margo with impish amusement. "Just now she thinks I'm a remarkable teacher, and she talks about the school quite a lot. It's good publicity, even if we don't like her."

Margo was silenced, but her feeling of foreboding persisted.



## CHAPTER FOUR

MARGO could not remember when the Labor Day holiday had meant so much to the Macintyres. They wound up the second five weeks of the school on Friday, and spent the weekend in a delightful state of relaxation. This year the holiday fell on Mrs. Macintyre's birthday, and they celebrated the event with a quiet family party on the terrace, only slightly complicated by livery parties who wanted to spend their holidays on horses. That was a mixed blessing which the Macintyres by this time could take in stride.

The bookkeeping in which they spent the morning together was a source of satisfaction. They had totaled seventy-five pupils in classes during the summer, plus six private pupils who rode twice a week for ten weeks,

plus Ginevra, who studied for an hour daily, and the gross income had been almost twenty-four hundred dollars. This was half of what they had at first joyously anticipated, but still very encouraging, now that they knew how hard it was to earn the money.

Mrs. Macintyre deducted a long list of expenses, which the girls had been prepared to ignore.

"Feed for seven horses for ten weeks, two sets of shoes for seven horses, saddle soap, two bills for the veterinarian," she added up. "You remember he came that time Counterpoint ran a nail into the near hind foot, and again when Red Queen developed that shoe boil. And then there was the antitetanus shot, and the shoe-boil boot, and other medicines. And we replaced a bridle, and had another mended. Straw for the stables, and two girth bands——"

The net intake for the summer was approximately fifteen hundred dollars.

"We've worked hard for that amount of money," Madeleine Macintyre said realistically, "but we are doing better than breaking even, and it looks as if things will continue to progress. How about it, girls? We said we'd try it for the summer, and the summer is over. Shall we go on indefinitely?"

Margo held her breath, waiting for her sisters to speak. She wanted so badly to keep what they had that she felt as if she should say nothing about it. She was almost sure her mother felt the same. But neither of them wanted to impose her own will on the two younger girls.

Connie said slowly, "It's an awful lot of work, of course. But I do like living here in the country—and I'd

miss Domino—I don't see any other way to live the way we really want to. There would be less work in a city apartment. But maybe we wouldn't be happy there anyway——”

Molly said quickly, “Here we know what it's like and what we've got. How do we know we'd like another school and another place to live? I'd just as soon keep on working this way——”

Margo let out her breath on a long sigh of relief. Her mother smiled, as if she had expected the girls to feel that way.

“That's fine, then,” she said. “Everything is all set up, and I think things will get easier as we go along. Did I tell you the Wentworth High School wrote yesterday, asking if we can take their Saddle Club this year? That will be probably thirty, riding once a week—they'll have to come in groups of six. I'll write the school, then, and tell them we'll be glad to have the club. And we have enrolled twenty-four pupils for Saturday classes already. That's capacity.”

Margo was adding in her head, while her mother figured on paper. “This doesn't add up to enough pupils to pay as much as this summer,” said Madeleine Macintyre, with a slight frown. “And yet it's capacity enrollment. We couldn't take any more, unless we had another horse or two. And even if we could afford more horses, we couldn't manage without help. If we could find some private students or daytime riders, for hours when the others can't come——”

“Why don't we board some horses?” Margo asked. “Davy mentioned that his father might get him one, and

one of the other girls asked about bringing her horse here—but we haven't an extra stall."

"We could remodel the box stalls into straight stalls, and have three or four more," Mrs. Macintyre said. "But more horses will mean more exercising, more currying, more time, remember."

"Oh well, today is a holiday, anyway," said Margo. "Let's worry about those things when we have to! Right now we're celebrating your birthday. Remember."

Molly bore the blazing cake in to the table and set it before Mrs. Macintyre, while the three girls sang, "Happy Birthday" to their mother.

"There is no telling what birthdays will bring," Mrs. Macintyre commented, cutting the cake with care. "I certainly never expected my forty-sixth to find me running a riding school—and liking it, what's more. Here's to the Junior Horse Fair ribbons!"

She lifted her glass of fruit punch, and the girls met each other's eyes solemnly as they drank to the event that was to establish the excellence of the Green Meadow Riding School in the horseman's world.

"This cake is delicious, Connie," said her mother, eating her slice with appreciation. "I had no idea you were doing so well in the kitchen."

"Nothing to it," said Connie, airily. "Compared to wrestling with those stables, or even a Bach prelude, whipping up a birthday cake is child's play. It is good, though, isn't it?" She sounded surprised as she tasted it.

Margo lay back, replete and content in the afternoon sun on the terrace, and stretched her arms above her head.

"I guess the next event on the year's program is the show next Saturday," she reflected. "How many have we got entered, Mother?"

"Twenty, counting the beginners," said her mother. "Half a dozen can't possibly get even a sixth place. But they were so anxious to ride in the show I thought it would be good for them to try it. Then there are about ten who ought to get some kind of ribbon. They'd ridden before they came here, and they've worked very hard and conscientiously. Two of the advanced students look really very good, for the senior equitation and hireling classes, and one of those has a chance in the handy hunters, I think. And then of course there is Ginevra."

"I was hoping she would forget to enter, or get herself disqualified, or something," Margo exclaimed, with an expression of distaste.

Her mother smiled wryly. "Ginevra would never forget the details of registration when it is so important to her to win," she said. "She's really very good, Margo. She's entered in three equitation classes with her saddle horse Coquette, and four hunting and jumping classes with Kingpin—although the jumping is new to her this summer——"

Margo stiffened. "I don't know why she has to enter everything in sight," she muttered. "Connie and I can only ride in the five open classes, now that we're professionals——" she rolled out the word in exaggerated quotation marks. "And Ginevra makes me so mad I wonder if it's worth while to enter. I'd hate to be beaten by her, and with her attitude it might be dangerous to win from her——"



Mrs. Macintyre raised her eyebrows. "I think you're making too much of a personal reaction, Margo. She's not as bad as all that. There will always be persons in your life for whom you will feel a natural antagonism, and it may not be any fault of theirs. Relax, honey! Ginevra has a sense of professionalism about her riding that many riders have. She cares more than the casual rider about being excellent, and there is no reason to hold that against her."

Margo shook her head stubbornly. "It's more than that, Mother. She thinks more of the ribbons than she does of the horse. Any horse. Look at it this way: when we win a ribbon we know that half the credit goes to the horse, and when we lose, we know it's our own fault. Isn't that so?" They all agreed with her. "But Ginevra! You can tell, just by watching her, that when she wins, it's because she's so good the horse didn't count, and when she loses, she blames the horse entirely!"

Her mother was silent for a moment. Then she said, "I know, Margo. I've recognized that feeling in her—perhaps that is why it's hard to like her. But as her teacher perhaps it's up to me to change that attitude, to make her into a real horsewoman instead of just an expert rider——"

"I'm glad it's your job and not mine," said Margo. "Personally I do not believe anyone with an attitude like that can be changed."

Her mother looked concerned, but she changed the subject. "In any case, I certainly think you should ride in the classes you're entered for. Withdrawing now is just letting yourself be beaten by default."

"I suppose so," Margo agreed reluctantly. "But it takes most of the fun out of the show——"

They dropped the subject of the horse show then, and talked of the coming school year.

Margo was entering her senior year at the Wentworth Township High School, and with school beginning a week from today she was suddenly looking forward to it. All summer she had not thought about school, enmeshed as she had been in the details of their new life. But in a week, she would be again a high school girl, seeing all the friends she had been too busy for during the summer. And Dan Ryerson.

Her heart thumped irregularly at the thought.

Dan was big and blond and smiling, sought-after and admired. Margo had been in the social spotlight at school, after he had begun going with her last spring. They had been practically going steady, attending every dance together, riding at Green Meadow every weekend. Then he had gone away for the summer, on a trip through the West with one of his friends, and she had had only two post cards since last June. Ah well, she thought now. He was not the kind to write letters, he had told her that when he had left.

But now the summer was past, and in another week she would see him again. The thought crossed her mind uneasily that he must be home by now, and he might have called her up. But she dismissed the idea impatiently. She would have been too busy to see him if he had called. And for all she knew he might have gone straight to his family's summer home, in Wisconsin, to return this weekend, when most of the summer vacationers were coming

back. He would probably call sometime during the week ahead. And if he didn't—she would see him next Monday. That was enough.

Connie said dreamily, "School will certainly be delightful after this summer's grind."

Connie would be a sophomore at Wentworth, and her boy friend of last year had been writing all summer. But Connie was a reserved girl who said nothing to her family about her heart affairs. Margo knew of the correspondence only from having brought in the mail occasionally.

Her mother looked at Connie thoughtfully. "You might look into musical scholarships, Connie. You'll need a scholarship if you expect to go to an out-of-town music school——"

"I know," said Connie, without a note of regret, "I've had that in mind this summer. There must be several, and I'll get one. Don't you worry, Mom. I'm just wondering about all the work around here."

"We'll manage," said Margo and her mother together. "Things do work out. Of course, there's nothing to stop you from baking more cakes and washing dishes, is there?" Margo reached for another slice of birthday cake.

Connie shrugged. "Not a thing, except time. I'm planning to practice at least two hours a day. What will you do when I get a scholarship and go to New York?"

"Oh, by that time," Margo waved an airy hand, "we'll have grooms and a staff of teachers and millions of dollars."

"I can hardly wait for eighth grade to start," said Molly. "Did you know I've lost ten pounds, Mother?"

Honestly! May I have another piece of cake, please? Wait till I tell Beth and Liz and Aggie about our school. Say, I'll bet they'd take lessons here. They were talking about learning to ride last spring. And can I go on with my swimming on Saturdays at the high school? I was just ready for the diving group."

Her mother smiled reassuringly. "I think we can manage the swimming, Molly. You were so good about not going to camp this year——"

"Oh, camp!" Molly made a face. "I never did like that camp. I'd rather stay home with the horses any time."

A group of four pleasure riders was turning into the stable yard, and Margo and Connie went to take their bridles and rub down the horses.

"Beautiful horses," remarked one of the girls as she dismounted. "I'd like to ride here again. Look, Chet, why don't we do this every Sunday for a while? At least through the fall? I've never ridden as much as I wanted to——"

"Good idea." Chet smiled at her. The other couple agreed.

"Would you like to make a reservation for these same horses?" Margo asked, quickly.

The group said they would, and she sent them up to her mother on the terrace to arrange the time and leave their names.

Well. As easily as that they had four more regular pleasure riders every Sunday. She hummed as she curried and brushed Counterpoint and Daffodil.

When she had put the horses into their stalls, she saddled Scarlet Royal for her evening ride, loving every

line of the horse, the delicately boned head, the fine, lustrous, free-blowing mane and tail, the shining red coat, the small impatient hoofs. She ran her hand down Scarlet's neck and withers, patting her gently, and the horse bent her crest as if she liked the touch of Margo's hand.

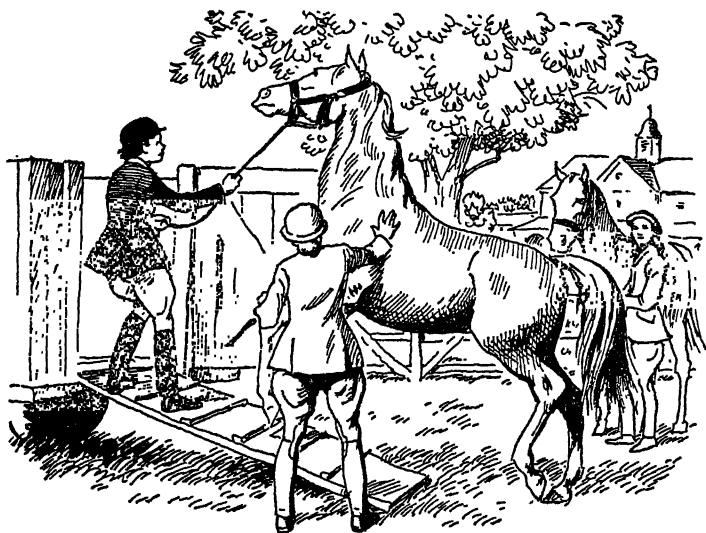
Swinging into the saddle, Margo felt Scarlet move forward in that peculiarly rhythmic pace that made Margo a part of the horse. The compact collected gait at which she moved, the ease with which she went into an extended canter as smooth as flying, her instant response to every suggestion of her rider, the rare combination of a fine way of going with willing co-operation with the rider, had developed between horse and girl a camaraderie that Margo had never before experienced with any horse.

Nothing mattered, she told herself again, with a kind of exultation, as long as she had Scarlet Royal. Someday she would do exciting things with this horse. Someday perhaps they could find a way to race her. But for now, just being near her, caring for her, riding her daily, brushing and grooming and loving her, that was enough.

And next Saturday Margo would show Scarlet again, would win another blue ribbon to hang in her stall, another silver trophy for the school, but it would be Scarlet's trophy. With Scarlet Royal Margo knew she could win as surely as she knew the horse loved her. And every ribbon, every trophy, was fresh recognition for a beautiful horse who deserved recognition.

She walked Scarlet the last mile home in a state of deep contentment.

In spite of everything that had happened this past year, she was lucky, and she knew it.



## CHAPTER FIVE

THE day of the Junior Horse Fair of the Greenwood Equestrian Association dawned warm but fresh, ideal September weather.

Margo opened her eyes at seven, wondering why she felt so excited the first thing in the morning. And then she remembered the Fair and sprang out of bed.

For Margo the Horse Fair represented more than the opportunity to win ribbons for the school or even for Scarlet. It would be the first horse show any of the Macintyres had attended since their father's death in May, and it was like revisiting the easy, secure joyous life they had known before this summer.

There had been no time these months to lounge about the club, chatting with other horsemen of coming eques-

trian events, of new tack, of appointments, of new boots, of horses changing hands and riders winning ribbons. The Macintyres had decided in conference that this year they could not afford the hunt club subscriptions, and they had not participated in the plans for the hunting season as Margo and Mrs. Macintyre had done in other years. And in consequence they had seen almost nothing of their friends for some months, except for the few who dropped in to call on an occasional evening. This horse show, the first important event of the fall season, would bring together everyone they had known, and for the Macintyres it would mean renewing friendships as well as showing their horses.

Margo dressed with greater care than she had ever felt necessary before, in the Oxford gray hunting coat, with the scarlet collar and canary piping of the Millrace Hunt Club, spotless buff breeches, and black boots, wrinkled from honorable service. Her heavy leather gloves matched the buff of her breeches, and her black bowler sat snugly on her head. She tied her white stock with quick movements, and jabbed her thumb with her safety pin. Thrusting her thumb into her mouth she stared sharply at the stock in the mirror. Thank goodness, she hadn't stained it.

She ran down to breakfast, where Mrs. Macintyre was pinning Connie's stock and saying, "We'll have to tie the stocks for all our entries, probably, except the older girls. And let's get the horses over to the show grounds as early as we can."

Madeleine Macintyre was tense about this show, though she had never been before, Margo thought. It was

understandable: everyone in horse circles knew who was studying with whom, and it was vitally important, at this stage of the school's career, that some of their pupils should win ribbons, equally important that Margo and Connie should prove their excellence as horsewomen and teachers.

Molly was jittering around, complaining that she had grown taller this summer as well as thinner, and her habit looked terrible.

"Too late to do anything about that now," remarked Margo, pulling the coat down and straightening the shoulders, brushing some lint off Molly's boots, finding her gloves for her. Another habit for Molly would be a big expense, she thought, wondering if there might be one of Connie's old ones that would fit the younger girl.

Breakfast was a hurried and perfunctory affair. They were all anxious to begin getting the horses into the vans, to reassure themselves that the horses would get to the show. It was decided that Margo should drive Scarlet Royal and Red Queen over to the show grounds first, with Mrs. Macintyre, who would bring back the van for Bittersweet and Domino, and make another trip for Counterpoint and Gingham Girl. Margo thought of the days when Dick had driven all the horses to shows. Life had been simpler then than she had ever realized.

When she led Scarlet up the ramp leading into the van, Scarlet balked. It was an ill omen, and Margo could feel herself getting uneasy. "Good girl," she patted and encouraged the horse. "Come on, Scarlet. You've done this before. Nothing to it." She talked cajolingly, soothingly, persuasively. Scarlet stood rock-still, looking at Margo



as if to say, "You don't really expect me to go into that cage, do you?"

Mrs. Macintyre pulled from the other side. Scarlet tossed her head and refused to move. Margo went inside the van and called her. Scarlet, scenting a trick in the call, whinnied her answer from where she stood, one foot disdainfully pawing the ramp.

"It's no use," Margo panted after fifteen minutes of effort. She racked her brain for some method of enticing the horse into the van. It was impossible that Scarlet should not get to the show, should not win the ribbons Margo was planning to take for her.

"Let's get the Queen in first," suggested Connie, leading Red Queen forward. "Scarlet might not worry so much if she saw her mother go in——"

Mrs. Macintyre looked at Scarlet Royal disparagingly.

"Just a nuisance, that's all," she pronounced. "I have no use for a horse that won't perform."

"She will, Mother," Margo said quickly. "She's a personality girl, and she's got temperament!" She tried to laugh off her mother's disparagement, but it hurt to have so fine a horsewoman disapprove of Scarlet.

Red Queen went in obligingly.

"But she's more used to it," Margo pointed out. "Scarlet has only ridden in the van once before—maybe she got jounced that time. How do we know?"

They went to work again, leading her forward from a distance and walking with an effect of confidence straight up the ramp and into the van. This time Scarlet, seeing the other horse inside, looked questioningly at Margo, pawed protestingly once or twice, and suddenly walked

up the ramp and inside, where Margo hastily and firmly cross-tied both horses.

She climbed into the driver's seat with the feeling that already she had done a hard day's work, and the show was still ahead.

"Now drive very carefully," her mother reminded her. "No sudden stops or quick turns——"

"I know." Margo could feel her impatience tingling in her fingers, she was so anxious to get to the show grounds.

"You'll have to get hold of yourself," her mother remarked, watching the road ahead. "You're much too tense. That could have caused the trouble with Scarlet this morning. I don't remember any difficulty last spring about the van. Horses sense those things, you know. If you're nervous you'll make her nervous."

"I know," Margo repeated. She did know and she was trying to bring herself into a state of philosophic calm. But that was not done by wishing, she thought with exasperation.

At the show grounds cars were parked in a circle facing the ring in the cleared meadow. Spectators sat in their cars, on the hoods and bumpers, or stood around the ring to watch the show. Margo drove past the show ring, waving to some of her old friends, around to the back where riders were walking their horses, practicing jumps, visiting with friends and rivals. She put Scarlet Royal and Red Queen into a small enclosure, as her mother drove off with the van, and then turned to greet friends she hadn't seen since the last show, girls who had returned from summer vacations only a week ago.

"We're so glad to see you people," a wind-blown

matron with gray hair and a sun-tanned face spoke enthusiastically. "How is the school going? I've heard wonderful reports——"

"Will your mother be here later? We've missed you all this summer." A member of the riding club shook Margo's hand warmly.

It was like old home week. Margo was touched and pleased with the enthusiastic welcome from old friends, and reassured that life had not changed as much as she had thought during the summer. Friends were friends, whether you had money or had lost it, and these long-time riding friends made it evident that they considered that the Macintyres were still important people in their lives.

Margo saw horses she had known, new ones that looked promising. Her tension disappeared entirely, and she was prepared to enjoy the show as she always enjoyed shows, when Ginevra rode past on Coquette.

The shining bay mare had great style, with her head held high, her tail arched, her high action. Margo liked all horses, but her dislike for Ginevra suddenly rushed through her with such intensity that she could not like even the horse she was riding.

Ginevra, perfectly habited, immaculately tailored, smiled down at Margo with an expression that Margo interpreted as great condescension. She carried her head arrogantly, and her expression showed her awareness of being the center of attention. This was what she rode for: to appear to advantage before an audience. The group of horsemen around Margo was silent, and an unwilling admiration was suppressed.

The other Macintyre horses arrived, the Green Meadow contestants were lined up, Margo and Connie straightened stocks, set hats straight on excited heads, calmed and encouraged their riders.

The show opened.

Margo found every class intensely interesting. It was always a challenging preoccupation, like working a crossword puzzle without references, to pit her judgment against the judges, to see if she could spot the winners before they were announced. She watched every rider, every horse, calculating poise, form, skill in equitation, hands, feeling for the horse.

In the second class she was positive that a Green Meadow pupil was the blue-ribbon winner, and she was shocked to discover that the child got fourth place. What was wrong with her own judgment, she wondered, and what did the judges see that she herself had missed? She had to admit that the winner was an excellent performer, a stranger whom she had scarcely noticed, in her concentration on the Green Meadow entries.

After that she tried to look at the Green Meadow riders as if she had never seen them before, and was excited beyond measure when one of their entries in the hireling class won the blue ribbon. She looked around for her mother and saw her by the ring entrance, welcoming the prize-winner, who rode out of the ring with blue rosettes on Red Queen's brow-band, a silver trophy hugged to herself in triumph. Madeleine Macintyre looked as happy as the young prize-winner, and Margo heard someone say, close to her, "That little rider had good teaching. She shows beautiful form for the hireling class."

In the next class the Macintyre entry came in sixth, nearly breaking into tears as she left the ring. Disappointed as she was herself at the showing, Margo made a mental note: drill the kids more on show manners and philosophy. They've got to learn that winning isn't that important, that it's the fun of riding that counts, not just being the best.

The five-gaited equitation class was called, and twenty entries trotted into the ring on fine saddle horses, and lined up in single file. Margo found herself watching Ginevra, in this class, with the eye of a teacher hoping a pupil will bring acclaim to her instructor. Ginevra accepted a blue ribbon with gracious appreciation, allowed herself to be photographed with the trophy, and smiled brilliantly at the applause that accompanied her as she left the ring.

During the next class Margo went out to get a hot dog and a soft drink from one of the food wagons standing about the grounds. The only entry she knew in the class was Ginevra, and she had watched Ginevra long enough.

Another acquaintance came up to Margo as she munched on her hot dog, to tell her how happy they were in the Saddle Club to have one of her mother's pupils as a new member. Wasn't Ginevra a charming girl? And such a fine horsewoman! Margo agreed pleasantly with everything, suggesting finally, to escape, that they go back to the ringside and watch the final awards. She was just in time to see Ginevra win another blue ribbon.

"That will put her in the International Show in November," cried her acquaintance in delight. In her excite-

ment she left Margo, to try and speak to the winner. Margo was pleased to be alone again.

She watched the ring for another half hour, and then, tired of unknown saddle horse entries, she wandered back where the horses were kept. The handy hunters would be called in the next class but one, and she looked for Scarlet Royal, uneasy again over the show, as she had been earlier.

She rode Scarlet up and down the path, putting her through paces, turning and backing, and the horse's response which had seemed to her at first less ready than usual became keyed to her own will, and her confidence became calm and sure. Ginevra was entered in handy hunters also. Remembering that, Margo looked unwillingly about for her, hoping she would not see her. But Ginevra was leaning against the hood of her flame-colored convertible, at the end of the ring near the exercising path, and as Margo met her eye she waved indifferently.

Margo wheeled away, annoyed with herself, and tried Scarlet at some practice jumps, knowing that Ginevra's eyes were on her and feeling herself tightening up involuntarily. Scarlet knocked down the slip fillet on the first hurdle and refused the second.

In despair Margo wheeled her away from the jumps and cantered for a few minutes. It must be her fault that Scarlet had refused. It was because she was so strung up today. But how overcome her tension? She had felt from the beginning that this show would do them no good, and now she was more sure than ever that nothing was going to go right for her.

When the handy hunters were called, Margo found that she was going to be the third contestant to enter the ring, and Ginevra was somewhere behind her. With a strong effort of will, she put Ginevra out of her mind, watching the first girl ride in and put her horse at the hurdle. He took it clumsily, and Margo thought, she's holding back, she isn't helping him at all. He's going to refuse the next one. He did refuse, three times, and the rider was excused, looking, as she left the ring, as if she were controlling her disappointment with difficulty. The second horse refused the first hurdle twice, and again the second hurdle, and the girl rode out, impassively. Margo thought, she ought to come to us. We could teach her how to jump. And then she heard her number called, and found herself riding into the ring.

Unexpectedly she rose to the challenge of the arena. She had forgotten her problems entirely, while she was considering the two who had failed, and now, riding up to the hurdle. she leaned slightly forward and up at the right moment, feeling Scarlet collect herself almost imperceptibly as the horse rose smoothly through the air, clearing the hurdle as easily as if she were cantering. In the tingle of exhilaration that always came from feeling the horse respond to her so lightly and so promptly, Margo took her across the brush jump, wheeled to the right around a post, took three more hurdles in rhythmic succession, jumped a wall, rode in a three-cornered path to jump a coop, swung down easily to open the gate, and again to close it securely, and led Scarlet over a fallen log. She was startled at the small, quickly stifled burst of applause as she left the ring. Oh Scarlet, you darling,

she thought, looking up at the horse. You did it, just as I knew you could.

She watched the rest of the class critically, and she knew no horse performed as Scarlet had. Ginevra's form was perfect, until she came to the brush jump, when Kingpin, a spirited black hunter, refused twice. Margo could see Ginevra's mouth tighten, as if she were controlling a furious anger, but with admirable self-control she brought him around the course. The refusals had cost her the blue ribbon, of course, and she accepted the sixth-place award with unconscious disdain. Watching her horsemanship, Margo could not understand what had made the horse refuse. Ginevra was a beautiful rider. Margo was forced to recognize that.

The blue ribbon went to Margo, who received it for Scarlet with delight.

In the touch and out class Margo rode a perfect course, the only contestant who did. Ginevra was eliminated at the third obstacle, as Kingpin dropped the slip fillet. She turned to leave the ring, white with fury, and as she approached the gate, almost out of sight of the ring of on-lookers, she lashed her horse unmercifully with her heavy crop. Kingpin reared in protest, and Ginevra brought him down expertly, with an expression that said, I'll show this beast who's boss.

Margo was sick at heart. It always disturbed her to see any horse mistreated, and she was depressed at the knowledge that this girl who took out her disappointment on her horse was in some part a responsibility of theirs, since she was studying with them.

At the end of the long day the Macintyres collected



their horses and their trophies, made sure each of their younger pupils was in the company of his parents, and returned to Green Meadow to reminisce over the events of the show, to assess the showing the Green Meadow pupils had made, and to make notes on teaching practices to be improved or to be congratulated.

Connie had taken a blue ribbon in the novice hunters, and Molly had won a junior handicap hunter class, and a junior five-gaited saddle horse class with Bittersweet. Four of their pupils had taken blue ribbons, six others had placed in the ribbons.

"In some ways," Mrs. Macintyre remarked, "this show was more fun, because it meant so much professionally. In the other shows we were only thinking about our own ribbons."

Fun? Margo wondered. It would have been but for the dark foreboding that seemed to overhang her thoughts of Ginevra.

"I don't understand why Ginevra's horse refused in that handy hunter course," said Connie. "She handled him beautifully."

"I think she overworked him," said Mrs. Macintyre. "She's had him only this summer, three months, and she was so determined to polish him for this show that she was jumping him a couple of hours a day. Of course no horse would stand that. I warned her, but she didn't believe me."

"What can she do about it now?"

Mrs. Macintyre shrugged. "She'll have to begin all over again—as if he'd never had a lesson. It's too bad, because she had set her heart on winning with him."

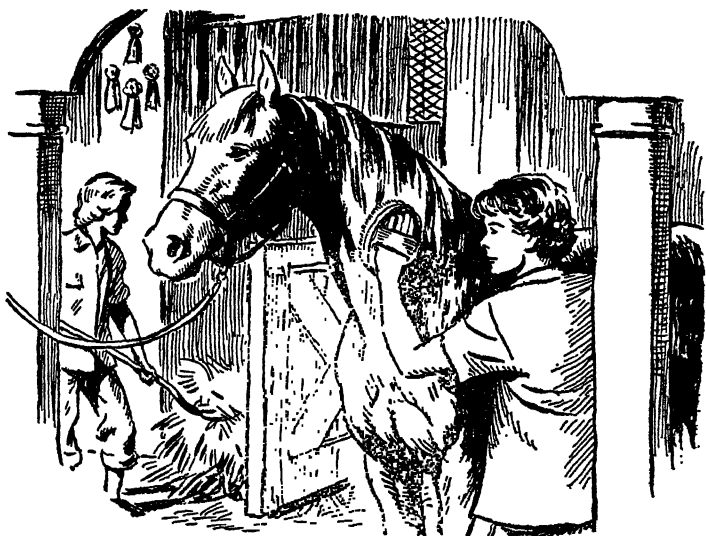
Margo was impatient with the whole subject. "She won a couple of ribbons on Coquette, didn't she? And the way she lashed Kingpin, when she left the ring that time, I'd be surprised if she ever could school a horse properly."

Mrs. Macintyre sighed. "Her temperament is against her," she said. "And while I've been trying to change her point of view and make her understand what the philosophy of real horsemanship is, I never can feel that I've made any headway."

"I think she's hopeless," said Margo positively. "No matter how she looks on a horse, she hasn't got the real stuff down underneath——"

"Oh, she's not as bad as all that," her mother defended her prize pupil. "You just haven't liked the girl from the day you first saw her, and that's hardly fair, either."

Margo said no more. But she was still bothered by her uneasy feeling.



## CHAPTER SIX

SUNDAY morning Margo went out to the stables with a pleasant sense of achievement. The horse show was past, they had several new ribbons, and whatever she had been afraid of had not materialized. No child had been thrown or injured, no horse had behaved badly, no open conflicts had occurred, and they had already had calls from two parents who wanted to arrange riding hours for their children. In the shining sunlight of the bright September morning she was convinced that she had feared only the obvious kinds of accidents that might mar the Macintyres' reputation. Since nothing of that sort had happened, she had thrown off entirely her anxiety of the night before, and she hummed a popular tune as she curried Scarlet Royal, breaking off now and then

to talk to the horse about how beautifully she had performed yesterday.

Margo loved caring for the horses. Even when Dick Elder had been with them, doing the hard work, she had always wanted to rub down the horse she brought in from a ride, sure that she could detect in the animal's expression its pleasure at being made comfortable. Her enthusiasm had not extended to the care of the tack, nor to cleaning out the stable. But now that she was responsible for those details, too, she did not mind them. Any stable work she found more rewarding than housework, which she hurried through as quickly as possible, in order to get out to the horses.

She led Scarlet out to the paddock and left her to graze while she worked on Red Queen, wondering as she groomed the mare why no horse meant as much to her as Scarlet Royal. She loved and understood all their horses. But for Scarlet there was a special affinity that she had never felt for another horse. Rubbing the mare's slender legs and working over her hoofs, she let herself dream about the future when she would be free to make of Scarlet Royal the great horse she was destined to be.

A car drove into the white-stoned roadway and crunched to a stop. Who could be calling on them at ten o'clock on Sunday morning, Margo wondered idly. She finished her work on Red Queen and then cleaned Scarlet's stall before she took the mare into the paddock.

"Margo?"

Looking over her shoulder, she saw her mother standing in the door of the stable with a couple of visitors.

"I'll be right there." She washed her hands quickly and came out into the sunlight, to face Ginevra and a short, stocky man with gray hair, glasses, and an air of being engaged in important business.

"Margo, this is Ginevra's father, Mr. Cranshaw," Madeleine Macintyre said. Margo held out her hand, wondering why her mother sounded so neutral. "He wants to talk to you."

"Certainly," said Margo, glancing from father to daughter. Ginevra smiled remotely, as if dealing with Margo were necessary but tedious.

Mr. Cranshaw came straight to the point. "You've got a very fine horse there," he said, waving toward the paddock. Margo's heart plunged and then stood still. "The chestnut filly over there—what's the name?"

Margo's mouth was too dry to speak, and Ginevra answered for her. "Scarlet Royal," she said, as if she were prompting.

"That's the one," said Mr. Cranshaw. "Ginny here tells me Scarlet Royal is better than any horse she's seen around here, and we'd like to buy her. Ginny wants a better horse than she's got, and I'm willing to get her any horse that will improve her riding."

Margo felt cold and stiff. She stared from Ginevra who was watching Scarlet approvingly, to Mr. Cranshaw who was looking at Margo with an intent, businesslike stare. This danger to her horse she had never anticipated.

Struggling to get out of the situation, she said, "But I never thought of selling Scarlet. She is my own horse. Any other horse we have—might be—available."

"But Scarlet Royal is the one she wants," said Mr.

Cranshaw, briskly. "Would twenty-five hundred dollars be satisfactory?"

Margo felt her mother stiffen beside her. She knew they could not afford to refuse. But smothering quickly her sense of responsibility, she said, "No! She is not for sale."

"Oh, now, come," said Mr. Cranshaw, a little impatiently, as if he disliked losing time about getting his own way. "After all, you're in business here——" He waved his hand in the direction of the big sign that read "Green Meadow Riding School." "Ginevra tells me Scarlet is not a school horse. Why not let her go for a good price?"

Margo was furiously angry, but she dared say nothing. She shook her head mutely, glancing toward her mother, who smiled at her in support of Margo's stand. Mr. Cranshaw looked from one to the other of them and an unwilling respect came into his eyes. Margo knew what he was thinking: that money must not mean so much to the Macintyres as he had supposed, and that Scarlet Royal must be a better horse than he had expected to buy. Well, Ginevra had told her he paid three thousand dollars for Kingpin, Margo thought angrily. How dared he offer less than that for Scarlet? *How dared he offer her a price for Scarlet at all?*

She was suddenly weak with fear.

"The horse is worth more than that, Dad," Ginevra said, in a tone of authority. "Look at her, out there in the paddock. Wonderful conformation. And I've seen her in action. Beautiful way of going, well-mannered, well-schooled. Oh, Dad, I've got to have her!"

Mr. Cranshaw glanced at Margo, whose face was stony, and spoke to Mrs. Macintyre half-apologetically.

"I don't know a thing about horses, myself," he said. "Only I like to watch them. But Ginevra here—she knows what she wants, and I want her to have any horse she thinks she can ride better than another. She's going to do something big in the horse world." His eyes dwelt fondly on his daughter for a minute. "If she wants Scarlet, I can afford it."

Rallying to the struggle now, Margo said carefully, "I don't think you ought to buy a horse without trying her out. Why don't you ride her, Ginevra? Be sure you want her. I really don't think anyone could handle Scarlet but me——"

What she meant was that the one-man horse was unresponsive to anyone but herself. But the way she said it challenged both the Cranshaws.

"Ginevra can ride anything," said her father positively. "She could handle any horse. Why, out West last year, you should have seen her take on some of those broncs——"

"I don't think it will be necessary for me to try the horse," said Ginevra coolly. "I'm not dressed for riding. And any horse will feel strange with a new rider for awhile. You can't tell much that way!" she said flatly.

"Twenty-seven fifty," said Mr. Cranshaw, in a take-it-or-leave-it tone.

Margo looked at her mother, helpless and desperate. That was more money than they had grossed out of all the summer's work, and Scarlet was only a luxury item anyway.

Mrs. Macintyre, with a glance at Margo's stricken face, said firmly, "No. The horse really is not for sale at any price."

"Well"—Mr. Cranshaw seemed to be regretfully ending the conversation—"three thousand."

The words rang in Margo's ears, and suddenly the demands of the school, the needs of the family beat in her brain. In an access of self-sacrificing despair, she threw out her hands before her mother could defend her position again.

"O.K.," she said dully. "You can have her."

She stood motionless, while the Cranshaws made final arrangements with her mother. They would send over a groom, with a veterinary to check the horse this afternoon, and a van to bring her home, delivering the check at that time.

Ginevra smiled upon both Macintyres with an expression that said she was satisfied that getting Margo's horse was a very sharp transaction. She shouldn't let the girl know how much she cared, thought Margo, averting her face. But she knew that Ginevra knew.

Abruptly Margo turned away and moved woodenly over to the paddock, hearing nothing more, seeing nothing. Clinging to the fence, she kept her face turned toward Scarlet, knowing that she couldn't stand Ginevra's self-satisfied look any longer. The car door slammed, the wheels rolled on the stones. Margo buried her face in her arms.

When the car was out of sight, she called Scarlet to her and fondled her for a moment. Then she saddled the horse and rode out on the driveway.



"I'm going for a ride," she called, without looking at her mother, who was sitting on the terrace staring into the distance thoughtfully.

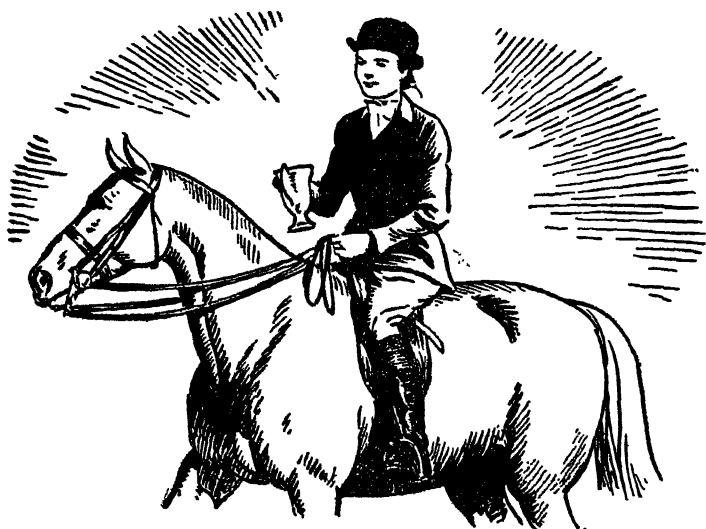
She rode hard for an hour, trying to forget that this was the last time that she and Scarlet would ride together.

In the woods she left the bridle path, out of sight of passing motorists and picnickers, and slipped off Scarlet in a quiet grove of birch trees. Leaning her head against the horse's withers, she wept convulsively. Scarlet whinnied in sympathy, turned her head, and tried to nuzzle the girl. Clinging to the filly's neck, Margo moaned, "How can I ever stand it?"

She couldn't do it. She'd tell them this afternoon that she'd changed her mind. She'd send away the veterinary, the van, the check.

"But three thousand dollars!" she thought. "I can't throw away all that money just to please myself, just to keep a horse no one else can ride——"

She tried to pull herself together then, to tell herself it was ridiculous to build all her dreams on a horse. At last, exhausted with weeping, and calm again, she dried her eyes and climbed into the saddle to ride slowly home.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE next day school opened.

Margo drove to the Wentworth High School as she had since her sophomore year. Green Meadow was off the high school bus route, and two years ago her father had taught her to drive and designated one of the cars as the "high school taxi." This summer, in considering their financial adjustments, Mrs. Macintyre had determined that if they could possibly keep two cars they should do so, because of the daily school trip for all three girls. So Margo drove Connie to high school with her, and dropped Molly off at the home of a friend with whom she walked to the grade school in the village.

Connie was a silent kind of person, chatting very little, unless she had something of importance to discuss or to announce. This morning she sat wrapped in thoughts

of her own, a faint smile of anticipation on her face.

Margo was glad enough not to talk. Almost anything she and Connie could have discussed at this point would have led directly to the riding school, the horses, and the fact that Scarlet Royal was gone. She was thinking now, as she drove past dun-colored shocks of corn and orange-berried bittersweet, that today she would see Dan Ryerson again. It would help so much, she thought, unconsciously pressing the accelerator.

“Aren’t you going kind of fast?” Connie inquired.

Margo let the car slow down, remembering those days last spring when she had been going with Dan. That seemed like another life now, so much had happened since then.

She had not gone out with many boys in her freshman and sophomore years. Dates and dances and going steady had never appealed to her as much as riding and hunting and showing. When other girls were going to Andy’s every afternoon to meet the boys, or talking about the Wednesday social hour at school, or looking for new formals, Margo had spent her time schooling one of her horses, or being fitted for a new habit, or looking forward to the next hunt. The only school activity in which she really shared the interest of her fellow students was the football schedule.

And then, in the fall of her junior year, boys at school became suddenly interesting. She began watching them openly, smiling when she caught their eyes, talking about them with the other girls. Dan Ryerson, she knew, noticed only the popular girls. And she admired Dan Ryerson beyond any boy she had ever seen.

It began one day when he made a spectacular eighty-yard run for a touchdown in the last five minutes of play, turning a defeat of 13-12 into a 19-13 victory for Wentworth High School, over the undefeated Greenfield team. She could hardly wait to see him the following Monday, treading the same floor with her, sitting in the same home room. And when he appeared in class that fateful day, following his heroic performance, she knew that for the first time in her life she was more interested in a boy than she was in her horses.

For the next six weeks she watched him worshipfully, discovering that other girls also admired him, and that it was comforting and delightful to discuss him with them. She went to Andy's with some of the girls several times, trying to learn more about techniques for attracting his attention. And occasionally he smiled at her in the home room. She wondered how you got farther with a boy than smiles of recognition. How did you get your love to ask you for a date?

Then for a couple of weeks she was too busy to worry about Dan. The International Horse Show was scheduled for the first week in December in Chicago. It was one of the major events in the world of horse shows, and as the date came closer the importance of preparing for her entry pushed high school matters into the background. She rode Red Queen in the show and took a silver cup in equitation. Her picture, accepting the silver cup on her horse, appeared in the rotogravure section of the Sunday paper the next week. "Member of the Junior Hunting Set on the North Shore Takes Trophy," the caption read.

It was a good picture of Red Queen, Margo thought, hardly noticing herself.

The next week Dan phoned to ask her to go to a dance on Saturday night. She accepted as calmly as she could, and after she hung up the telephone she was weak and trembling. So it had happened! She had no idea why.

After that they went together most of the spring.

In those first months, for Margo, the delight of being with Dan was underlaid with uncertainty. She could never feel sure that this was true, that she wasn't going to wake from the dream and find that he was gone. And she clung to every indication that he cared, she sought reassurance in every date, until at last in the late spring she believed that he was in love with her at least as much as she was with him.

He was handsome, he was an excellent dancer, he was amusing, he was a school hero. The combination was irresistible. Margo began to feel secure in her love, the more so when Dan took riding lessons that spring in order to be able to ride with her weekends. With the fine co-ordination of a natural athlete, he became a skilled rider very quickly, and she admired him even more.

That spring she became aware of his faults, but she was so infatuated that she excused them, overlooked them, persuaded herself that they were unimportant. She knew by April that he had asked her for that first date because her picture had appeared in the paper and to Dan that was a valuable asset. She realized that he cared less about horses than horsy society, and he had told he'

that he wanted to belong to the Hunt Club, where she had assured him her father would sponsor him. He talked with a cynical humor of winners and recognition and making the grade and getting the breaks, as if anyone who couldn't be a winner and who couldn't get the breaks was a lower form of life than the one that he and Margo belonged to. He liked a girl with style and money and prestige: she recognized that. But so long as she was the girl, did it matter?

Then had come the shock of her father's death in May. Dan had expressed proper sympathy, and they had had one last date after the funeral, just before he had gone away for vacation. That had been a difficult evening, she remembered with a pang, because that night she had wanted more assurance that he cared, and she had sensed his recoil from the demand on his affection.

After that he had gone away for the summer, and she had been too involved with the riding school to worry much about him, although she had thought of him often, confident that in the fall they could go back to the old basis of the early spring.

Now, as she approached the school, her heart began to quicken. Dan would be in her home room, as he had been last year. She would ask him when he was going to hunt, invite him to ride next weekend.

She parked the car in the parking lot and with Connie went through the side door, eager to get to her home room. The walls were freshly painted, the gleaming linoleum already showed tracks of the first footsteps, the ranks of slate-colored lockers were familiar and welcoming. She walked through the long lower hall to the

double staircase at the far end, went up to the second floor, down the long wing to Room 222.

Dan was there already, sitting in the back corner seat he always chose, and as she crossed the room near enough, he said, "Hi, Margo!" with a casual smile. He was friendly enough, but, supersensitive today, she wondered if he looked wary. He was studying his schedule with a look of great concentration, and Margo deliberately chose a seat down in front where she couldn't see him. There was plenty of time, and she must be careful not to let him think she was taking anything for granted.

When the class moved out of the home room into the hall, she lingered a little, hoping that he would catch up with her. But he was busy with two of the other boys, and she told herself that couples didn't make a practice out of walking together between classes anyway.

By the end of the second period their schedules separated them for the rest of the morning. There was no time to talk with him all day, it turned out, occupied as she was with schedules, new teachers, book lists, and all the busy detail of the first day. Over all of Margo's reactions hung a heavy pall of sorrow for Scarlet Royal. Nothing seemed really important, here in the high school, but dutifully she listened as carefully as she could. Even Dan seemed remote. Better not look him up, in any case, she thought during the noon hour, with a flicker of irony. He must be tired by now of a girl with a tragedy. Better wait for him to come to her.

At three o'clock she was preparing to go home, dreading the thought of facing Scarlet's empty stall, when Dan walked down the hall with Ginevra, both of them looking

very much as if they belonged together. Margo turned quickly to search in the far corners of her locker. As she closed the door they passed her, and she could not restrain a quick glance at them. Dan grinned at Margo as if he still knew her, but were letting her know he was quite disentangled. With a flash of insight, Margo realized, money would fetch Dan, Ginevra's money, and Ginevra's prestige, which she advertised in the very way she walked. She had acquired Dan as easily as she had acquired Scarlet Royal.

As they moved on down the hall, Ginevra said in her clear, carrying voice, "Did you know the Macintyres have opened a riding school? We just bought a beautiful horse from them yesterday——"

Her tone said: we were very kind to them in their need, throwing them this crumb of business. Dan responded in an undertone, and Ginevra said, glancing up very casually, "Why don't you come over and ride one of these days?"

He's hooked, Margo thought. Gone for good.

She tried to walk easily through the halls, not rushing, not stamping, not letting anyone know how angry she was. But she vowed with every step she took that men were undependable, heartbreaking, and never would she put any confidence in a man again.

Sick at heart, she arrived home to discover that three private pupils had dropped out and that Bittersweet had developed thrush because Molly had been neglecting his feet. Connie, finding that the piano tuner, who had been called a week ago, had not yet appeared, began storming that the piano was too out of tune for her to practice, and



Mrs. Macintyre, sitting at the desk with her head in her hands, said, "We just got a tax bill today for fifteen hundred dollars! I had forgotten the real-estate payment came due this month."

Margo dropped her books with a thud on the table. "Maybe it's just a waste of time to try and keep this place going!" she said wearily. "Work, work, work, and then we have to sell the best horse we ever owned, and put up with people like Ginevra Cranshaw! What's the point?"

Mrs. Macintyre sat up straight, her eyes snapping. "If you girls want to sell out and move into Chicago, that's your choice. This business was a joint undertaking, and I certainly can't keep it going alone."

Connie played a scale down the length of the keyboard with one finger, scowling at the tone. "I must say, horses are a lot of work. In that city apartment there would be lots less to do. Believe me, when I get the chance, it's the big city for me—and service!"

"You pay for everything you get, in one way or another," her mother remarked. "Less work, less pleasure, perhaps."

"I don't see how we could have much less pleasure than we've got now," Margo muttered bitterly. Her mother glanced at her, troubled, but said nothing.

Margo moved restlessly about the room, picking up the morning paper which she had not yet read, throwing it down again, noticing that tables needed dusting and thinking, what's the use, they'd just be dusty again tomorrow.

"I think I'll ride for a while," she said abruptly. "Any special horse needing exercise?"

Her mother looked thoughtful, and Margo winced at her own question, knowing that two days ago there would have been no need to ask which horse to ride. Then Mrs. Macintyre said, "They all need riding except Daffodil, honey. Choose your own."

Margo went out to the stable, wanting to ride, and yet not wanting to. She moped about the stalls for a while, staring at the ribbons left in Scarlet's stall, and thinking how little they meant when the horse was gone, how little any of the other horses meant to her without the one she wanted most.

Then she shook herself. She was still a horsewoman. Certainly she was not going to give up riding, because of one horse. She went out to the paddock, choosing between the horses grazing there. Red Queen was her own mare. But Counterpoint had more fire, more personality. Next to Scarlet Royal, he was the best horse they had. He could be shown brilliantly, and he was so different from the chestnut filly that perhaps he could take her place better than the chestnut mare who was so like Scarlet, and yet not like enough. She would take over the care of Counterpoint, Margo decided, saddling him quickly. That would relieve her mother and help to keep herself busy.

Out on the bridle path she galloped him for a while, finding more pleasure than she had anticipated in his flowing gait and easy tireless action. She felt as if years had passed since she had been on a horse, so long had the past twenty-four hours been, since Scarlet had gone. Counterpoint responded quickly and well, but there was a difference between the horses. She wondered if size

made all the difference. Scarlet had been just under sixteen hands, dainty and fleet and streamlined. Counterpoint was a heavyweight hunter, seventeen hands and powerfully built, close-coupled, short-cannoned, with a way of going that suggested untapped energy, yet beautifully responsive to the lightest use of the aids.

Margo became so absorbed in considering the difference between the horses, in admiring Counterpoint's fine manner and schooling, surprised that she had not observed his distinction before, that for a quarter of an hour she hardly noticed in what direction she was riding. When she set him to an easy canter and relaxed to look about the countryside, she found herself approaching the Cranshaw place, five miles from Green Meadow.

Her first impulse was to change her course. Then she caught sight of the white, cross-barred fence of the Cranshaw paddock, half a mile down the road, and she thought of seeing Scarlet Royal again, who might even now be grazing there. She looked quickly about: the bridle path and road along which she had come were empty as far back as she could see. Her path led alongside the paddock, and coming from this direction, she was screened from the main house by the stables, a long, low, summer house, and a thick lilac hedge.

Recklessly she rode at a gallop up to the paddock, hoping only that Ginevra would be nowhere in sight.

Three horses were grazing there: Coquette was cropping the grass along the far fence from Margo, Kingpin raised his head and looked around uneasily at the sound of another horse, and Scarlet Royal was eating, quietly indifferent to sounds, not far from Coquette.

Margo reined in her horse beside the fence and gave the low whistle that she had always used for Scarlet. The filly's head went up alertly. She looked around the paddock, and then, seeing Margo beside the fence, came to her at a rush.

The girl slipped off Counterpoint and fastened his reins quickly about the fence. Then she cried softly, "Oh, Scarlet, you darling! Have they been good to you?" The filly thrust her head across the top rail and nuzzled Margo, with small, whickering noises.

Margo dashed her hand across her eyes, impatient with tears now, rubbed Scarlet's neck and ran her hand over the horse's crest, patting her endearingly and murmuring reassurances. Scarlet twisted her head and caught Margo's sleeve in her teeth, tugging playfully. Margo was swept with a wave of longing to vault onto Scarlet's back and ride her again, just for a minute, just inside the pasture. Sternly she held herself in check. This was no longer her horse.

Somewhere on the main road she heard a car approaching the house, crunching on gravel as it turned into the Cranshaw drive.

"I'll come back," she promised Scarlet, with a final hug.

Mounting Counterpoint quickly, she turned into the lane through which she had come and rode away at a gallop, not wanting to be seen. Because, as she had talked to the horse, she had determined to come over daily, when she could, and see her horse.

Somehow she was going to get Scarlet back again.

Exhilarated by that determination she rode home

again, finding in Counterpoint satisfaction that she had thought was gone forever. Somehow life looked different now. Scarlet was not, after all, so far away as she had thought. Margo's confidence soared. Now she had something to fight for, and characteristically she collected herself for the struggle, feeling new excitement surge in her veins.

Even Dan didn't matter, she thought scornfully. Only, if Dan didn't matter, no man did. From here on she would put her faith in horses and in herself. No more men.

When she got home she rubbed down Counterpoint, admiring the silvery gray of his coat, the fine pattern of veins, the strength in his legs. So different from Scarlet. But beautiful, too, in his own way. His coat gleamed in the late afternoon light, the mane and the fine-haired tail almost white. She gave him his water, filled his manger with hay, measured out three quarts of oats, spread the straw evenly over the floor. Closing and latching the half-door securely, she went on to Red Queen's stall, which she had cleaned out in the morning. Might as well do all the stable work before she went into the house. She filled the water pail, and went out to bring in the Red Queen and make her ready for the night.

Passing Scarlet's stall she thought, it won't be for long. She will come back, I'll get her back. Somehow. Sometime. Instead of reminding her of heartbreak, now the empty stall was a challenge to her, she could look at the ribbons there and promise herself and Scarlet that this loss was only temporary. I can do anything I have to do, Margo told herself in a fierce assertion of confidence. And I can get Scarlet back again.

Crossing the lawn she noticed that the late roses were still blooming, pink and white and scarlet, tea-colored and yellow and crimson. She stooped over the bushes and breathed the fragrance. Then she looked toward the west, where the sun was setting in a broken sea of red clouds. Between her and the horizon stretched the fields and roads and trees and the rolling, open land, scented now with the smoky haze of fall. Nothing was changed since yesterday, her home was as lovely as ever, her Middle Western countryside was as rich and spacious and satisfying, to ride through, to live in, to look at. Nothing was changed, except the ownership of one horse. And that is not for keeps, Margo told herself, with a lift of her heart.

When she came inside the house Connie was practicing, ill-tempered still at the condition of the piano, Margo could tell by the way she repeated runs and banged out chords. Molly was setting the table, her mother was putting potatoes into the oven to bake with meat loaf. Madeleine Macintyre looked up as her eldest daughter came into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of milk.

“Will you show Molly what is wrong with Bittersweet, Margo?” she said, “and how she should be cleaning those hoofs? My goodness, I didn’t think there was anyone in this family that didn’t know how to look after a horse——”

“I have been cleaning those hoofs.” Molly burst out of the dining room, deeply offended at this slight to her horsemanship. “But the last couple of weeks he just wouldn’t let me lift his feet up, and with the show and everything I guess I just got too busy to mention it.”

"I'll show you how to lift up his feet whether he likes it or not," Margo said. "Mom, I've decided that days like this are depressing, but after all they don't come very often. This time everything happened all at once. But I'd rather go on struggling here instead of someplace else that wouldn't have roses and sunsets and horses."

Her mother looked at her directly, and smiled.

"I'm delighted to hear you say that, Margo," she said. "I think we're happier this way, but with you girls doing so much of the work, it has to be your decision. We're beginning the fall in very good shape, and even that tax bill we can meet, with Scarlet's sale." Margo winced, but her mother went on as if she hadn't noticed. "Otherwise it would have taken all our profit from the summer work. I was heartsick to see her go." Mrs. Macintyre glanced at Margo. It was the first time the subject had been openly discussed between them. "But when you said they could have her, I couldn't see any way to help it—in the position we're in."

Margo shrugged. "It couldn't be helped, Mom. I'll get over it, I suppose. Only someday I'm going to get her back."

She and her mother stared at each other for a moment. Margo knew Mrs. Macintyre had never shared her feeling for Scarlet, and yet she would do anything in her power for the happiness of one of her daughters. It was ridiculous to think of spending three thousand dollars to buy back a horse that no one could ride but Margo. But she had to let her mother know of her determination, although she would not mention it again, if she could help it.

Connie came out from the piano, on her way to her work in the stables.

"No matter where we live," she remarked with some bitterness, "we will never have any money, and without money life is nothing but work." With that philosophic expression she jerked open the kitchen door.

"Depends on what you're working for," Margo reminded her. Connie sent her a level look over her shoulder.

"Horses are all very well, in their own inimitable way," she said, "but I have yet to see what they'll do for me in a musical career."

Molly looked at Connie with scorn for her lack of realism.

"I can't see why it would be any better to be poor in the city than to be poor in the country," she said. "Besides, it would be terrible to be poor without even any horses!"

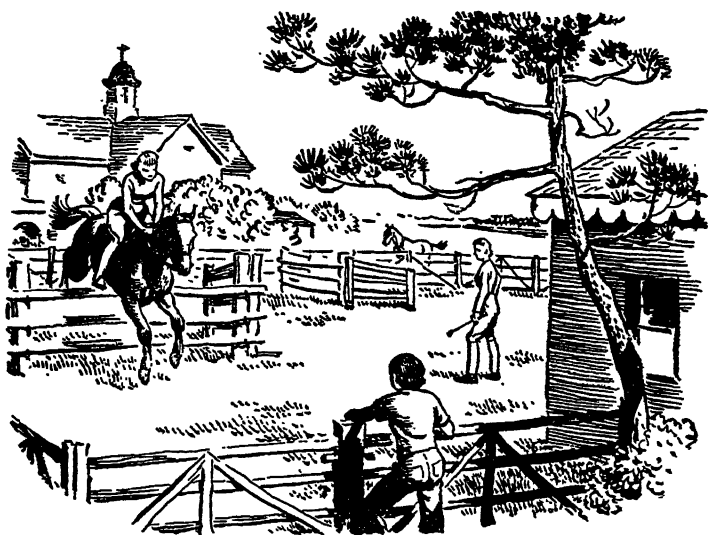
Margo laughed aloud. Connie gave a strangled gasp, threw up her hands and went out. "It's terrible to be poor anywhere, if you ask me," she tossed back, over her shoulder.

"I'll get that piano tuner out here tomorrow!" said Mrs. Macintyre. "She'll feel better when the piano is fixed. Nothing matters, really, money or horses or country or city, as much as what you are doing with what you have. Connie will learn that someday. In the end that's where all happiness comes from."

And what you are doing about what you don't have, thought Margo.

Already the glow of having seen Scarlet had worn off.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

SOMEHOW the time went by.

Margo became accustomed to seeing Dan and Ginevra together, became adept at avoiding them. But at times she wondered how long it was going to take to get over Dan.

She spent very little time with the girls she had known last year. With her determination to have nothing more to do with boys, there was no object in going to Andy's, no reason to stay for the Wednesday social hour, no point in listening to gossip about dates and dances.

She continued her membership in the tennis club, which she had joined to please her father, but she dropped all other extracurricular activities. She felt happier at home, and she had the excuse that she was so busy

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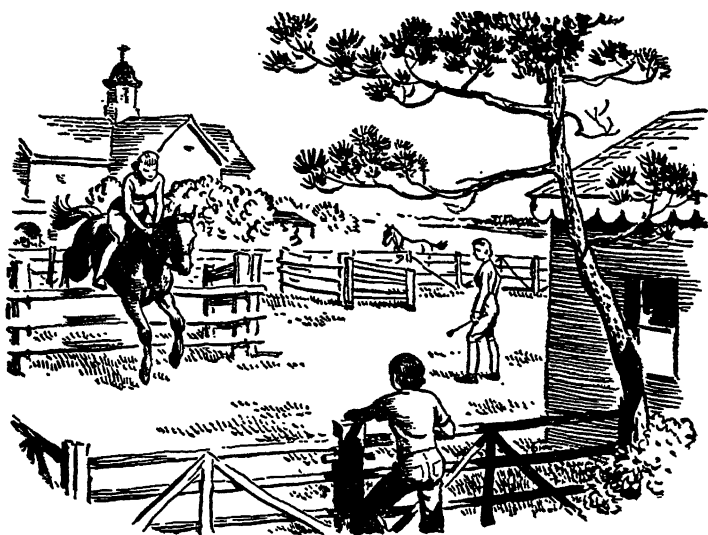
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there that she had no time to stay after school. It was a relief to withdraw from the other students, who seemed so young now, unencumbered, confident, carefree. Her only comfort was her daily ride to see Scarlet Royal.

They had divided Scarlet's stall to make two straight stalls, and had taken two horses to board. Margo didn't know whether that helped or not. True, no empty stall reminded her of her loss every time she entered the stable, but sometimes in moments of depression she wondered if they could ever get Scarlet back again, now that they had no place for her to come home to. That was a silly superstition, she scolded herself. Once she got the horse, they could easily find room for her. But still she hated to see other horses in Scarlet's place.

Her mother had decided to wait until spring to buy the two additional school horses they felt they needed. During the winter they had enough horses for the riders who were enrolled. Next spring would be soon enough, when business picked up.

In spite of the Saddle Club from the high school, and the weekend students and riders, they were not doing as well financially as they had done in the summer, and Margo knew her mother was worried about it. Next year Margo would be ready for college and demands would be heavier than ever.

Margo herself was looking no further ahead than the next week. Sometimes she asked herself, what was there to look forward to? Between grieving over Scarlet Royal, and hoping for some future day when she would return, and trying to wipe Dan's defection from her memory,

nothing seemed to matter during those weeks, except just to keep afloat from one day to the next.

Connie was buoyantly cheerful, after her outburst of last September. She seemed to have developed a new sense of proportion about work and her home, and she remarked occasionally, after entertaining a group of the girls at a slumber party, or inviting a party to ride on Sunday morning, that she couldn't do those things in the city, and she guessed she was pretty lucky after all.

Connie was working harder than ever on her music, and devoted all the time she could spare to musical activities at the high school. She was the first piano soloist for the orchestra, she sang in the girls' glee club and mixed chorus, and she had joined the radio club, which presented daily programs over the inter-school broadcasting system. Connie played incidental music on the programs, served as accompanist, and once a week gave a fifteen-minute solo program of her own.

A scholarship contest for music students had been announced for the spring. Preliminary auditions would be held in each city and suburban area high school in mid-March; winners of the high school auditions would be heard in the final contest, over a radio program on a Sunday afternoon in May. The grand prize was a scholarship at the Chicago Conservatory of Music, and the winner, if he were a pianist, would study with Raymond Kellnick, the well-known teacher of famous pianists.

For Connie, this was her big chance to get into the world of music for which she longed. The Macintyres, with the confidence of families, were convinced that Connie would win the grand prize. In this anticipation

the whole family co-operated in making as much time for Connie to practice as possible. Her stable work and house work were scheduled to a minimum. Connie's music was as important to them as it was to her, and that was as important as the business of horses.

Molly was beginning to make a reputation for herself in her swimming, at which she was working every afternoon after school at the high school pool, where seventh and eighth graders had a regular hour. Molly was planning to make the girls' diving squad the minute she entered high school, and even now the swimming coach remarked occasionally to Margo, "That little sister of yours in eighth grade—she's showing awfully good form for her age."

If only she had something else to concentrate on besides Scarlet, Margo thought, she would be much better off. She remembered that her father had told her something like that, two years ago, when Scarlet had been foaled. Perhaps he had been right, when he said horses were not enough. But what could you do, when nothing at all could take their place?

The riding club crowd, whom the Macintyres saw frequently, since it was good business as well as pleasant to be with old friends, was talking these days of hunts, hunt balls, hunt breakfasts—all the activities the Macintyres used to share with them. This year the Macintyres had given up their hunt subscriptions. Between the pressures of money and of time they could not afford them, but even the conversation about hunting hardly made Margo miss it. Once she had thought, why ride, if you can't hunt? She was beginning to discover that the horses

meant more to her now, when they exacted such struggle and sacrifice, than in those carefree days when life had been easy.

In late October Ginevra began taking daily lessons again, an hour a day, from four to five. Since she had qualified for the International Horse Show in the September Horse Fair, she wanted to prepare for that event.

For the first two weeks Mrs. Macintyre was delighted with the thought that a Green Meadow pupil might represent them at the international event, and Ginevra worked hard and carefully. She told Mrs. Macintyre that she was schooling her horse at home more carefully than Kingpin, whom they had sold.

Margo avoided her as much as she could, and managed not to see her too often. At school it wasn't so bad, in a crowd of students. But when she came in once or twice from her own ride before Ginevra had left, and found herself confronted with the girl, she was filled with such revulsion that she trembled in her effort to conceal it. Once Ginevra said, with drawling condescension, "Scarlet Royal is doing very well, Margo. But I'm a little disappointed in her schooling."

Speechless, Margo stared at her, refusing to ask a question or make a comment. But Ginevra went on. "She seems a little reluctant. But she'll get over that. She's going to make a beautiful show horse."

The thought that the horse was reluctant for Ginevra was comforting to Margo, and then she was filled with dismay for fear Ginevra might be mistreating her. But she still visited the horse daily, and she found no evidence of mistreatment.

On a day in early November Ginevra was working with her teacher, when some compulsion pushed Margo to the cross-barred fence to watch. Silently Margo stood there, observing with a critical eye that Ginevra's hands were good, her seat was excellent. But a hard line about her mouth showed the tension that had communicated itself to her horse so that every jump looked like a strained effort, and although the horse cleared every hurdle, Margo was never sure that he would. The sense of confident easy soaring, in rhythm and way of going, was not there, and without it the effect was like a violin played not quite in tune.

Mrs. Macintyre, not noticing her daughter standing by the fence, signaled to Ginevra to ride back to her and stand. Looking up into her pupil's face, she said earnestly, "Ginevra, you are handicapping yourself for this show you want to enter, and I don't know how to take you out of it."

Ginevra's face seemed to close up. She said stiffly, "How do you mean, Mrs. Macintyre?"

"I mean this: you have a great deal of skill and technique. But your temperament makes it difficult for the horse to go along with you."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," said the girl coldly.

Margo could see her mother turning over in her mind what words to use, how to say some of the things the Macintyres understood about Ginevra in such a way as to open the girl's mind to a different kind of understanding of herself.

"Look, Ginevra," she said patiently, "we've talked



about this in almost every lesson. It's the most important part of horsemanship. It's a matter of attitude. Perhaps you try too hard. Perhaps the trophy is more important than the horse. If that's the way you feel, the horse will know it, and he will never give you the last fine margin of response that makes the difference between a champion and an also-ran. If you could bring yourself to care more about the horse than the trophy, you would find the trophies coming your way much more easily."

The girl sat there, still and impassive, flicking her boot restlessly with her crop, while the horse winced slightly at feeling the crop so near him.

"That sort of thing," said Mrs. Macintyre. "You wave your crop around without any consideration of the horse's feelings. If you loved your horse, you'd be thoughtful enough not to worry him carelessly——"

Ginevra drew a deep breath and swung out of the saddle.

Mother has done it this time, Margo thought, watching the scene with admiration and a little concern. She had seen Ginevra take any amount of correction and instruction on her riding techniques, and had been astonished that the girl had accepted as much as she did without argument. You had to hand it to Ginevra: she really wanted to ride, and she knew she still had much to learn. But she would never accept this criticism of her fundamental outlook on life.

Now Ginevra handed the reins to her instructor with the air of handing her wrap to the maid, and said, with a resentful glance toward Margo, "You may cancel the rest of the lessons, Mrs. Macintyre. I shall not be back."

She walked past her teacher, head in air, passed Margo without even a nod, and climbing into her car, drove away. The swish of tires, the racing motor and the whine of brakes as she stopped at the highway, betrayed her temper.

Madeleine Macintyre looked at Margo and smiled ruefully.

"There goes our prize pupil," she said. "I was afraid she might take it like that. But someone had to tell her. She should have been told years ago. She is never going to hit the top with the temperament she's got."

"I always said," remarked Margo, "if they want to be like that, you can't change them. Good riddance, I say!"

Momentarily she was delighted to have seen the last of Ginevra at Green Meadow. But that joy was tempered immediately by the realization of the income they were losing: she calculated rapidly on her fingers, two half-hours a day, five days a week.

Her mother's voice picked up her thought as if she had spoken aloud.

"We'll miss the thirty dollars a week she was paying for lessons. But I couldn't in any conscience let her go on practicing technique, when she was so wrong in her own approach. Ah, well! Someone else will come along." She sounded quite matter of fact.

It wasn't until later that Margo realized, with a sinking sensation, that her last professional tie with Scarlet Royal was gone.



## CHAPTER NINE

SNOW fell thickly the night before Thanksgiving, covering the meadows and roads, the hollows and the rolling hills with a tranquil hush. Margo's heart stood still at the beauty before her. Every tree and bush, every sloping roof and fence was frosted with clinging snow. Life seemed to pause during the holiday, collecting itself for a change of pace, and in that pause she found a kind of peace.

The snow brought the necessity for planning how to carry on their school during the winter. They had the horses sharp-shod for snow, and decided to continue with outdoor work until the temperature was too cold for riders and horses. The riders and the horses enjoyed the work in the snow, but an indoor ring was becoming more

and more necessary, if the school was to go through many more winters.

The snow, Margo found, meant that Scarlet was no longer in the paddock during the afternoons. While she was not surprised, this was one more blow, and for a few days she felt depressed and purposeless. A thaw bared the ground after a couple of weeks, and she rode immediately over to the Cranshaw paddock. From a distance she could see someone riding there, so she turned and rode away again. The next day she found Scarlet alone. But the uncertainty of finding Scarlet alone, or in the paddock at all, wrought her to a pitch of excitement that made the days seem unreal.

Christmas came, and with it a refreshing slackening of pace for two weeks. They held no classes and gave no lessons those weeks, and spent the time decorating the house with greens, wrapping presents, hanging Christmas cards on broad red ribbons around the doorways, and making Christmas cookies, candy and fruitcake for their home on Christmas night.

On Christmas morning Margo and Connie got the breakfast, a lavish, leisurely meal with fresh-squeezed orange juice—a rare luxury in those busy days—waffles and sausages. Then they opened the presents: sweaters for the girls, a quilted housecoat for their mother, slippers, stockings, a huge bear for Molly, who was collecting stuffed animals with the enthusiasm of an eighth grade fad, a book about music for Connie, a book on the teaching of horsemanship for Margo, a book of cartoons about horse shows for all of them, that each of them kept peeking into during the morning, and reading aloud with constant giggles.

They took presents out to the horses in the middle of the morning, a bright red apple and a sugar lump for each of them, ribbon-tied green rosettes for each brow-band. And then they went for a morning ride together, something they had not done since last spring.

It was a clear, bright day, with fresh-fallen snow deep over the fields, capping the fence posts, clinging to the black outlines of the trees and shrubs. The snow in the sunlight held blue lights reflected from the dazzling sky, and the clean sharp air lifted Margo's spirits in an intoxication of happiness. Even without Scarlet, she thought guiltily a moment later, there was delight in this life.

Late Christmas afternoon their friends from around the countryside began dropping in to drink mulled cider and eat the cookies and fruitcake, and talk about horses.

"Did you hear about Ginevra at the International?" asked Helen Wadsworth, who lived a few miles down the road from Green Meadow. She was a long-time friend of Madeleine Macintyre, with wind-blown hair and a hearty laugh, slim and active and loyal. Now she grinned with a trace of malice, as she mentioned the story that was obviously a source of delight to the crowd who had heard it before.

Madeleine Macintyre shook her head, cutting the fruitcake into another half dozen slices.

"I haven't heard a thing about Ginevra since the day she walked out of here mad, because I told her she had the wrong kind of temperament for horses," she said. "Was I right?"

"You were right!" Helen Wadsworth said emphati-

cally. "We went to the show—you know my little Katie won a third place, and she's only eleven. Were we proud! Anyway, Ginevra rode out in the ring as if she were the queen of the show—I can't stand that upper-class expression of hers—and she was riding your Scarlet Royal."

Margo leaned forward, unconscious that she was holding her breath.

"So she went into the forward seat equitation with jumping, and of course she does have a nice seat and good hands. She went straight through, to the jumps. And Scarlet refused! Simply would have nothing to do with any of them. So Ginevra was out, and furiously embarrassed. She gave the horse a cut with her crop as she left the ring, and Scarlet simply stood still a minute, and then bucked her off. Right in the dirt! The spectators guffawed. I don't think they would have made a sound, except for that business of taking out her temper on the horse. But they let her know they didn't like that——"

Margo sat back again, with a mixture of resentment at Ginevra's treatment of Scarlet Royal and delight at Scarlet's treatment of Ginevra.

Mrs. Macintyre said, "She's not a horsewoman, that's the trouble. And I couldn't ever seem to make her understand what was wrong——"

"It's a crime that she's got that wonderful horse," said Helen Wadsworth, emphatically.

The talk turned to activities at the club, anecdotes of the hunting season, shows, past and future, and personalities among horsemen. Toward the end of the evening Connie played for the group, and they sang, at first hunting songs they all liked, and then Christmas carols,

until the evening was over. And as their guests left, with good wishes for the coming year, Margo felt with an inexplicable kind of comfort that perhaps the new year was going to bring happiness after all.

The next week, the day after New Year's, Madeleine Macintyre had one of her brainstorm, the occasional brilliant thought that caused her daughters so often to regard her with amazement, and label her a genius.

"Since we are only five miles from Northwestern University," she said, casually, "perhaps we could find some boy there who would like board and room in exchange for helping with the horses. Is it worth trying?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Molly, "I don't know how you think of these things!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Madeleine Macintyre modestly, "sometimes I just seem to get bright."

"Let's get him as soon as possible," said Connie. "Oh, my, the thought of having someone else scrub tack once in a while and muck out those stalls!"

"It won't be like having Dick," Mrs. Macintyre warned them. "He can't do it all—especially on the part-time basis we can afford. We can't pay anything, you know. The only kind of help we can have is someone who would work a couple of hours a day, just to get his room and meals here. But of course he wouldn't even want the job, if he didn't like horses, and there must be some students that like horses. And we've got those rooms over the garage——"

"Any help would be better than none," Margo agreed practically. She herself would not mind continuing the stable work and the care of the horses, having learned

that just the company of the horses, the intimacy that came from caring for them, more than compensated for the effort involved. But she would never mind letting someone else work on the tack, and Connie certainly needed more time for her music.

Mrs. Macintyre telephoned the advertisement to the university paper, and was assured that it would appear in the first issue after college reopened.

At four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, the day the advertisement had appeared, a small black car, several years old, and weather-beaten, drove into the white-stoned driveway.

Margo, just back from a ride in which she failed to see Scarlet, was fidgeting around the living room, reluctant to study. When the doorbell rang, she went to answer it.

A thin, rangy boy stood there, looking longingly toward the stables. As she opened the door, he snatched his cap from his head and said in a soft, drawling voice, "Did you folks advertise for a boy to help with your horses, ma'am?"

"Why—yes, we did," Margo answered. "I'd better get my mother to talk to you, I guess. She's out there in the paddock now, with a class."

She threw on a coat and started across the snowy lawn toward the paddock. The boy followed her with an easy, loping step.

When her mother heard her message, she said, with a quick glance at the boy, "The class will be over in fifteen minutes, Margo. Ask him if he'd mind waiting till then. And you might just show him the stables and give him an idea of what we are looking for."



"Sure enough," he said amiably, when Margo repeated her mother's request. "I'd like to see the place."

She showed him the stalls, the tack room, trophies and ribbons, with a touch of pride. He smiled, a slow, easy smile, as he looked around, and he breathed deeply, enjoying the smell of the stable.

"You have eight horses, then?" he asked.

"Six are ours, now. Two are boarding."

He was interested in the well-equipped stable, the feed troughs, the records of each horse hanging on the door of the stall. Then he went back to the door and watched the class in action.

Margo shivered in her coat, and tucked her hands up her sleeves, having run out without gloves or hat. She said, thinking suddenly that she should have asked sooner, "What did you say your name was?"

He glanced at her with that good-humored smile in his gray eyes.

"I didn't say, ma'am. I'm Neil Campbell, freshman at Northwestern."

"I'm Margo Macintyre," she told him.

There was another minute of silence, while he watched the horses, and she watched him, wondering if he would be the kind of help they were looking for. Spare and muscular, he stood with his weight on one leg, his elbow leaning on the ledge next to the door, his eyes on the horses, focused as if he were used to looking over distances. Nothing distinguished about him, Margo thought. He needed a haircut, but so did dozens of students. There was an outdoor air about him, his jaw was strongly marked, his face was thin, he had a nice smile. And his

manner was easy and unself-conscious, as if he were used to talking to strangers about horses. He turned to her at that moment, and said, "The gray is good, isn't he?"

"That's Counterpoint," she told him. "He really is good. Dad took a blue with him in the International show a couple of years ago. He's a hunter, and a wonderful jumper."

Neil Campbell nodded as if he knew that by looking at him. Then he asked, "What about the chestnut mare?"

She told him about Red Queen, and went on to talk about the other horses, pointing them out and describing their characteristics.

And then the class was ended, and each rider was bringing his horse into the stalls. While the students curried the horses, Madeleine Macintyre came forward and met Neil Campbell. She shook his hand in a firm grip and explained about the school and the present group of riders as they walked to the house.

When they went in, Connie and Molly were there, and they were introduced.

Connie looked at Neil from under her lashes critically, and said, "I understand you know horses. Is that right?"

Margo was embarrassed. She didn't have any interest in this stranger, herself, but still he didn't strike her as being "help" in the sense they were accustomed to, and Connie's tone relegated him to the position Dick had held for so many years. In her discomfort Margo spoke up more enthusiastically than she had intended.

"He certainly does know horses!" she cried.

Neil glanced at Margo with a slight grin that implied

they already had something in common, and she averted her eyes, thinking now that she had said too much.

Molly sat down beside him and said, "Where did you come from?"

Margo and her mother smiled at each other ruefully. Neither one of them had thought to ask that. Neil smiled at Molly with the same warmth he had shown Margo, and Molly was captivated. "I come from Wyoming, Molly," he said. "My dad has a horse ranch there, and I've ridden since I was about three years old."

Molly's eyes widened. It was evident that she had met her hero. "Stallions and broncos?" she demanded. "How many horses do you have? Do they run wild in the winter? Oh, Mother!" She turned to her mother mournfully, "I've always wanted to live on a ranch! Tell me about the West!" She turned back to Neil as if she were settling down for a long, cozy chat.

"Not so many stallions and broncos." He answered her question with a wider grin. "But we are breaking and training horses all the time for the market. We used to sell lots of them for polo ponies."

Mrs. Macintyre cut off Molly's questions. "Well, Neil, about this advertisement you came to answer. You've seen the place and the horses. We want some part-time help with them, and if you'd be willing to give us a couple of hours a day, and Saturdays, we can give you a nice room over the garage, and your meals here with the family. How do you feel about it?"

He looked at her with that direct attention that Margo liked in spite of herself.

"I'll tell you how I feel about it, ma'am. I was home

for Christmas, and when I came back here I was so homesick for the horses I thought I'd just have to give up and go back to Wyoming again. When I saw that ad this morning, it was an answer to a prayer, for me, ma'am. How soon can I move in?"

He looked as if he were trying not to be too eager, and yet he was so wistful that Margo was touched. Mrs. Macintyre laughed, and Connie and Molly sat up straight—Connie delighted at this prospect of immediate help, and Molly at the idea of the company of her hero.

"The sooner the better," said Mrs. Macintyre. "How soon can you move in?"

"Would Saturday be all right?" he asked. "That will be almost the end of the semester. If it's all right with you, I'll just bring my stuff out in the morning, and then I can get some work done that same afternoon."

"Fine," agreed Mrs. Macintyre. "Let me show you the room."

She took him upstairs and through the long hall that connected with the quarters over the garage, explaining as they went that there was an outside entrance also. Molly trailed along worshipfully, asking Neil questions about rodeos, cowboys, his own horses, and his father's ranch.

Connie and Margo, remaining behind, heard him answering Molly freely, as if he liked to talk about his home.

Connie raised her eyebrows skeptically. "Just another cowboy, if you ask me," she said. "But if he can curry and feed the horses once in a while, I'll be satisfied."

"No matter who he is, he'll be useful," Margo agreed.

They came back from the inspection tour, visiting like old friends. Neil stood, hat in hand, ready to bid them farewell, as Mrs. Macintyre finished what she had been saying about his duties.

"If you'll clean out four stalls in the morning," she said, "that will leave the girls one apiece instead of two. Then you can clean half the tack in the evenings. And exercise the boarding horses—will that give you enough riding?" She smiled up at him understandingly.

He nodded. "That will be fine, Mrs. Macintyre."

"We'll see you Saturday then." She went to the door with him.

He said good-by to her and to Molly, and then, raising his voice a little, to the girls who were sitting in the living room. Margo looked up politely, and met a glance of real interest. She smiled impersonally and he went out the door. She hoped he wasn't going to be a nuisance.



## CHAPTER TEN

NEIL fitted into the family as if he belonged to them, and the girls were delighted with the difference in their lives.

Mornings were more leisurely now, with another hand to do part of the work. Neil, working along with them, showed them ways to co-ordinate their jobs so that everything seemed to get done with less time and effort. Or perhaps just having another person around, talking to them about the horses, taking an interest in their problems, made the difference.

Within a week he was teasing the girls and Mrs. Macintyre about their small frustrations, and giving the horses first aid treatment which had been beyond them.

Margo was forced to admire his skill with the horses,

but every now and then she found herself resenting the way he could cajole a reluctant horse into accepting treatment. She told herself she was being ridiculous, that she ought to be glad he was there to treat Counterpoint's infected cut on his hock or Domino's stubborn girth sore without having to call in the veterinarian. Her strange unwillingness to see the horses she had cared for respond so easily to another was a reaction that she was ashamed of, and she concealed it from everyone, struggling to overcome it.

At the same time, this attitude made it easier for her to keep a distance between them, to remain aloof, and allow nothing "to get started."

She held to the promise she made herself, on the first day of school, that she was going to forget Dan immediately, and that his change of heart meant less than nothing to her. Carrying her head high and keeping her smile casual and indifferent, she hoped that neither he nor anyone else at Wentworth High School knew the difference.

But forgetting him was not so easy as she had planned.

She became accustomed to seeing him and Ginevra walking together in the halls, riding together in Ginevra's convertible, or Dan's station wagon. She could skip the sly questions in the gossip column of the school paper, and throw away the issues that announced new couples in the senior class who were going steady.

But she couldn't seem to control the stabs of longing that attacked her unexpectedly when she wasn't even thinking of Dan. Riding along a country lane, she saw a cardinal soar in a crimson arc across the snow, and with-

out warning she remembered a ride she had taken a year ago with Dan. They had seen a cardinal perched on a fence post, a bright figure against a snowy meadow and he had said, "A cardinal is a lucky sign! I told myself before we started that if we saw a cardinal today, it would be a sign we'd ride together again." And they had both laughed in the intimacy of falling in love, Margo thinking joyously, so he will be back again!

Or the time when she had been grooming Red Queen in the late afternoon, and had looked up to see a station wagon swing into the driveway. Last year Dan had always swung into the driveway just like that, in his station wagon, and stopped with crunching suddenness in exactly the same spot. Then her heart ached with remembering, and she bit her lips and winked back the unwilling tears.

If she could only hate him, it would make everything so much simpler.

She reviewed the faults she had known so well, reminding herself of her causes for grievance. But that didn't work, either. She knew perfectly well that he had noticed her first because he had seen her picture in the paper. But she couldn't hold that against him. Why else should he ever have noticed her, she wondered. She knew that he liked prestige and a winner. But was that cause for hate? He had cared for her last spring, she told herself wretchedly. Perhaps he had stopped, and she couldn't say that was his fault either. But he *had* cared once.

She did not try to persuade herself that he might come back to her, but she did resolve never to let herself get interested in another man. Too much grief.



There was one small blessing in the situation, though. Margo had discovered that Ginevra and Dan were always busy together after school, so that Ginevra seldom arrived home before five. Margo could ride over to visit Scarlet Royal undiscovered, whenever the horse was in the pasture. And as the winter wore away, she could see the horse almost daily again.

For the first few months after school began, Ginevra talked about horses whenever she could, collecting about her a small coterie of admirers, who listened avidly to everything she told them. Whenever she had a chance to let Margo overhear, she managed to bring the conversation about to her horsemanship, her horses, and especially Scarlet, whom she represented as a wonder horse, a superlative acquisition.

Margo couldn't keep away from the girl, much as she disliked her, knowing that she might hear some word of Scarlet. She would not ask Ginevra any questions, and she tried to act as if she heard nothing, but she listened with a gnawing compulsion, unaware that her face betrayed her heartsick interest.

Only once did she break her resolution to ask nothing, and that was when Ginevra said that the horse was sick. She didn't know what was the matter, but the groom suspected colic. Frantic, Margo asked for details, demanded to know the symptoms, inquired what was being done.

Ginevra said, in her superior way, "I don't know anything about horses' troubles and complaints. That's what we have Jones for, and he's really very good. If he says it's colic, you may be sure it is——"

Angered in spite of her anxiety, Margo snapped, "If

he's any good, it wouldn't happen. And in any case, he ought to know what to do for it!"

Ginevra smiled, serenely. "Oh, I'm sure he'll know what to do," she said.

Margo could hardly live through the rest of the day, until she could get home and fly over to the Cranshaw paddock to see if Scarlet was still alive. The horse was not only alive, but out in the paddock at the moment Margo arrived. Perhaps she was just imagining things, Margo told herself, caressing the horse with emotion, but it seemed as if Scarlet was more glad than usual to see her.

She would have given anything if she could have ridden Scarlet again. But that was impossible, at least without the connivance of the groom, and Margo was more anxious to conceal her visits to the paddock than to ride the horse. It was just pure luck that Jones never seemed to be around when she was.

Just in case he should be noticing a daily visitor, she tried to wear a different kind of costume every time she went there: jeans, breeches, habit, hunting coat, jeans again, with different caps on her head. She rode a different horse each day, and stopped one day at one side of the paddock, and then at another. So far there was no indication that she had even been noticed, and she never stayed more than a few minutes.

Soon after Christmas Ginevra's tone changed. She still implied to the girls who didn't ride much that she had got a wonderful horse, and Margo had lost it. But she let Margo know, in small innuendoes and side remarks that a horsewoman would understand, that actually the

horse was stubborn and maybe stupid. Her tone implied that as an expert horsewoman, Ginevra could do anything at all with a good horse. But this misbegotten animal would baffle anyone.

This development filled Margo with mixed reactions: pleasure that Scarlet would not respond to another rider, perverse satisfaction that Ginevra was having trouble with the filly, and fear that Ginevra in her vexation would mistreat the horse.

So now besides the emotional compulsion to see Scarlet, she had the need to keep track of the horse's condition, to see for herself that Scarlet was not being mistreated. Fortunately at this time of year, Ginevra was not riding as much as she had been in the fall, and there were fewer occasions for her to lose her temper.

Daily, riding away and leaving Scarlet Royal penned in the Cranshaw paddock, Margo turned over in her mind the possibilities of getting the horse back again. When she was in an unusually optimistic frame she dreamed of recouping the family fortune by racing Scarlet Royal. But even in that dream she must first get the horse back again, and when would the Macintyres ever have three thousand dollars for a luxury horse? More than Scarlet they needed an indoor ring as soon as possible and extra horses for next summer's riding program. And when she was in a pessimistic mood Margo told herself that Ginevra would never sell the horse back to them anyway.

But still, the thought of getting back again the horse that meant more than anything else in her life stayed with her, filled her mind, until even Dan began to fade in

importance. As the weeks wore by, her preoccupation with Scarlet gradually erased from her thoughts the anguish she had been suffering over Dan, and also her reluctance to admit Neil to any kind of friendship. Almost without noticing what was happening she was letting down the bars she had put up when he had moved in. Her change in attitude was due less to feeling any differently toward Neil, than to being so concerned about Scarlet Royal that there was no room for any other emotion at all, not even fear.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

BY EARLY March, when Neil had been with the Macintyres for two months, Margo had let down her guard completely. Neil was not the kind of boy she need worry about becoming involved with, she decided with a sense of relief. He was so definitely and comfortably like an older brother.

Even the interest he showed in Margo was reassuring, not disturbing. He was very attentive, in an unobtrusive way, helping her with heavy jobs, teasing her about the things that annoyed her, like the day he had offered to groom Counterpoint after her ride in mid-afternoon. She had snapped, "Thanks, but I like to take care of my own horse!"

He had grinned broadly and said, "Excuse me for putting my toe under your foot!"

She had had the grace to blush for her ill-mannered response. "Thanks just the same, Neil. I appreciate the offer. Only——"

"I *do* like to take care of my own horse!" he had mimicked her tone. "Don't mind me. I only live here to be useful."

Scrubbing Counterpoint down firmly, she kept her face out of sight until her cheeks had cooled, telling herself that she wished he wouldn't try to be quite so useful. But she knew that wasn't fair, either. And when she had finished with the rubbing cloth and turned Counterpoint into his stall, she discovered that Neil had polished her tack. She really was grateful. She was tired and hungry, and tack was one job that seemed endless.

"Now that I really appreciate," she told him. "I guess I'm just funny about horses, or something."

"That's all right," he said good-naturedly. "You're the girl for me, as I've said before, and I keep reminding myself I must get used to your little ways."

He told her at odd times that she was the girl for him, and someday she'd find it out. But he made it so casual that Margo found him amusing rather than disturbing.

About once a week he asked her for dates, in the same casual way that he offered to do some of her work for her. "Good movie in the village, Margo. Want to have a fling?" "There's a dance on campus Saturday night, Margo. Why don't we go in and celebrate?"

But dates were too likely to be the beginning of something she wanted to avoid. So she always refused, as

casually as he had offered the invitation, and no feelings ever seemed to be involved.

Once, in a moment of camaraderie, over the saddle soap, she asked him outright, "Why aren't you dating some cute coed, Neil? Seems to me you haven't had a date since you moved out here."

"When can I date, with all there is to do around here?" he wanted to know. "If you're worried about my recreational experience, why don't you take me to a show when I give you a chance?"

She laughed, easily now. "Oh, I'm allergic to dates," she told him. "I tried them once, and they didn't work."

In spite of his quips and teasing, he was too perceptive not to understand the feeling back of her light words. He said no more then, but brought the saddle he was working on to a high luster.

Neil was so much one of the family now that they frequently wondered how they had ever got along without him. Mrs. Macintyre conferred with him over bills and pupils and problems. He thought up ways of publicizing Green Meadow that would not be so expensive as paid advertisements in the paper. He arranged some of the Saturday hours, so that more pupils could ride on that day, and he sent out at least a dozen students from the University to ride at Green Meadow.

He discussed ways of obtaining the indoor ring, its necessity, cost, and probable contribution to the school. They talked over together, again and again, how soon they should buy two more horses, how many more stalls they should remodel. In these conversations Margo could see their business flowering into hundreds of pupils and

dozens of horses. But not too fast, he warned. No faster than the business justified. "Let's consider the summer plans when summer enrollments begin to come in." And those enrollments, he suggested, could be encouraged by letters of information, as early as March, so that their rolls might be filled as soon as possible.

It was stimulating and it was fun, and it was deeply satisfying, to talk over these fascinating questions with someone like Neil.

Toward the girls he took a fatherly attitude. When Connie began shirking her stablework, in a ladylike, musicianly, absorbed-in-my-art kind of way, he kidded her into doing her part, telling her that nothing would improve her piano-playing like a little hard labor. "You'll go stale, otherwise," he said gravely. Connie didn't quite know how to take him when he said things like that with a straight face. Besides he took it for granted that the girls would want to spare their mother as much work as they possibly could, and even Connie was ashamed not to live up to that assumption.

He praised Molly in grave tones, when she told him of having lost ten pounds. He commiserated with her on having gained back five, over the Christmas holidays. Then when he caught her nibbling between meals on cookies and soft drinks, he told her she had broken his heart and his faith. "I thought you had will power," he said, mimicking bitterness. "I thought, here is one girl that can do the thing she sets out to do. And what do I find? Softness, indulgence, fat creeping up again! How much did you weigh this morning?"

Half-laughing, half-serious, Molly couldn't remember.



“Look, little girl,” he said soberly, “if you can keep track of your weight for four months—until next June—and lose another five pounds, and keep it there, I’ll take you out and buy you one of those double-decker sundaes myself. O.K.? A date!”

Molly’s eyes shone at the thought of a date with her hero. From then on she ate quantities of vegetables and fruits and meat and eggs, and no desserts, cakes, cookies, or candy. Neil never failed to notice and admire her for her powerful will, as he called it, and Molly, devoted to him, was entirely happy to be showing him she could do what he wanted.

As the weather softened, and the winds blew promise of the end of winter, Margo had taken to riding at night. She found that riding out in the darkness, lighted only by the moon and the snow, gave her a wonderful, heady sense of entering a world of fantasy and romance and unreality, and racing recklessly through the unpeopled night was a thrill that lifted her entirely out of her depression.

Neil objected to this practice, pointing out that it was unfair to the horses and dangerous for the rider.

Margo only shrugged, as she had when her mother had tried to reason her out of it.

“It’s not as dangerous as all that,” she insisted. “And I’ve got to get out. Besides the horses ought to have a good run, once in a while. They need the exercise. Don’t bother me about it! I know what I’m doing.”

After that Neil rode out with her at night, using, when she objected at first, her own excuse that he hadn’t been able to exercise the boarding horses earlier, and he

wanted to get out himself. She knew he was just going along to keep her out of trouble. But she couldn't prevent him.

The first few nights she was very silent, trying to preserve the illusion she had found before, of solitude and unreality. But it was hard to keep that illusion with Neil riding beside her. After a few rides her reserve broke down and she began to talk. Not too much, not about Scarlet, yet. But Neil was easy to talk to, and those conversations were almost as comforting as the solitary rides had been.

They were on their way home, walking the horses in, when Neil asked her abruptly, "What's eating you all the time, Margo?"

She glanced at him, riding so straight and light and easily in the moonlight, and then she said flippantly, "What have I got to be glad about?"

"That sounds like Connie," he said. "She's always complaining about not having any money any more. But I didn't think you were like that."

"I haven't got any either," she said. "Why should I like it?"

"What's money got to do with it?" he wanted to know.

She gasped in irritation. "What's money got to do with anything?" she demanded. "My goodness! I should think anyone could figure out that things are simpler, when you don't have to slave and sacrifice and everything all the time. Can't buy horses, can't fix the stalls, can't build the indoor ring, can't do anything without money. Maybe Connie's right, when she says she's going to leave this grind and get money as soon as she can."

He was looking straight ahead as if he scarcely heard her. But he said casually, as if she were somebody else, "Sometimes it seems as if you girls get more sorry for yourselves all the time. When I first came here I thought you were a fine crowd of sportsmen, having a good time out of making a living. And the longer I'm here the more it looks as if every one of you resents the effort you're making. Sure as anything, the whole deal is going to go sour, if that's your approach to life. Everybody's got troubles. Did you think you were the only ones? And I've known lots of troubles that were harder to live with than yours. I'll bet when you had money you were all a bunch of deadbeats!"

Margo glanced at him with a furious denial on her lips. But he was riding as placidly as if he had been strewing roses in her path. For several minutes she rode on in angry silence. But the things he had said kept going through her head, and she was forced to concede some truth in his observation.

He had her wrong, she kept telling herself in defense. She wasn't really complaining about the life she had to live, and there was only one reason that she was fretting about the lack of money. On an impulse she spoke again.

"I wouldn't mind working hard, or not having any money. That is the least of my trouble. But what I can't get over is losing my horse. The only horse I ever really cared about that way, the finest horse we ever owned."

He looked at her quickly. Then he said sympathetically, "Tell me about it, Margo."

She told him the whole story, then: the hopes they had had for Scarlet Royal since she was born, the affec-

tion that had grown between herself and the horse, and finally the Cranshaws' offer to buy her.

"How could I refuse?" she demanded bitterly. "How could I turn down three thousand dollars, when I knew how hard Mother had worked all summer to make half that much? I couldn't do it, so I had to let her go. And now nothing seems worth while any more."

"I know what it's like to lose a horse," he said, quietly. Something in his tone told her that he did know. For the first time she felt as if her grief were shared, and some of her bitterness went out of her.

"I'm going to get her back sometime," she declared. Saying it aloud like that to Neil confirmed her purpose somehow, made her feel that now it really was going to happen. Someday.

"I know how you feel," he repeated. "It's almost the roughest thing that can happen to someone like you or me, feeling the way we do about horses. But it's no good building your life around one horse, Margo. And when that one's gone, don't waste all your life wanting her back. Life is too short."

She shook her head. "I will get her back," she declared. "Meantime, I'm just waiting and hoping—and trying to think where I could possibly get the money. So you can see why money means so much right now. Neil, you have no idea what she's like. So much personality. Lots of Arabian blood—she has such a pretty head and dainty feet. Fire and wind, she is. I hear she doesn't act right for Ginevra——" She laughed scornfully.

They were back at the stables then, untacking the horses and rubbing them down. Margo looked up at Neil

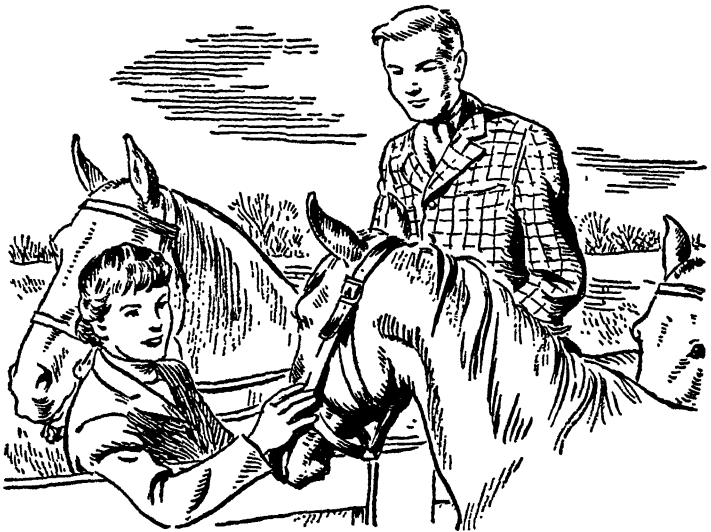
from where she was crouched down to reach under Counterpoint's belly.

"She's only five miles from here," she said. "I've been going to see her in her paddock a couple of times a week. Why don't you ride over there with me tomorrow, if you could make it by four o'clock? We could ride a couple of the boarding horses."

"It's a date," he said, grinning down at her.

At the twinkle in his eye she realized that she had practically asked him for a date, after all the time she had been refusing to go out with him, and she was hot with confusion. She rubbed methodically at the horse's back and withers, until her face cooled off.

After all, she told herself, he is really just like one of the family, and anyway, one ride isn't going to prove a thing.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

MARGO was home from school by three-thirty the next afternoon, pacing nervously back and forth from house to stable while she waited. She had told Neil four o'clock, so of course she must wait for him. But she wished now she had not asked him to ride with her this afternoon. She was so anxious to be off that the half-hour's delay was aggravating.

She didn't know whether she was happy about sharing her secret or not. In some ways it was comforting to know that someone else knew now how she felt about Scarlet, and that she was still seeing the horse: something she had not let her mother suspect, knowing that Madeleine Macintyre would have suffered for her daughter's grief. In

other ways the very secrecy of her emotion had made it peculiarly her own, had seemed to keep the special affection she and Scarlet had for each other as deep and important as she knew it was. She had even felt a kind of safety in the assurance that no one could spoil what no one suspected. Revealing it to another left her feeling vulnerable.

Impatiently she led one of the boarding horses out of his stall, tacked him up for the ride. At that moment Neil drove up. Margo glanced at her watch. It was quarter to four. His promptness was reassuring. He ran up the outside stairs to his room, and reappeared within five minutes in riding breeches.

"Oh, you have the horses ready!" he said, in some surprise. "You must be in a hurry."

"I am," she said briefly.

They mounted and walked out to the bridle path, and she found herself beset with self-consciousness again. A horrid fear assailed her: what if Neil didn't think that Scarlet was as good a horse as she did? What if he said he couldn't see what all the fuss was about? What if he thought, as her mother did, that a problem horse was a waste of time? If he implied anything unfavorable about Scarlet, Margo thought, she would never forgive him.

Nervously she talked about everything else that came to mind. Connie's contest was scheduled for next Monday, but there would be no pupil audience, except for a couple of special music classes. Margo would not be attending, since she had some special exams scheduled for that morning. Anyway, she'd rather hear when it was all over how it came out. There was an important horse show com-

ing up early in June, in which there would be a Maclay Cup class. Last year Margo had been runner-up for the blue ribbon. Everyone had thought she'd take it this year. But they hadn't thought that she would be a professional by now. She laughed a little at that. The winner in that class would go to Madison Square Garden for the finals. She supposed Ginevra would be in it, although the Macintyres no longer knew what Ginevra's plans were. She'd probably ride Scarlet Royal——

That brought them around to the horse they were riding to see, and Neil asked with great interest about her background, her possibilities, her schooling. Margo described her breeding and her father's hopes for racing her.

"Did you ever clock her speed?" Neil asked.

Margo shook her head. "That was just a dream of Father's. Of course, Mother grew up in Kentucky and racing is in her blood. She thought it would be fun to have a racing stable, when Dad had that idea. But then he died, before anything got started, and we had to let the groom go, and since then we've just been working along with the school. And of course now we don't have Scarlet any more."

Neil rode in thoughtful silence. "Racing is a big gamble," he said, finally. Margo looked at him and her heart beat fast.

"Do you know about racing?" she asked, trying to sound casual.

He nodded. "We've had one or two horses every year that looked good on the track," he said. "We're always entering them in some race or other. Sometimes we have



a fast winner, and then we sell him for a lot of money. But that's a rare thing."

She thought about the implications in his words for a few minutes.

"The thing that worries me more than anything else is that Ginevra might spoil Scarlet," she said. This was a fear she had never admitted before, even to herself.

"Can't she ride?" Neil wanted to know.

"Oh, she can ride!" Margo exclaimed scornfully. "But that's all. She's no horsewoman. She doesn't care a thing about the horse, Neil. She chooses horses just for what she thinks she can get out of them. And then if she can't win, she blames the horse and discards him the way you'd sell a—a used car. And she doesn't know a thing about taking care of them—she's always left that up to her groom."

"I don't think she'll spoil the horse—for you," Neil said thoughtfully. "Regular steady mistreatment might make the horse mean or vicious, but if she's just an average unthinking rider—good, as you say, but unthinking—why, probably the horse won't act right for her, but would respond to you the way she always did——"

"That's why I think she's sure to let Scarlet go, sooner or later," Margo said. "I know she won't show on my horse as well as she hopes."

"You don't believe in choosing your horse to complement your horsemanship?" Neil asked, with a noncommittal expression.

"Not the way she chooses horses," Margo said with some violence. "She can't ever see that the horse is more important than the horsemanship. I mean, if a rider

doesn't consider his horse before himself, he doesn't belong on a horse. And the rider should blame himself if the horse doesn't perform. But Ginevra thinks it's the other way around. She always blames her horse if he refuses. And I saw her beat a horse in the show ring, when she missed the ribbon—I can't stand her!"

She was so absorbed in watching the paddock, which was now in sight, that she didn't see Neil's look of open admiration. She went into an extended canter, and he followed behind her until they reined up at the paddock fence half a mile down the road.

Margo slipped off her horse and moved quietly around the fence, just watching Scarlet Royal for a moment, loving her clean-lined grace, her air of loneliness as she grazed apart from the two other horses in the paddock.

Then the girl called softly, "Scarlet! Come, girl!"

The chestnut filly lifted her head, pricked her ears, and looked around. Then she came at a gallop across the paddock to Margo, whinnying and nickering her delight at seeing her.

"Were you glad to see me, honey?" Margo asked tenderly. She fondled the filly's head and crest, patted her neck, rubbed her poll, gave her a carrot. Then she turned to Neil with a wide smile, as the horse laid her head on Margo's shoulder, and said, "Oh, Neil! Isn't she beautiful? Come closer and let her get acquainted with you!"

Neil moved toward the horse, who watched him cautiously. Slowly he held out his hand, talking gently as he laid it on her neck and patted her lightly. She snuffed at his jacket and pawed lightly at the ground. But she

stretched out her neck as if she liked the touch of his hand. Margo was enchanted.

"I've never seen her take to anyone like that," she told Neil with awe. "You should have seen her with Mother and the girls. She'd look at them as if they were not only strangers, but breathing fire and brimstone. Mother got her saddled once and took her out for exercise, but she was worn out when she returned. No one ever took care of Scarlet but me, and she'd let me do anything. Wouldn't you, darling?"

"She's a fine horse," Neil said, considering the filly with a practiced eye. "High-strung and temperamental, maybe. But I've seen some of these one-man horses that would out-perform any champion in the ring, when the one man was riding them. Anyone else that tried thought they were stupid nags. I don't see how Ginevra can get anywhere on a horse like that——"

For the first time since the horse had been sold, Margo giggled in remembering that day. "I told Ginevra she ought to ride Scarlet, try her out. And she said," she lifted her nose in the air and imitated Ginevra's positive manner, "she said, 'That won't be necessary. And you can't tell much that way, anyhow.'"

Neil guffawed. Somewhere a stable door banged, and Margo started.

"We'd better go," she said, hastily giving Scarlet a farewell pat. "I've never seen anyone when I've come here, and I'd rather not have them notice me. Ginevra would probably keep Scarlet tied up in her stall, if she thought I came to see her like this."

She mounted quickly, and they wheeled and rode back

along the road they had come cantering until they were out of sight, and then trotting smoothly together.

As they rode Margo dreamed aloud of owning Scarlet again. Knowing Ginevra, she was sure that someday the horse would be for sale again. The only problem was finding the money she would cost. The school was doing very well now, with Neil's help, but there was no telling when there would ever be three thousand dollars to buy an extra horse.

"Especially one that can't be used for a school horse," Margo brooded. "Racing after all is only a long-shot gamble. We can't put three thousand dollars on that chance yet."

Neil said practically, "She's a beautiful horse, Margo. And naturally, with the feeling you have for her, you want her back. But what could you do with her? Racing takes training and money——"

Margo said stubbornly, "People do race. And not all of them are millionaires. We could manage somehow. And even if we couldn't race her, we could breed a racing stable."

Neil shook his head doubtfully. "You don't know what you'd be getting into," he said dubiously. "Actually, Margo, fine a horse as she is, Scarlet Royal is really a luxury item. Isn't she?"

Margo reluctantly agreed. "It looks like an impasse," she admitted. "But someday I'll find a way. You wait and see——"

They slowed down to a walk, and he said, watching her as they rode, "Look, Margo. You're too good a horse-woman to build all your life on just one horse. It's like

losing your money last year. When a landslide blocks your road, you take a deep breath and detour. Or you start over again, and have fun doing it. But if all you ever think of is the view from the last mountain, when you can never return to it, you can spoil all the rest of the ride. And what's the use? I can see how you feel about Scarlet. And I don't blame you. She's a personality girl, and I could even get excited about her myself." Margo threw him a look of gratitude for that. "But what's done is done and past. And when it can't be undone, you can't let one loss like that spoil your life. Now don't get mad, Margo!" he said hastily. "I'm only saying these things because I like you too well to see you go sour."

She smiled faintly. "I know, Neil. And I'm not mad. Only, I'm going to get that horse back, that's all."

He shrugged and gave up. "I hope you can, honey. I'd like to see that little horse around Green Meadow myself."

She looked at him covertly, wondering how much he meant the endearment, taking comfort from it and yet withdrawing from it. He looked so unconscious of having said anything that she decided it must have slipped out in a brotherly sense.

After that ride she felt closer to Neil than she had before. Mindful of the way Dan had let her down, she was not going to let Neil suspect any friendly affection at all, and her manner became if anything more casual, more flippant and teasing, than before. But she felt, down inside, an assurance that she could depend on Neil, she could count on him for help when she needed it. That was a comfort she had missed for months now, and it

warmed her pleasantly. But she was safer if she kept it to herself.

As they curried the horses on their return, they could hear Connie practicing the Chopin étude she was going to play in the contest on Monday.

"I wouldn't be surprised if she won that contest," Neil said, cocking an ear toward the house. "She's really awfully good for a kid."

"It looks as if someone around here might get what she wanted," Margo said a little bitterly. "It might be nice, just for a change."

Neil frowned at her sarcasm. "You might just as well be big about things like that," he told her tartly. "It's more becoming."

Humiliated for herself, Margo said apologetically, "I didn't mean that the way it sounded, Neil. I'd really be terribly glad for Connie, if the kid got her big chance. Of course, I don't know how we'd get along without her help, but I wouldn't keep her home on that account."

"Don't worry about the work," Neil said. "I'd stay on through the summer and do Connie's share myself, if it meant she could go on with her music."

Unexpectedly Margo felt a surge of admiration for Neil. She watched him watering his horse, thinking of the things he had done for the Macintyres, just because he liked them and because they had taken him into the family.

Quickly she hid her admiration from herself, buried it under flippancy, determined not to give anything away this time.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE preliminary auditions for the Greenwald Foundation Scholarship were scheduled for nine-thirty on Monday morning.

Driving in that morning Connie was very cool and self-contained. She discussed the other entries dispassionately, explaining to Margo that there would be violinists as well as piano students trying out, and that the first violinist of the high school orchestra was very good. She gave no evidence of nerves, and Margo couldn't understand how someone could be like that before a trial in which she had so much at stake.

She had made this observation to her mother the day before, and Madeleine Macintyre, who understood her daughters very well, said that what it actually signified

was that Connie was so sure of winning that she was completely composed. Margo thought wistfully that it must be marvelous to be like that. She herself approached crises with a pounding heart and shaking hands, even though she usually came through them in good form.

She reflected too, that in a way it was rather sad, that if Connie won the finals in May it would take her away from her family entirely. She would leave high school and go straight to the Conservatory. Margo had always known, as Mrs. Macintyre had known, that music meant more than anything else to Connie. All of a sudden the break seemed very close, and Margo found herself hoping that Connie would get her heart's desire, and at the same time recoiling from the changes that seemed to be approaching so fast. She smiled ironically at the thought. There was no way to move forward and at the same time stand still. Yet that was what she was wishing she could do.

Margo was not taking advantage of the invitation for families to attend the audition. She felt so nervous for Connie that she didn't think she could endure the suspense of listening to the dozen or more participants, and then wait for the decision of the judges. Mrs. Macintyre was taking the time off that morning and driving over to the high school in time for the audition. Connie herself seemed not to care whether her family listened to her effort at this time or not. She seemed, between the bursts of rational discussion of the event, to be withdrawn and thoughtful, as if she had already become separated from her family in interest and emotion.

The girls walked through the halls together toward



their home rooms. At the foot of the stairway that led up to Connie's floor, they stood together a minute.

"Good luck," said Margo, suddenly. "I won't be there, you know. I couldn't stand the suspense. But let me know as soon as it's over, will you? How soon will you know?"

"We're supposed to have the judges' decision by eleven-thirty anyway," said Connie, sounding very matter-of-fact. An errant ray of sun down the stair well burnished her red hair to a glittering sheen. She lifted a round white chin, and her freckles looked as golden as her hair. Her aquamarine eyes glanced past Margo down the corridor, and then, nervously, up the stair well, where two violinists were walking in the hall above, instrument cases in hand. For the first time Margo felt the tension of the tightly wound spring in Connie.

"I'm free at eleven-fifteen," she said. "Why don't I come around to the auditorium and look you up?"

"O.K.," said Connie. She moved up the stairs with graceful composure.

For Margo the morning dragged by on weighted steps. Her thoughts kept wandering from first period English to the auditorium where the judges would be sitting in an obscure corner—on the stage? No, the acoustics would be wrong. In a back corner of the balcony? She should have asked Connie. The parents would be coming in to hear their darlings. Nothing would matter quite so much, if the parents didn't take it so hard, Connie had said once. The mothers would be dressed as elegantly as if they were listening to Horowitz and Heifetz. There would be a sprinkling of high school students, brothers and sisters and friends of the performers. Suddenly

Margo felt that she should be there. Then the bell rang, and she moved in a dreamlike state to second period French.

Nine-forty-five. The audition would have started. In what order would they be playing? She should have asked her sister. Perhaps even now Connie was at the piano. And then there would be those others, whom she had felt she hadn't the courage to listen to. Margo did not know or care much about music. The only thing in this audition that interested her was Connie's place in the final decision. Like those parents at a horse show whose only interest was seeing their own child win a ribbon, and who cared nothing for the other performers, or the horsemanship they were seeing, she thought.

Ten-thirty. Third period history. Dan was in this class with her, and she watched him today with the idea of replacing one anxiety with another. But today Dan was unimportant. He reminded her only of Ginevra, which made her think of Scarlet Royal, and that made her think of the ride she had taken with Neil on Friday. Neil had thought Connie could win today. Neil was a great comfort, and she thought of him for the rest of the period, hardly noticing when Dan spoke to her casually as they left the classroom. When she realized that, she thrust Neil out of her mind also. He was not going to replace Dan. She was going to uproot Dan, and there would be no replacement.

And then it was eleven-fifteen, and time for some news. She thrust her books into her locker, and hurried toward the auditorium.

When she pushed open the heavy doors, the room was silent. She tiptoed quietly down a side aisle, glancing about in the darkness for her mother, and then she sat down by herself.

The head of the music department, Mr. Leopold, was standing on the lighted stage, consulting a piece of paper. Behind him, facing the audience, were three serious-looking persons, sitting with their feet uneasily crossed. Mr. Leopold began to speak.

“The performances you have just heard were the preliminary auditions for the first annual award of the Greenwald Foundation Musical Scholarship. Our judges have been the distinguished music critic of the *Chicago Daily Post*, Miss Alicia Garner”—Miss Garner smiled at the audience—“the head of the piano department of the Chicago Conservatory, Mr. Christopher Holden”—Mr. Holden acknowledged the introduction—“and the famous composer and pianist, Gordon Gorman, of Chicago.” Mr. Gorman bowed, in his turn. “The winner of these auditions today will be heard in the final audition for the grand prize on Sunday, May twenty-fifth, with the winners of all auditions held this week in Chicago area high schools. On May twenty-fifth the grand prize will be awarded to the musician who is chosen worthy of a four-year scholarship at the Chicago Conservatory, studying with Raymond Kellnick, if a pianist is chosen, or with Rudolph Metz, if a violinist is chosen. I am sure you will agree with me that all of our musicians today have given outstanding performances. The judges have conferred on their choice, and now I am going to

let Mr. Gorman tell you who will represent Wentworth High School in the May twenty-fifth event. Mr. Gorman.”

Mr. Gorman, short and stocky, with snow-white hair and a round face, stood up before the audience, fingering with his own piece of paper. He spoke hesitantly, as if he were self-conscious about expressing himself vocally before an audience.

“We have listened to these young musicians—ah—with a great deal of interest. I may say that they all show—ah—careful preparation and fine teaching and talent. It is the opinion of the judges”—he stopped and squinted at the piece of paper in his hand again—“that the most distinguished performance of many fine performances was that of—ah—Miss Constance Macintyre, who played the Chopin Etude in E flat. Miss Macintyre—ah—will be your representative in the final contest over Station WBMB. Miss Macintyre.”

He turned in some relief and held out his hand. The audience burst into enthusiastic applause, as Connie came onto the stage. She turned to Mr. Gorman and the judges and said, “Oh, thank you so much! I’m terribly happy.”

Then, while the audience applauded madly, she fled from the stage into the dimness of the auditorium again. The lights went up, and Margo, blinking in the light, and surprised to find tears in her eyes, looked about the half-filled room. Connie and her mother were already standing at the back, being congratulated by students and parents as they filed toward the door.

“Connie, it’s wonderful!” Margo cried, hugging her sister with more emotion than the girls had shown each

other in years. "I knew you'd win! I just knew you would."

Madeleine Macintyre looked as thrilled as she had over any ribbon her horsemanship had won.

"There was no doubt about it," she said to Margo. "You really should have heard her. Connie never played so well. I was astonished at her poise."

Connie was shaken and babbling, after her stoic calm of the entire weekend.

"I don't know how I did it," she chattered. "Feel my hands. Stone cold. I didn't feel anything when I was at the piano. I just thought, I've got to get through this, that's all. And then I concentrated on the piano and tried to forget the audience. But I didn't think I'd win. Lots of the others were terribly good."

"We're not surprised," her family reassured her. "We all knew you could do it. Just wait until that audition in May. You'll sweep the field."

"That won't be so easy," Connie said, her eyes sparkling in anticipation. "It's a picked field of winners, you know."

For the first time in her life Margo had an inner illumination of what music meant to Connie: as much as horses meant to her, Margo. Suddenly she thought, feeling that way about music—no wonder Connie would like to get away from the stable grind. She's really held her end up very well, considering.

Each of them, Margo realized, was driven by a compulsion that no one else could understand. Scarlet Royal was no more important to Margo than Connie's music was to Connie.

Margo spoke again. "Anything we can do, Connie. We'll all help with getting ready for that audition if we can. I know how you feel about it——"

"Thanks," said Connie. "It's just up to me to keep working, I guess. That reminds me, Mother—I've got something I must tell you when I get home this afternoon. About the school. Don't let me forget."

She met Margo that afternoon immediately after dismissal with the explanation that she wanted to get home today as soon as possible, and she thought they ought to talk things over before the Saddle Club members arrived.

"Should I be there?" Margo asked, hoping she wouldn't be needed.

"I think you should," said Connie. "Why? Are you busy?"

"Well——" Margo was frowning at the sun that struck into her eyes—"I usually try to ride before the Saddle Club takes all our horses. But I could let that go——"

Madeleine Macintyre had prepared a tea tray, partly to honor the prize-winner, partly because she liked the lift a mid-afternoon cup of tea always gave her. The three Macintyres sat about the coffee table, fortifying themselves with black tea and cinnamon toast.

"You asked me to remind you to tell us something, Connie," Mrs. Macintyre said.

"It's Ginevra again." Connie made a face.

Margo held herself tightly together. "What's she done now?"

"One of my friends in the Saddle Club told me this," said Connie slowly. "Last week. It made me so mad that I thought maybe I shouldn't repeat it right away, I ought

to find out more about it. And then with the audition this morning, I just decided we had enough on our minds, and I'd wait till now." Unconsciously she took it for granted that the audition had been as much of a strain for her mother and sister as for herself. Margo smiled a little, but in the light of her new understanding this morning, she said nothing.

"What did your friend tell you?" Mrs. Macintyre asked.

"It was Sandy Hill—do you remember her, Mother? She rides Friday afternoons."

Mrs. Macintyre nodded, identifying Sandy.

"Well, she says that Ginevra has been talking to the Saddle Club members ever since last Thanksgiving, and now they are beginning to listen to her. Ginevra says that she spent hours here, and her riding became worse instead of better, that the only reason she didn't win in the International Show was because we sold her a bad-mannered horse and misrepresented the horse, and she has only discovered how bad our teaching is since she's been going to Jack Culbertson. She's doing everything she can to get the Saddle Club members to feel the same way and switch over to Jack next year."

Mrs. Macintyre was staring at Connie gravely.

"How do the Saddle Club riders feel about this kind of gossip?" she asked. "What does Sandy say about them?"

"Most of them didn't like Ginevra anyway," Connie reported, "and they didn't pay attention for a long time. But she's been working on them, one by one. She invites them out to visit her stables, she's been working with Dan

to get double dates with some of the girls, so she can get friendly outside of school, and she's been so terribly nice to some of the kids she never used to speak to, that hardly anyone dislikes her any more, and now they're beginning to believe what she says."

Margo sank back into the couch, feeling as if cold steel had cut at the roots of her courage. How could you combat this kind of campaign, she thought.

"Sandy says," Connie went on in a low tone, "that Margo doesn't have many friends any more, because she acts as if she hardly belonged to the school. She never talks much in the halls, or sticks around for anything afterward, or shows any interest in Wentworth affairs. So now Ginevra says that's because she thinks she's too big for high school kids, now that she's got a riding school. And that doesn't help either.

"Oh, Mother!" Connie burst out. "It makes me just sick—and so mad I can hardly see. Lies like that about everything we do—and how can you counteract lies? If Margo would work at making friends the way Ginevra has—but I don't suppose that would make the difference, anyway——"

Margo pulled herself out of the shock of anger that had felled her momentarily.

"I couldn't make a business of getting friends, just to sell the riding school," she protested angrily. "Maybe I have an unfortunate personality or something, that I don't want to spend lots of time in clubs this year. Anyway, with the things that have to be done around here, I ought to get home as soon as possible. Lots of girls like me, even if I don't gabble with them all day long. And at



school I want to study as much as possible, so I won't have so much to do at night."

"That's all right," Connie reassured her hastily. "Anyway, you're not the person to defeat Ginevra in this, because you're too close to the riding school. Sandy thought the whole situation was getting serious enough so we ought to know what was going on. She says there really is a chance that we could lose the Saddle Club next year. It only takes some pressure from the kids and their parents, and the gym teacher picks the school that seems to satisfy the largest group."

They considered her words silently, as Connie wound up her report.

"Sandy says she would be sick not to be riding here. But if the club went somewhere else, she'd have to go too, unless she wanted to drop the Saddle Club, and then she wouldn't get any gym credit for her riding. And anyway she likes the club on all other counts."

Margo and her mother stared at each other, while the implications of Connie's story sank in. Connie watched both of them in lively concern.

"If we lost the Saddle Club," Mrs. Macintyre said, "that would be thirty riders in the winter season—I don't see how we could afford the loss."

"That's what I thought," said Connie seriously. "We'll have to figure out some way to kill Ginevra's effect. But she's terribly subtle, and she's getting very popular these days. A lot of kids pay attention to her."

Connie, Margo realized, was really as much upset about these rumors as if she were emotionally involved in the Green Meadow school. In a matter that challenged

their family loyalty, she cared as deeply for the family reputation and welfare as if she had no other interest in her life. Good for Connie, she thought.

Aloud she said, "We can't lose the Saddle Club, Mother. The next question is, how do we keep them? It seems to me if we could prove that our instruction is as good as any other school around here, that would make the stories look like malice."

"That's all we can do," her mother said with a sigh. "Work even harder with the students and the Saddle Club, and hope that it shows."

"Genevra says that Jack Culbertson is saying that while we are making a good effort, naturally we can't handle the kids the way an experienced school could, and while he wouldn't want to cut into our business, still for the good of the high school, he really thinks they should consider sending the Saddle Club to him, next year."

"Jack Culbertson said that?" Madeleine Macintyre sat up very straight, and her eyes snapped.

"If you can believe Genevra, he said it," said Connie.

"All right, girls, here is where we stand." Madeleine Macintyre had shrugged off the hurt surprise that shocked her when she first listened to Connie's story. Now she was marshaling her arguments with the fighting courage her girls were accustomed to.

"This shows, first, that we are successful enough to be unsettling Jack Culbertson's security. He was willing to give us a hand last summer. Now he'd like to keep us in our place and not let the competition get too strong. Getting the Saddle Club last fall was a major success, and I think it bothered him.

"The big thing that we've been working for all year is the Millrace Show, the first week in June. If we get more blue ribbons than Jack Culbertson's riders do, that will prove something. We've simply got to work our heads off to groom the kids for that show. We'll get the Saddle Club to enter as a group——"

"But Jack has been concentrating all along on his long-time students who have horses of their own," Margo pointed out. "He's got an advantage there and I don't see how we can possibly overcome it."

"I've never liked that attitude of Jack's," Mrs. Macintyre remarked. "I knew even when you girls were studying there that the more money a rider had the more he favored her. He's an excellent teacher, no doubt about that. But only a few get the benefit of his teaching. The others get assistants who don't know as much as you girls do. He'll work with about six students, and we'll work with thirty-six."

"But Mom," Margo reasoned, "maybe just for now we should pick out the most likely winners and give them the works. After all—there's so much at stake in this show——"

Her mother shook her head. "Margo, understand this, once and for all. This is a competitive situation, and it's too bad. But that's how life is, and we're going to go into this competition on our terms and not on Jack's. And our terms are that it is a matter of ethics and common honesty to give every rider what he or she has paid for, and I'm going to stake the survival of the school on that principle.

"Horses and riding should be available to anyone who

wants to learn, like music or books or dancing. I hate to make so much of blue ribbons, anyway. Every rider who comes to this school has paid the same money for lessons, and brings the same enthusiasm.”

Margo looked at her mother. “Do you think our terms will beat theirs?”

“We’re going to work all spring to measure up ahead of Jack Culbertson, and we’re not going to sacrifice one single student to do it,” Mrs. Macintyre told her. “We’re going to groom every one of them a little more than necessary, a little more than possible.

“Now, the only thing we can be sure of is that he will be counting on Ginevra to bring in a lot of ribbons for him. We can’t stop her in the amateur classes. But you girls can match her in the open classes, and you can beat her, if I know horsemanship.”

“The saddle horse stake class is open,” said Connie. “I won that two different years on Domino. I’ll work all spring for that show, and at the very least I can give Ginevra a good scare. I can go into one of the Western open classes, too. Remember the trappings we got for Daffodil, for that costume show a couple of years ago?”

Her mother said, “But the show comes almost immediately after your radio audition, Connie. I don’t see how you can get ready for both.”

Connie waved her hand lightly. “Don’t worry about it, Mother. I’ll get ready for both all right. And there’ll be two weeks after the radio show to concentrate on the Millrace Show.”

Margo heard her with an admiration she never thought to express. She said, “That challenge trophy for open

jumpers I won last year: this is the year I defend it, and if I win this time, it's mine to keep. That's an important class, so it ought to count for a lot. And the Maclay Cup, where I was runner-up last year. I'll work on Counterpoint for that——"

Connie said, "I heard, too, that Ginevra will ride Scarlet Royal. They sold Kingpin last fall, so Scarlet is the only jumper they have. She's been taking the horse to Culbertson's school, to get her lessons on her own horse, and Sandy says Ginevra says she's handling her beautifully now."

"I thought we'd sold her a bad-mannered horse!" Margo exclaimed.

Connie grinned. "Ginevra can't make up her mind on that story: one day she stole a jewel from us, and the next day we skinned her on a bad bargain. I don't think the kids are paying much attention to that part of the story."

There was another silence, heavy with their thoughts. Margo said, finally, "If she can handle Scarlet Royal, she's got a terrific advantage. There's no horse like Scarlet."

"Well," Mrs. Macintyre rose and straightened her lithe figure belligerently, "our horses are as good as any that will appear in this show, and you girls can ride as well as anyone. All we have to do now is to produce some prize-winning students. And if any of the kids want private lessons, take them on. We'll find the time somewhere."

Neil came in at that moment from his university classes. "Tea, Neil? It's still hot," Margo said. "We're celebrating for Connie and planning a course of battle."

“Good girl!” he said, giving Connie a warm grin. “Knew you’d make it.” He drank his tea and finished the remaining slice of toast, while the conversation went on. Then he said, “Trouble ahead?”

“Trouble!” Margo exploded. “You tell him, Connie!”

Connie explained the challenge they were facing. He listened attentively.

Then he said, “My money’s on the Green Meadow outfit, girls. You’ve got the stuff, but it’ll take some doing.”

“That’s what we know,” Mrs. Macintyre smiled a little wanly. “We’re starting to do it now.”

“I could help,” he offered. They looked at him speculatively. “I used to show in Wyoming—in fact, we vanned our horses to shows around four states. They always fetched bigger prices if they had a blue ribbon along with them. So this is old stuff to me. Why don’t I help? I’ll coach you girls while your mother is teaching, if you like.”

Margo drew a deep breath. “We’re in!” she announced.

Neil grinned at her, in appreciation of her confidence.

“Not yet, you’re not,” he said. “But you’re in the running.”



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHEN Ginevra spoke cordially to Margo, one morning early in May, Margo thought it must be a mistake, and replied with great indifference. Later that morning Ginevra made an occasion to walk through the hall with Margo, discussing an English assignment which she thought was stupid and ridiculous. Margo felt the same way about it, but she wasn't going to give Ginevra the satisfaction of agreeing with her. She said as little as possible, wishing Ginevra would drop the subject.

At two-thirty Ginevra approached Margo at her locker, as she was putting her books away. Margo was thinking about her afternoon ride, and wondering if it was raining too hard to take the horses out, when Ginevra said, "Don't you ever go over to Andy's?"

Margo would have liked to snub her completely. But she dared not antagonize the girl, if Ginevra were impelled for some strange reason to be friendly. So she said politely, "No, I usually go home as soon as I can."

"Why don't you go over there with me someday?" Ginevra invited her.

Margo looked up in amazement. Ginevra's blue eyes were fixed on her with purpose, and Margo withdrew inside herself uneasily.

"Someday maybe I will," she said, purposely leaving the matter as vague as possible.

"I'll remember that!" Ginevra promised brightly, moving away. Margo stared after her, puzzled.

She wants something, she thought. She hasn't talked to me like that since last summer—the day she admired Scarlet, when I was jumping her. Still brooding over the question, she drove home carefully through drizzling rain.

It was not raining too hard to ride, she decided, and saddling Counterpoint she rode over to the Cranshaw paddock. Scarlet was not out, and Margo cantered disconsolately home again, her uneasiness over Ginevra's overtures augmented by her disappointment.

During the next week Ginevra's friendliness became more marked. She made opportunities to meet Margo between classes, she talked to her after school, she almost never appeared with Dan Ryerson. And after the first day or two she talked about Scarlet, an irresistible subject for Margo, of course.

Mostly Ginevra talked about how fond she was of the horse, what possibilities Scarlet had as a jumper and



show horse, how enthusiastic Jack Culbertson was about the horse, and how she loved the animal as a personality.

Margo heard her with a sore heart, torn between pride in Scarlet Royal and pain that another owner could speak of her so knowingly. She could not hold herself aloof from this one common interest, and lowering her guard almost unaware, she found herself, within a couple of weeks, chatting eagerly with Ginevra in Scarlet's interest, persuading herself that perhaps this development was going to make of Ginevra a true horsewoman. Unintentionally she revealed again the deep love she still had for the horse, and Ginevra, who was very astute in her self-centered way, knew exactly how Margo was going to respond to anything that concerned Scarlet.

Before the uneasy friendship had progressed very far, Ginevra asked Margo with a fine show of frank humility just what the secret was for getting out of Scarlet Royal that last ounce of performance that was so unbeatable.

Margo thought fast. But the girl seemed sincere. For Margo the choice lay between breaking off the friendship which seemed to be bringing her closer to her horse than ever before, and coaching the girl who would be in competition with the riders from the Green Meadow school. She told herself it was either a question of loyalty to Green Meadow, or to horsemanship as a profession, and she made her choice. Anything that would improve the horsemanship of the girl who now rode Scarlet Royal she would freely give.

"Are you having trouble?" she asked, feeling her way.

Ginevra laughed deprecatingly. "Not trouble," she said lightly. "But I always have the feeling that the horse

just doesn't perform for me quite the way she did for you—that last ounce of enthusiasm, if you know what I mean."

Margo knew too well, and she winced to remember it.

"It's hard to explain," she said slowly. "It's a matter of understanding between horse and rider. The horse has to feel that you belong to her, that you love her, and that you are working with her, not just expecting her to work with you. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so," said Ginevra, wrinkling her brow. "Of course, that's what I always try to do with any horse—work with him——"

Maybe she had misunderstood this girl all along, Margo thought doubtfully. Or maybe Ginevra had had a change of heart.

"Why don't you come over and ride Scarlet Royal someday?" Ginevra said, then. "Just watching you would probably give me the idea."

Margo held on to herself firmly. This was something she must be careful about. A little dizzy with the idea, she shook her head regretfully.

"I couldn't make it this week," she said faintly. "I'll think about it."

"Please do," Ginevra said cordially. "I'm really anxious for your help. I'm going to ride her in the show in June, and it's terribly important to me."

Margo went home that day deeply uneasy. Her instinct told her that something was wrong with Ginevra's approach, that she didn't really want to help Green Meadow's strongest rival to win anything. But Scarlet

Royal was involved, and anything that would help Scarlet was something she must do.

Connie was practicing when Margo got home. Connie was practicing all the hours she could get to the piano, these days. Her final audition for the Greenwald Musical Foundation Scholarship was to be held on Sunday, and for the past two weeks Neil and Margo had done all of Connie's work around the house and stables to let her concentrate on her big effort.

Margo wondered, as she worked around the stables, whether she shouldn't talk this problem over with someone. But she decided to wait until after Connie's performance.

On Sunday afternoon they all attended the radio audition, including Neil, who was confident that Connie could win as easily as she had at Wentworth High School. Connie herself was not so poised as she had been at the preliminary event. She held herself rigidly still and silent on the ride in, and the rest of the family chattered busily of horse shows and school problems, with the idea of distracting Connie.

The concert hall in Chicago was filled with people when the Macintyres arrived, and the air clattered with parental confidence. Connie disappeared backstage, and the other Macintyres found seats, disappointingly far back and to one side, and composed themselves to hear Connie win the grand prize.

According to the program there were twelve entries. Fortunately all the pieces were short ones. Connie was playing again the *Étude* in E flat, which she had played before.

Long before it was over Margo found herself waiting restlessly for the end, entirely uncertain where Connie had placed. There were some extremely difficult numbers, some musicians who played sensationally well.

When the prizes were announced, Connie took the third prize of one hundred dollars.

Until that moment Margo had not realized how definitely she had expected her sister to get the grand prize. She sat still with shock, and all she could think was, "Poor Connie! How can she stand it?" All the Macintyres gallantly concealed their disappointment, commenting over and over how distinguished the third prize was in that competition.

Connie joined them, very composed and showing no disappointment at all.

"Thank goodness, that's over!" she exclaimed. "Here's the check, Mother. Even a hundred dollars will be useful somewhere."

"It's yours, Connie," said her mother. "We all thought you were marvelous."

"I did all right," agreed Connie. "Did you hear that Brahms number? The boy from some place in South Chicago? He was terrific, simply terrific! The minute I heard him I knew I couldn't get the first prize. I'm not too surprised, really. Anyway, I like Miss Graves just fine, and I'd just as soon go on studying with her. I can try again next year. Now I can concentrate on that horse show. I'm ready for a vacation from piano for a while, anyway."

Neil shook hands with her solemnly. "You're O.K., little girl," he said. "I always knew it would come out."

She giggled, and only Margo suspected, halfway home, that she was concealing a major disappointment under her light-hearted manner.

For the next two weeks, with the radio audition out of the way, Connie worked at her horsemanship as intensively as she had worked at her music. Margo found herself amazed at the application she had not realized Connie possessed.

Neil told her, "You don't need to underestimate your little sister. She's got lots of stuff. And I never saw her ride better. She'll take her class in that show; we don't need to worry about that."

During those weeks, with casual yet beautifully timed insistence, Ginevra continued to urge Margo to ride Scarlet.

One day she said, wistfully, "I hate to go home after school, Margo. There's no one there but the housekeeper and the groom. If you'd come over and see the horses and ride Scarlet Royal, I'd just love to have you. Why don't you come over today?"

Another day: "Look, Margo honey, you're only five miles away. Why don't you ride over on one of those wonderful hunters of yours, and we could exchange horses. That's such good practice. And I'd love to know what you think of Scarlet's schooling now. It seems to me she improves with every week of work."

And once, with insidious suggestion, "I wonder sometimes if the horse isn't still missing you. I think it would do her good for you to ride her again."

Margo felt herself weakening. The thought of sitting on Scarlet Royal again, feeling that smooth power that

had once seemed part of herself, aroused an intolerable longing to accept Ginevra's invitation.

Why not? she asked herself, more than once.

And yet, in the clear-sighted strength of the early morning hours, when she was watering and feeding her own horses, before she went to school, she told herself sternly that Ginevra must have some motive. She was not the kind of girl to swing suddenly from antagonism to cordiality unless she had some purpose to gain. And whatever Ginevra wanted to gain, it would not be good for Margo, nor for Green Meadow. Leave it alone, instinct told her.

But her longing for her horse kept her searching for some loophole of reason. And since Ginevra had opened her campaign to get Margo to come to her home openly, Margo had not felt that she could ride over there secretly. So she had not seen Scarlet for three weeks now, and the need to see the horse again was compelling.

Grooming Counterpoint on Thursday morning, she found herself thinking, with a sense of surrender, that perhaps she was going to accept Ginevra's invitation after all. What was there to lose?

The thought of riding Scarlet again was intoxicating. She became suddenly gay and voluble, with a need to talk to someone about her excitement. Neil was raking out the stall next to Counterpoint, and he stared at her when she burst into a trilling whistle.

"Did someone leave you a million dollars?" he inquired.

"Practically the same thing," she said gaily. "Ginevra Cranshaw—you know, the girl who has Scarlet now—

has been wanting me to come over and ride Scarlet. Today I'm going to."

He busied himself raking the manure out of the stable, spreading fresh straw, fetching the grooming comb and brush, without saying anything for a couple of minutes. Then he said casually, "I thought she was your worst enemy."

Margo felt a chilled confusion spreading through her, as if a dream were being dispelled and she hated to let go of it.

"She was for a while," she said quickly. "But she's been very friendly for several weeks now. And she wants me to give her some pointers on Scarlet Royal—and ride her. When I think of being on Scarlet again, I can hardly breathe. I've wondered what she had in mind. But after all, what harm could it do, just to ride my horse once again?"

Neil said sternly, "I'd lay off the whole idea, Margo."

She looked at him, with a stubborn determination in her upthrust chin and tightened lips. "I don't see why."

"I'll tell you why. In the first place, if she wants pointers on how to ride her horse, let her come to Green Meadow and pay for them. Do you want to help your strongest competitor? Don't be a fool, Margo! In the second place, from all you've told me about her, she's not the type to change her feelings about you people, unless she's got something to gain."

Since this advice was exactly contrary to what she wanted to hear, Margo took it as unwarranted.

"I can't see that it's any of your business," she said coldly, "if I want to be friends with a girl. After all, if

she wants to play ball for a change, I think it might be better than being sworn enemies.”

“When there’s a horse involved, the way Scarlet Royal is,” he said grimly, “you’re not playing ball, you’re playing with dynamite.”

They finished the stable work with no further conversation.

In some ways, Neil was becoming too bossy for any good use, Margo thought. Taking things for granted, presuming on the way they had all treated him as one of the family, like this. She was sick of him, he didn’t know what he was talking about, and in any case this affair was none of his business.

She told Ginevra that morning at school that she’d be glad to come over this very afternoon.





## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RIDING over to the Cranshaw paddock on Counterpoint that afternoon, for the first time in three weeks, Margo resolutely crushed her misgivings. In spite of Ginevra's friendliness, Margo could not suppress the distrust she had felt ever since their first meeting last summer. And yet, she kept arguing with herself, her explanations were so reasonable. She wanted to know more about the horse she now owned. She had finally, probably reluctantly, determined to ask for help from the former owner. Maybe Ginevra didn't like Margo, maybe Margo didn't like Ginevra. What difference did that make, when they were both concerned with Scarlet Royal?

Neil's blunt answer kept nagging at her conscience:

"If she wants pointers on how to ride her horse, let her come to Green Meadow and pay for them." But after the way Ginevra had left Green Meadow, it was surely expecting too much for a girl of her temperament to come back like that. No, Margo couldn't blame Ginevra. Besides, this kind of conference over a horse in which they were mutually interested might contribute invaluablely to Ginevra's horsemanship, might even do for the girl what Mrs. Macintyre had tried futilely to do.

In any case, Margo assured herself, she was helping the horse, not the girl. And even when the Green Meadow school was involved, Scarlet came first.

None of her reasoning left her entirely satisfied. But reason had nothing to do with Scarlet Royal. The only thing that really counted, this afternoon, was that she was going to ride Scarlet again.

The thought made her hands tremble, and her heart beat fast as she saw the white, cross-barred fence of Scarlet's paddock come in view down the road.

It was a delightful day for riding, a soft, bright day in the full burst of spring. The trees had at last come into full, lush leaf, and the world was freshly green. It was May twenty-ninth, and one week from Saturday was the date for the important Millrace Show. Margo rode at a collected canter, seeing the buttercups blooming along the edges of the bridle path, smelling the spicy scent of a country spring, and a zest for living that had almost nothing to do with Scarlet Royal filled her to overflowing. She said to herself, in a little prayer of thanksgiving, "I'm so lucky! It's hard to believe!"

Ginevra was in the paddock, riding Coquette around

as she waited. The high-action saddler was stepping proudly around the paddock, with a conscious perfection. Margo watched for a few minutes, as Ginevra put her through her paces and brought her to a halt in show stance, back legs stretched rigidly, high-set tail finely arched. Margo watched Coquette with an odd sense of revulsion that no other horse had ever aroused in her. The gleaming saddle horse seemed to reflect the personality of her mistress, and in spite of being here today at Ginevra's invitation, Margo still could not like her.

Ginevra dismounted gracefully. "Hi," she said, not cordially, but as if at last she had Margo where she wanted her. Margo hardly noticed her expression or her tone. Her eyes were on Scarlet Royal, cropping along the far fence. She said, absently polite, "Coquette did beautifully, didn't she?"

"Oh, I'm not worried about Coquette!" said Ginevra confidently. "It's the jumping classes. Scarlet? Come here, Scarlet."

The horse might have been stone deaf. Cropping steadily, she never raised her head nor flicked an ear. Ginevra said, with a little laugh, "They say horses don't come until they're used to a carrot or something. But I'm not going to bribe her that way."

Margo whistled lightly, and called, "Scarlet?"

Instantly the horse came to attention, head high, ears pricked. Then, wheeling, she cantered over to the fence and greeted Margo with a whinny, pawing the ground impatiently as if she wanted to be closer to Margo than the fence would permit.

"How's my girl?" Margo asked fondly, rubbing her

face along the horse's cheek, patting and fondling her ears and poll.

"Do you want me to saddle her?" she asked Ginevra.

Turning to question her hostess, she was repelled again by the girl's cold expression of annoyance. Ginevra could not tolerate anyone else taking first place, even in the affections of a horse. She said now, "Jones will do it. Jones?"

The groom appeared from the stables. "Yes, Miss Cranshaw?"

"Will you saddle the chestnut, please?"

At the set expression on his face, Margo knew that every care of the horse was for Jones a battle which he had come to dread. Her heart sank for Scarlet. How was she being treated? Had they ruined her mouth? How long could she be used by misunderstanding hands and not be spoiled for keeps?

"Let me, Ginevra," she begged. "Really—I like to tack up horses, and Scarlet knows me so well."

That was the wrong thing to say, but she couldn't help it. She could not stand by and watch someone else struggle with Scarlet. Ginevra, with a calculating glance at her, shrugged and said, "O.K. If you really want to."

Jones fetched the tack from the stable and Margo bridled the horse in a matter of seconds, slipped the saddle on and tightened the girth expertly. Scarlet stood motionless, only a slight quiver betraying her pleasure at Margo's handling. Jones said tactlessly, "You've got a way with that horse, miss. She's a real problem for me."

The air was frosty with Ginevra's displeasure, and

Margo felt herself tightening with caution. She knew that Ginevra resented the groom's suggestion that Scarlet was less than co-operative with the Cranshaw stable man, or anyone else in her new home.

Lightly, Margo mounted and walked Scarlet in a circle. She heard Ginevra say brusquely, "You may go now, Jones. Thank you."

Riding the filly again, she felt for a few minutes that nothing else mattered at all. She was on Scarlet Royal. She was one with the horse she loved. She cantered, wheeled, trotted, walked forward and backward. Scarlet responded to her lightest suggestion. Her mouth was not ruined, Margo thought, in great relief. It shouldn't have been. Her mother had always said Ginevra had light hands. But it wasn't Ginevra's riding technique that Margo worried about. It was that temperament that threw her into rages at any opposition.

"Do you want me to take her over some jumps?" Margo asked, stopping beside Ginevra and caressing the horse.

"If you don't mind," said Ginevra, with the polite manner she always used for her inferiors. "It's the jumps where I always get that feeling that she's holding back."

Scarlet had always jumped more easily and lightly than any other horse Margo had ever ridden. Remembering that flowing, soaring motion, Margo forgot Ginevra and any motive her hostess might have, everything except that once again she was jumping with Scarlet Royal. Almost imperceptibly she rose as the horse went up and over without breaking her stride. She took Scarlet around the four jumps in the paddock at three feet nine inches,

four feet, four feet three inches, and Scarlet never touched a bar with her hoofs, clearing them triumphantly, as if she loved this activity as much as her rider did. Margo patted the horse's neck, murmuring, "You honey, you darling! You go as well as you ever did, you pretty thing."

Too much absorbed in the horse to notice anything else, Margo had not looked toward Ginevra since the first jump. She did not see the thoughtful expression on Ginevra's face, or notice the calculation with which Ginevra assessed Margo's emotion for the horse.

Slowing the horse to a walk, Margo came back to Ginevra and sat still, reluctant to get off.

"She goes as well as she ever did," Margo said. "Do you want me to check your jumps?"

Ginevra shook her head indifferently.

"I know exactly what is wrong with my jumps," she said positively. "There was something else I wanted to talk to you about."

Margo slid off the horse, swept unexpectedly by emotion again. She felt for one terrible moment that she could not leave Scarlet again, now that she had been so close to her, had ridden her with such delight, had for a space of moments wiped out nine months of longing. Turning toward the horse so that her face wouldn't betray her feeling, she began to unfasten the girth.

"You wanted her untacked, didn't you?" she asked brusquely.

"If you like," assented Ginevra. Leaning against the fence, she watched Margo's hands busy with the saddle, the bridle, the bit.

"This is the situation," she said, with just enough persuasion in her voice to keep it friendly. "This show next week is terribly important to me. I've been counting on it all year. Even last fall I was planning for the Mill-race Show. That was why I bought your horse in the first place—she looked better at the September Horse Fair than any other horse there. I've got to win my classes. That's all. I've just got to win!"

The intensity in her voice compelled Margo to turn and look at her. Ginevra was not fooling now, she was not acting, or trying to be sophisticated. Her face was hard with determination. Slowly, on her guard, Margo asked, "Why is a show so important as all that?"

Ginevra plucked a long stalk of meadow grass and chewed at it nervously.

"Horses and shows have been my life," she said, with quiet violence. "My mother wins cups in golf. My father gets awards from Chambers of Commerce. They are important people, and they were too busy with their own lives for my little affairs to mean anything. Until I began to win silver trophies and get my picture in the paper once in a while. Then Dad took an interest, and now he's terribly proud of my horsemanship. Maybe that's why it's important to me. I don't know. All I know is that I've got to win. Now this show next week—I can take the saddle classes. I'm not concerned with them. But I'm entered in the Maclay Cup class. You know what that means."

Margo nodded, unwillingly sympathetic with this girl who craved the only kind of distinction her parents could recognize.

"I was runner-up in the Maclay Cup class last year," she said. "I was riding Scarlet then——"

"I know." Ginevra brushed off Margo's achievements. "I looked up an old program. That was another reason I wanted Scarlet. I feel that the horse is at least half the contest. Anyway, the Maclay Cup winner goes to Madison Square Garden for the finals. It's the biggest event of the whole year around the Middle West, here——" she scorned the provincial Middle West with an indifferent wave of her hand—"and if Scarlet would perform, I'd have a good chance at the grand championship in Madison Square."

She waited a moment. Margo said, uneasily, "What are you worrying about?"

Ginevra looked at her directly. "I wanted to ask you to withdraw from the competition." At Margo's shocked expression she hurried on. "Look, Margo. This couldn't possibly mean as much to you as it does to me. If you will pull out of all the jumping classes, I'll sell Scarlet back to you right after the show, for a thousand dollars."

Torn by the choice confronting her, Margo tried to think. Green Meadow Riding School needed the ribbons as much as Ginevra needed them, but that argument would carry no weight with Ginevra. Conniving at letting a chosen rider win was something Margo had never been asked to do before, would have scorned even considering. But Scarlet, standing close to her, was rubbing her velvety nose against Margo's neck.

Margo said, almost automatically, "But I can't withdraw now. I'm already committed. The judges would think it was funny——"



"Pull out of all the classes," repeated Ginevra. "Tell them your horse went lame, or something. After all, it's only one show. And afterward you'll get your horse back for a third of what you sold her for."

"I don't see how I could do it," Margo objected feebly. "It's just one of the things that isn't done around here. Mother would know something was funny——"

Ginevra approached the idea from another angle. "Well, of course, if everyone has to know, it would be no good. But look—couldn't you just make some small mistakes in your riding that would throw the class to me? That would be so easy for a horsewoman like you—just pull your horse in at the wrong time. You know how—and no one would ever have to know the difference——"

Margo felt her will faltering. She thought in quick succession of having Scarlet back again in her own stall, of winning other shows with Scarlet, of training her for racing or steeplechasing, of having Scarlet to love and to ride. Abruptly she said, "I just don't know, Ginevra. I'd have to think it over."

The horse nickered companionably, her head on Margo's shoulder, and almost without thinking she raised her hand to stroke the velvet nose.

Ginevra, controlling her impatience with unwonted effort, said reasonably, "Think of it this way, Margo. It's one of those times when the end justifies the means. And this could be handled so easily, without anyone at all knowing the difference. It's really important for me, because this is the last year I'll be eligible for the Maclay Cup class. By next year I'll be nineteen, and then I'll be too old. I was runner-up one year in the East, and it's the

one thing I've been working toward ever since I began riding six years ago. I'd let you have the horse today, but I couldn't school another jumper before the show, and Scarlet is the only one we have now. But the day after the show I'll see that you get her back. And you don't have to worry about the price—Dad will let me do anything I want with the horses."

She walked back to Counterpoint with Margo, still arguing, reasoning, persuading. Margo listened with her head bent, saying nothing, confused and doubting herself. When it came to Scarlet Royal, she just couldn't tell what she should do.

She mounted the gray gelding and looked back at Scarlet Royal, standing there by the fence, forlorn. All the pleasure was gone now from this visit, and all that was left was the pain of leaving her horse again, complicated by the knowledge that she could do what Ginevra was suggesting without anyone being any the wiser.

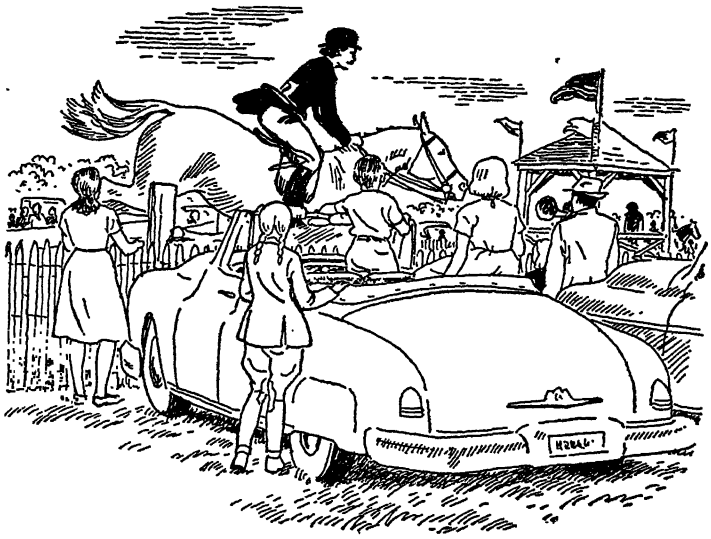
Couldn't she? And who would be hurt?

"Good-by now," she said to Ginevra. "Thanks for the chance to ride Scarlet. I'll think it over, I guess. But I don't know what I can do——"

She cantered down the road without looking back, strained with conflict and worn with bitterness and self-reproach. Neil's words came to her mind, his warning of this morning. How right he had been, she thought remorsefully. She had opened Pandora's box, and the stinging troubles were flying about her head.

She wished that she could talk to Neil again about the position she had put herself into.

But this kind of choice was something she could talk over with no one, Neil, least of all.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN the day of the Millrace Horse Show dawned, Saturday, June seventh, fair and hot, the Macintyres and their pupils were ready for any competition. Only Margo felt that this show carried more challenges, more strain, more difficulties, win or lose, than anything she had ever faced before, but she kept that dread to herself, hoping only that no one would know what she felt.

She had renounced, finally, with pangs of grief, her last chance to regain Scarlet, and she had worked many long, hard hours with Neil in perfecting her horsemanship on Red Queen and Counterpoint, with whom she was entered in seven classes. But the decision left her shaken, and she experienced bleak moments of indecision, in spite of what she had told herself she would do.

Entirely unsuspecting of the conflict that depressed her, Neil assured her that she was riding beautifully, that he had never seen any horseman grasp and apply so quickly certain fine points he had discovered she still needed to work on.

Connie had thrown herself into her horsemanship with the same determination with which she had worked on her music and had improved immeasurably. In the Western riding style, Neil had shown her some special techniques which were beyond the scope of most riding students in the Green Meadow neighborhood, and he felt confident that she would win that class.

They spent hours on the program, computing what they might expect to take in different classes. A silver cup would be awarded as the trophy for the winner of the most points in the meet, and Neil was determined to have that come to Green Meadow. When she was able to divert her mind from her unhappiness, Margo was amused at Neil's absorption in the welfare of the riding school.

"You'd think you'd sunk your own wealth into this business," she teased him. And he'd replied, "When I have some maybe someday I will. It's a nice business."

Neil was going to be present at the show as a spectator only. He had an exam on Saturday morning and it was doubtful whether he could get there in time to help very much.

So much hinged on this show, that by the time they were ready to leave Margo was strung to a pitch of tension that hampered her handling of the horses. Counterpoint balked at entering the van, and she shouted at him impatiently, until Neil, on his way to his early class, took

the lead from her hands and soothed and cajoled the uneasy horse into co-operating.

"Take it easy," he said, as he started his own car. "If you're going to let the situation get you down you'll lose every ribbon. Now hang on to yourself, for Pete's sake, Margo!"

Her nerves were quieting, she could feel herself relaxing, as they drove the van into the show grounds. She climbed out of the cab and went around to the back door, about to lead her horses into the enclosure, when she heard shouts of excitement and pounding hoofs. Whirling about, she stood still, holding Counterpoint's rein. Scarlet Royal cleared the four-foot fence of the enclosure in a running leap, and cantered up to Margo with an air of delight.

While the onlookers were chattering about the attachment of this horse for Margo and the astonishing leap Scarlet had taken, while Margo patted and talked lovingly to the horse, Ginevra stalked up, her face set and angry. Jerking the lead rein from Margo's hand, she muttered, "If I lose this show, you'll never see your horse again!"

Margo leaned against Counterpoint, white and shaken, as Ginevra dragged the reluctant chestnut away and got her back inside the enclosure, with sharp instructions to her groom to watch that she didn't jump out again.

Murmured conversation around Margo informed her that the onlookers disliked Ginevra and sympathized with Margo. But that assurance was of no help now. She fought for control. Counterpoint and Red Queen seemed to become strangers to her, and only Scarlet was real.

By the time the show had progressed through the first three classes, Margo thought she had regained her poise. Molly took a blue ribbon in forward seat equitation with jumping. A Culbertson student took second, a Green Meadow student third, and other places went to contestants from outside the immediate neighborhood. In a senior class for amateurs only, Ginevra took a blue ribbon on Scarlet.

Margo, studying the class from the spectators' seats, thought that Scarlet looked reluctant, almost as if she might refuse. But she did go over the hurdles. Telling herself that she was calm again, Margo gave conscientious credit to Ginevra for expert handling. But Scarlet, she knew, would have performed more effortlessly handled with affection. Did she want Ginevra to win or not? Margo still did not know.

Ginevra took another blue ribbon in the amateur saddle horse class, on Coquette, and she took the ribbon also in the open class in which Connie was entered, after a very close decision, with an exchange of horses.

Connie took the ribbon and trophy in the Western class, far ahead of the nearest competitor, as Neil had predicted. And to Margo's delight, Macintyre pupils took second and third.

Too bad Neil couldn't have seen that, Margo thought, looking about for him. She wondered when he was going to come to the show. It was now eleven, and the class in maze jumping, in which Margo was entered, was next.

She went into the ring on Counterpoint, nervous again, knowing she was not at her best. Counterpoint was performing beautifully, she thought gratefully. But the

direction of the maze, in which she was to take each jump with the red flag on her right, suddenly confused her. She turned once to the left and missed a jump altogether, took another from the wrong direction, and with a sinking heart found that she was excused from the ring.

Ginevra, intent and determined, followed Margo with a flawless course, in which Scarlet's performance, to the unknowing eye, was excellent. She took the blue ribbon.

In the next class, handy hunters, where they were again entered together, Margo thought she had done well, only to discover that the gate had not closed behind her when she thought she had fastened it. Ginevra took that ribbon also, with a smile for Margo that said, "Don't think I'm giving you any credit for this now!"

"What is wrong, Margo?" her mother wanted to know. "For goodness' sake, you never failed to close that gate before in your life! Pull yourself together, honey! Nothing is so important that you should go off your stride with nerves!" She meant to sound reassuring about the school ribbons. But it was not the reputation of the school now that was responsible for Margo's nerves.

In the interval before her next entry, she went off by herself, needing to think things through, to make up her mind about what was troubling her. Slowly she considered the problems that were disturbing her.

Was it possible that she had, even unintentionally, been letting Ginevra win, just for the sake of Scarlet Royal? What else could account for the nerves and pre-occupation that had pulled her performance below grade?

Facing that question bluntly, she became very still.

The hot June sun beat down on her head. Behind

her a couple of dowagers were complaining about the heat. "Every year this show gets hotter weather. We ought to have it earlier. I'm not as young as I used to be."

A hundred paces away an old car pulled into the parking lot, and Margo followed it with her eyes. Neil was getting out. The question she had been asking herself suddenly stabbed her with a quick revulsion.

Suppose she did let Ginevra and Scarlet win, as the girl had asked her to do? If she lent herself to a deal like that, Margo knew she could never face herself again, and even Scarlet could not restore her self-respect. She must put aside, once and for all, the idea of ever getting her horse back again. She thought she had done that a week ago, but she knew now that subconsciously she had still clung to the hope that she might get Scarlet again.

She must put Scarlet out of her mind and out of her heart, completely, and concentrate on the competition she was in, center her attention and affection on the horse she was riding. She must win the rest of her classes now, not to show anyone anything, but to prove to herself that nothing could persuade her to do less than her best, just for the satisfaction of representing her family and her school by her best performance.

And she must accept for herself the fact that with or without Scarlet Royal, she had chosen the life she wanted, and that choice she must maintain against any challenge, if she wanted to keep it.

Neil had tried to say something like that last winter, she remembered. He had told her that no one could build all of one's life around one horse. He had said that you



must find other satisfactions when your heart's desire was denied. She hadn't agreed with him then, she hadn't even known what he meant. But she did now.

She looked around as she moved back to the ring, wondering where he had gone. Just knowing that he was here, watching her prove herself, quickened her with a new energy. She walked lightly and purposefully to the enclosure where Counterpoint was waiting for her, feeling as if she had cast aside a heavy burden, glad that her heart could feel light again.

In the touch and out class she concentrated not on Ginevra nor on Scarlet Royal, but on Counterpoint and her own performance. Nothing mattered but the way she herself rode this course. And in her new determination, she remembered how fond she was of Counterpoint, she patted him affectionately, praised his efforts, talked to him softly, in a way she had forgotten to do before, when all she had thought of was that she was not riding Scarlet. Counterpoint responded with his finest effort, taking the touch and out class easily. From there on Margo took the blue ribbons in her next three classes.

By the time the Maclay Cup class was called, Ginevra's resentment was becoming marked by a lack of poise. When Margo had been off her form, early in the show, Ginevra had been coolly confident, and had won without strain. But now that Margo was back in winning form again, Ginevra became progressively strained and sullen, lashing her horse with the crop at the slightest provocation, holding her on too tight a rein. It was not because she didn't know better, but because, Margo could see, she was too tense to notice what her hands were doing.

In the Maclay Cup class the winner must take eight jumps without a fault and in perfect form. There would be one more amateur class, after the Maclay Cup event, and then the final contest, for the trophy cup, which Margo would defend for the third time.

Margo sat waiting for her turn, holding on determinedly to her purpose of showing Counterpoint perfectly, proving to herself that nothing could affect her horsemanship, demonstrating the kind of teaching the Green Meadow school could do. And she was confident that she could do it. But she thought, in a moment of weariness, she would be thankful when this show was ended.

Ginevra entered the ring just ahead of Margo. She went around the four hurdles once, perfectly, and the spectators applauded as she started the second round. Then, unexpectedly, on the third hurdle Scarlet refused, and Ginevra had lost her chance at the Maclay Cup. White with anger, she spurred her horse viciously toward the exit, lashing her unmercifully as she went, and pulling her brutally in, as the horse crowhopped and balked in protest. The spectators were quiet, but a murmur of protest followed her departure.

Margo, waiting for her number to be called, felt all her new-found determination drained away as she witnessed this treatment of Scarlet Royal. Weak and unnerved, she rode into the ring, stumbled over the third hurdle, and was excused.

Outside the ring, she rode back to the van, determined to leave the show at once.

Neil met her at the van, as if he had been waiting for her. She knew from the angry sympathy on his face that he had seen Ginevra's unsporting display of temper. She slipped off the gray gelding and leaned against the horse a moment, shaking with distress.

"Will you put Counterpoint in the van?" she said. "I'm going home, Neil. I feel too sick to stay."

Neil led the horse to the enclosure, and Margo slipped to the ground, holding her head in her hands. His voice startled her a moment later.

"I sure am disappointed in you, Margo," he said coldly. "I didn't think you'd let a horse mean so much to you that you'd throw away the good name of your riding school."

She lifted her face and stared at him, wincing at what sounded to her like a direct accusation of dishonesty, after the rankling conflict that had torn her for the past week.

"I'm not throwing anything away," she defended herself. "I just can't go on—not after seeing that exhibition——"

He held out his hands and pulled her to her feet, and she leaned against the van.

"Look, Margo," his voice was urgent now, and tender. "I know how you feel about Scarlet. And I saw what you saw. But that is something you must control. No matter how much you care about that horse, she's not yours, she's just a horse, and somebody else's at that. Remember the facts: you sold the horse for the sake of the riding school and your home and the other horses, and she brought you

a good price that helped you to keep the life you wanted to have. What right have you now to be moping almost a year later, because you couldn't keep her?"

Shaking her head from side to side, Margo muttered painfully, "I just can't help it. I've tried, and tried, and I can't get over that horse."

"In that case," he said harshly, "you're not the horsewoman I thought you were. You're a first-class neurotic."

Names can never hurt me, she thought drearily. Nobody understands what this feels like.

"Besides," he went on, "what about the horses you brought over? Counterpoint loves to jump, and you know he likes to win. And here you are, pulling out of your challenge trophy class, throwing away the silver cup that belongs to him, spoiling his chance to make a big name."

"I feel as if I never wanted to see a show ring again," she said, with her head down. "Maybe I've lost my confidence. It's just a waste of time——"

"That's like falling off a horse," he said. "You know the first rule is to get back on again. You've got to face the thing you're afraid of again, immediately. Otherwise you're licked."

"I'm not afraid," she denied. Her horsewoman's loyalty to the other Green Meadow horses turned her thoughts to Counterpoint's cup. Through the loud-speaker a voice as big as the air around them was calling the challenge trophy class in jumping. Slowly the words became meaningful for Margo.

Neil leaped the distance to the enclosure and brought Counterpoint over to where Margo stood, still irresolute. Thrusting the reins into her hand he gave her a shove.

“Get going,” he said sharply. “Hurry up or you’ll miss the class. Now get in there and fight! Ride the way your father would have ridden that horse!”

She mounted Counterpoint and rode slowly over to the entrance aisle. The things Neil had said stayed with her, repeating themselves in her mind, arousing her from the sick revulsion she had suffered over Scarlet’s beating. She must think of Counterpoint now, in the most important event of the show.

Waiting her turn to enter the ring, she watched the other jumpers thoughtfully. She could do better than that, she realized. It was up to her now to take this cup and keep it, not for herself but for Counterpoint and her family and the Green Meadow Riding School. Patting Counterpoint affectionately, she hummed to herself a paraphrase of a popular song, “If I can’t be near the horse I love, I’ll love the horse I’m near——”

The class was open jumping, where, after each contestant had gone around, the bars were raised, a few inches at a time, and riders were eliminated as they refused, knocked down the bars, or faulted in way of going. Ginevra, who had been entered in this class, was nowhere to be seen. Margo breathed more easily.

She took the first round easily at three feet six inches, and praised Counterpoint for his beautiful performance. He loved to jump, and he loved the applause of the audience, always knowing when he had shown well. The bars were raised three inches, and eight competitors, with Margo, went around again. Three more were eliminated. At four feet only two jumpers were still competing with Counterpoint. At four feet three inches, the first rider

knocked down two bars, the second horse refused on the third jump. Counterpoint sailed easily over all of them. He could have gone still higher, but there were no competitors left.

Then her number was called for the ribbon and Margo rode out on Counterpoint to receive the silver trophy cup. The judge presented it with the words, "Having won this cup for three years running, Miss Margo Macintyre has this year earned the right to keep it. Her name, with the name of her horse, will be inscribed on the cup."

Accepting it with thanks, Margo thought, I'm glad for Counterpoint. He deserved it.

The gray gelding was standing proudly for the presentation, tossing his head and glancing from judges to audience, and she leaned forward and said to him, "Good boy, Counterpoint," glad that she had not prevented him from this recognition.

Neil met her at the van, smiling his congratulations.

"Good girl," he said approvingly. "You deserved that cup, Margo. I'm proud of you!"

She stumbled into the cab beside Neil, who was driving the first two horses home, while Mrs. Macintyre rounded up her pupils and other horses. Exhausted with the emotions of the day Margo slumped silently in the seat, staring out of the window.

She had shown her horse, she had earned the challenge trophy to keep, she had vindicated Green Meadow's reputation for riding, she had fought and won a victory over herself.

Why, then, did nothing seem to matter?

Stealing a glance at Neil's face, his eyes fixed on the road, she wondered if she was going to have to struggle like this with herself all the rest of her life.

Because, in spite of everything, Scarlet Royal was still the only thing that mattered.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BY THE time they reached home, stabled, watered and fed the horses, and found themselves something to eat, Margo felt as if years had gone by since morning. She was dragging with exhaustion, and numb with a dazed realization of loss.

“Whatever happened to that sportsman’s trophy for the most points won in the show?” she asked her mother when they were all reviewing the show over the supper table.

Her mother smiled ruefully. “It went to an entry from Lake Forest,” she said. “Annabel Holden. Remember her? She took six blue ribbons and two red ones. Wonderful riding, no question about it. I was sorry we couldn’t have taken that cup. But no one from Culbert-



son's Academy took it either, and I think Ginevra's performance after her Maclay class failure was considered a serious reflection on Jack's teaching." For a moment she looked sympathetic with Jack's position. "It wasn't his fault, of course. She would have acted the same way, if she'd been working with us. But as long as she was his pupil, he does get more of the blame than he deserves, perhaps. I heard people talking about it afterward."

Margo was silent. No one else knew all the reasons for Ginevra's attitude, or the threat she had hurled at Margo in the beginning of the day. It was easier not to talk about it. Her head ached throbbingly, and she wanted to go to bed, yet she dreaded being alone with her thoughts.

The doorbell rang, and Neil went to answer it.

"Some men want to buy a horse," he reported.

Mrs. Macintyre rose, saying over her shoulder as she did so, "You girls will want to talk this over with us. And Neil, of course."

Together they sat down in the living room, Margo, Connie, Molly, and Neil, with Mrs. Macintyre, facing the two men who were dressed in riding clothes.

Margo liked the men immediately. They looked like good horsemen: alert, kindly, patient, shrewd. One was young and slight, the other in his early forties, stocky, but light on his feet.

"We liked the way Counterpoint performed this afternoon," the older one said, offering Mrs. Macintyre his card. "Beautiful horse, fine conformation, fine way of going. Would you consider selling him?"

Mrs. Macintyre looked from one to another of the girls. Margo's eyes sought Neil's. Mrs. Macintyre said

slowly, "We hadn't considered it before. However——"

"We'd be ready to offer thirty-five hundred, Mrs. Macintyre," said the younger man, leaning forward. "We think we can school him as a show horse to go to Madison Square Garden, and any international competition. He's got the makings of a champion open jumper."

Neil spoke in a drawling tone, glancing at the card he held in his hand. "We know how good he is, Mr. Angle. He's worth more than you offer."

Mrs. Macintyre glanced at Neil, startled. Margo concealed a smile, and watched him admiringly. His gray eyes, half-shut, held the other's look intently. The two visitors conferred together in undertones a moment. Then the elder one spoke again.

"He is worth more than that, Mr.—?" "Campbell," Neil supplied. "Mr. Campbell. We'll go to four thousand, but that's our limit."

Neil looked at Mrs. Macintyre, at the three girls. Margo closed her eyes, thinking. She hated to see Counterpoint go, as she always hated to lose any horse they had owned. But it would be a shame to keep him here as a school horse, when he could be a champion open jumper. Counterpoint would love that life!

She opened her eyes and spoke. "I think we ought to take the offer."

Neil nodded. Her mother spoke decisively. "I think so, too. We'll let you have the horse. Neil, will you take them out to see him?"

When the three men had left for the stable, Mrs. Macintyre said to the girls, "Your father used to be more thrilled by a good offer for Counterpoint than by any-

thing else about his horses. But now that he is not here to ride him any more, we might as well let him go. Four thousand is the best offer we've ever had."

"We'll have to replace him for the school," Margo said.

Her mother nodded. "With this money we can get one or two school horses," she said, her eyes shining with plans. "And Margo, honey—let's try to get Scarlet Royal back again!"

"Mother!" Margo sat upright, rigid with excitement. "Can we afford it? Do you really want to buy her back?"

Her mother smiled. "I kind of miss the problem child myself," she admitted. "And after Ginevra's display this afternoon I feel as if we can't leave a horse of ours in her hands another day! So—since we'll have this money from Counterpoint, let's use it that way."

They went on planning, in a delirium of excitement, exactly how they would use the money. Scarlet and two school horses. That meant they could expand the school's program by several students a day. They burst into cheers and laughter, as they dreamed of fantastic figures, of selling and replacing other horses, of breeding horses for sale.

The conviction came again to Margo that horses had never meant so much to her, when money was plentiful and life was easy, as they did today, when they meant heartbreak and struggle and hard-won success. Nothing had ever been quite so exciting as this offer for Counterpoint, and this opportunity to buy Scarlet Royal back again. Ginevra's words of yesterday, "If I lose this show, you'll never see your horse again," rang in her mind,

but, with the money in her hands, she could disregard that threat. Surely Ginevra could not want to keep Scarlet Royal, after the trouble she'd had. They would offer more, if necessary, than Ginevra had paid them. Everything was going to be wonderful.

The men returned from the stables, and the deal was confirmed. Their veterinary, with van and groom, would pick up Counterpoint on Sunday morning, and deliver the check to Mrs. Macintyre.

Margo was transformed from the drooping, exhausted girl who had returned from the show, to a vivid, jesting, dancing personality, gay and light-hearted. She teased and flirted with Neil in her exhilaration, wondering why Dan had ever bothered her, why she had given him a second thought. Neil was the kind of boy for her, and she didn't mind now if he knew it. In the rush of her excitement, she felt there was no longer any need for caution.

Neil looked surprised, and then amused, as if he understood her sudden carefree abandon. And Margo was amused with him. Life was light-hearted and wonderful, and after a long time, things were coming her way.

Sunday afternoon, with Mr. Angle's check safely in hand, Margo and her mother drove over to the Cran-shaws' to buy Scarlet Royal.

Quivering with anticipation, Margo was ready to forget everything she had suffered from Ginevra, and ready to believe that Ginevra would hold no grudges either. She rode into the driveway, her mother at the wheel, silent, dreaming already of taking Scarlet home. Her mother could drive her over, with the saddle and bridle, and she would ride the horse back to Green Meadow. The

thought almost overwhelmed her. In the enchantment of the dream, she sat perfectly still, until her mother said, "Aren't you going to get out, Margo? We're here."

"Oh, yes!" she said, laughing aloud. "Oh, Mother, isn't it wonderful?"

"I'm glad we've got the money," her mother said. "I just hope there's no hitch. Although, I can't imagine that Ginevra is really anxious to keep her, when Scarlet makes so much difficulty for her."

Margo had put aside the possibility of any hitch and now, at her mother's remark, she dropped with a thud from the dream to uncertainty again. Getting out of the car, almost reluctantly now, she let her mother lead the way up to the door, waited in unhappy suspense for an answer to their ring.

A uniformed maid answered the door. At their query she said distantly, "I believe Miss Ginevra is in. Will you wait, please?"

They waited in the handsome hall, watching the moments crawl by on the face of the grandfather clock at the foot of the stairs. After five minutes Ginevra appeared, alone and aloof.

"Hello, Ginevra," said Madeleine Macintyre, as warmly friendly as if her pupil had never left her. "Margo and I came over to see if you would be willing to part with Scarlet Royal. We've been missing the horse ever since we sold her, and now we'd like to buy her back again."

Ginevra looked at Mrs. Macintyre as coolly as if she had never seen her before. Then she gave Margo a long look of bitter satisfaction.

"Scarlet Royal is not for sale."

Margo heard her with wild disbelief. "But Ginevra," she protested, "surely you're not going to keep her! Some other horse could do so much better——"

Her mother raised a quieting hand.

"We're sorry to hear that," she said calmly. "We thought that perhaps after her lack of co-operation you might be glad to get rid of her, and we'd be happy to pay for her what you paid us."

"No," said Ginevra with finality. "I am not selling the horse just now, and in any case, I wouldn't sell her to you."

Margo met her mother's eyes miserably, begging her, can't you do something about this? Almost imperceptibly her mother shook her head. But she made one more try.

"We'd hoped to have the horse back someday," she said gently, "because she seemed like part of the family. Perhaps you will feel differently later?"

Ginevra shook her head with great indifference.

"I shan't change my mind," she said. "And as I said, I would never sell her to Green Meadow. And now, if you'll excuse me, I don't care to discuss the matter any further. Maryann will show you out."

With this dismissal, she walked upstairs, straight and imperious, never turning her head, or taking any further notice of her visitors.

Margo was too deep in her own misery to realize her mother's anger, until the car spurred forward with a clash of gears and a ripping sound of gravel. Glancing with some surprise at her mother she saw that her cheeks were burning, her lips drawn in a thin line.

"I have never," said Madeleine Macintyre, stopping violently at the highway before turning into it, "known a girl with such bad manners in all my life. Not to mention natural meanness."

Distracted momentarily from her own distress, Margo smiled involuntarily.

"You thought once there might be some salvage value there," she remarked.

"I was wrong," said her mother forcefully. "She's a hopeless case. I have never been so angry in my whole life. *Never*. It's not just the horse, it's her whole attitude. When I think that that vixen has one of our horses, I simply writhe!"

There was a small, inadequate bit of comfort for Margo in knowing that her mother felt as strongly about Ginevra as she did herself. But there was nothing further to say about the situation. They drove home furious but helpless, to explain to the girls and Neil that Scarlet Royal would not be returning to Green Meadow after all.

That evening Helen Wadsworth, who lived a mile down the road in the direction of the Cranshaws, came to see them, bearing news which she could hardly wait to deliver.

"Had you heard that Ginevra Cranshaw is selling Scarlet Royal?" she demanded.

Madeleine Macintyre leaned forward.

"No, we hadn't heard that," she said. "I had thought, after yesterday's performance, that she might not want to keep the horse. What did you hear?"

Helen Wadsworth's tanned face was lively with dislike for Ginevra. "The way I hear it," she said, "Ginevra has

made up her mind that the only horse that will really display her talents is an Arabian, and she has said that her father will go to five thousand dollars for the horse she wants. So now she declares that Scarlet Royal is impossible—simply impossible, my dear!—and she will be lucky to get her money out.”

Margo was trembling violently with the impact of her hatred for Ginevra.

She was about to burst out with the story of the afternoon's visit to buy the horse, when she remembered one of the first axioms her father had impressed on her memory. “When you're dealing for a horse, never talk about it until the horse is in your stable and the check has cleared.”

She wanted someone to sympathize with her in this trial, she wanted her neighbor to dislike Ginevra even more than she did, and to tell everyone how badly the Cranshaws had treated the Macintyres. But a warning sense of caution halted her. Gossip could do unforeseen damage. And while Scarlet still belonged to the Cranshaws, it was better to avoid that kind of damage.

For what purpose Margo could not tell. But with unprecedented control she bit back the vindictive words that trembled on her lips, and listened to the conversation instead.

Neil went out to the kitchen to put on a pot of coffee for them. Helen Wadsworth nodding in his direction, lowered her voice discreetly and said, “He's a nice boy, isn't he? Weren't you lucky?”

“Very,” Mrs. Macintyre assented. “He's just like one of the family. And he was a tremendous help in prepar-



ing us for that show last Saturday. His horsemanship is terrific!"

"Really?" Mrs. Wadsworth exclaimed. "I had no idea he was really good at riding. I thought it was just stable work——"

"He's good at everything," Margo said, almost involuntarily.

Mrs. Wadsworth smiled at her slyly.

"I'm surprised Ginevra didn't come running back here, with someone like Neil to work on," she remarked.

"I don't think Ginevra knows Neil," Mrs. Macintyre said. "Certainly she had never been near the place since he came. As a matter of fact, most of our friends have never met him. We've seen very little of people since Christmas, you know."

"I haven't heard anyone mention him," Mrs. Wadsworth said reflectively. "Funny, when you think of the way everyone knows everything about each other around here. Did you do it on purpose?"

Mrs. Macintyre looked as if she were not amused.

"You're making a lot out of nothing, Helen," she said. "Neil came here in February when we advertised for help with the horses. You knew we had a student living with us and working part-time. Why should we make anything out of that?"

"No reason at all," Mrs. Wadsworth said, placatingly. "It just goes to show how easy it is to get out of touch with your best friends, out here in the country, I suppose." She looked at Margo penetratingly, and in spite of herself Margo became confused.

Neil came in at that moment with the coffee tray and

set it before Mrs. Macintyre, passing cups as she poured them.

Helen Wadsworth watched him with sharp eyes and a thoughtful smile.

Then she said brightly, accepting her cup, "The Macintyres must have some reason for keeping you under wraps, Neil. Why haven't I ever met you before?"

He smiled at her, the slow, warm smile that Margo suddenly thought was utterly charming, and drawled, "I couldn't say, ma'am. Could be I'm usually keeping company with the horses when you come around."

She laughed, and then, setting down her cup, said briskly, "Well, I've got to be going. I just wanted you to know about Scarlet—although I don't know whether it means anything in your lives or not. Only she is such a wonderful horse with the right rider, and we were all so sick about the way Ginevra handled her yesterday. Will you be here for the summer, Neil?"

He got to his feet, as she rose to go, and said, "No, ma'am. I'm getting out to those wide open spaces, soon as school is out."

As the door closed behind Helen Wadsworth, the room was very silent. It suddenly struck Margo that in another week Neil would be gone, and nothing had been said about his returning next year.

Mrs. Macintyre said sympathetically, "You'd better get to bed, Margo. You look worn out, and I want to talk over some business with Neil."

Margo went unhappily to bed, thinking that almost everything that was said these days sounded ominous. The murmur of voices went on and on. She wondered

if that meant some crisis was impending in the future of the school. But she was too unhappy to care.

For the next couple of days she tried to avoid Ginevra at school, with the feeling that if she saw her she might be unable to control herself.

On Thursday they met, face to face, and Margo stood before Ginevra, stopping her progress, determined to make one more attempt to buy her horse before she would admit that hope was gone.

Ginevra stared at her stonily, as if she did not care to know her. But Margo ignored her manner.

"Ginevra," she said imperatively, "I thought you said Scarlet Royal was not for sale. And now we hear that you're selling her."

Deliberately Ginevra said, "We're selling, all right. But not to you!"

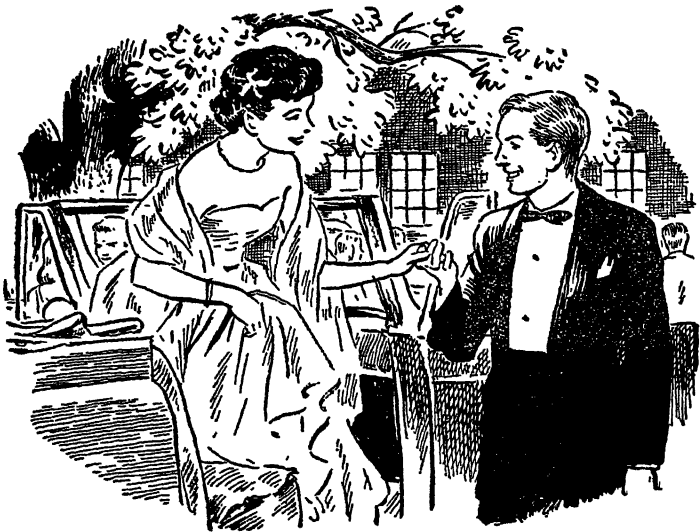
Blind anger rushed over Margo in a wave of fury. But Ginevra, brushing her aside, walked down the hall, secure in her possession.

It's no use, Margo told herself, as she drove home. No use at all. I could take it better if the horse were dead, she told herself bitterly. As long as she's alive, I just go on like this, trying and failing and mourning.

Tonight was the senior prom, for which she had no date and no interest. Tomorrow was graduation. The end of her high school life.

And the beginning of what?

She stopped the car in her driveway, and resting her head on the steering wheel, she broke into passionate tears.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MARGO ate her supper in a brooding silence. Automatically she went through the motions of co-operation, washing dishes, listening to Connie chatter about a party at a friend's home, and how wonderful it was going to be next year when she was an upperclassman.

Next year, Margo thought, wincing. Perhaps next year she wouldn't feel this way about Scarlet. How long did it take to forget a horse you loved?

Connie flew off to dress and go to her party. Molly was going to the eighth grade graduation party. Margo went into the living room and stared through the picture window at the rosy sunset, beyond the paddock and meadow. She was impatient with herself for this endless grieving, telling herself sharply that she was acting like a fool.

Snap out of it, for goodness' sake! She wished now she were going to the senior prom tonight. But that was a futile thought, too.

Groping for distraction, she sat down with a copy of *Holiday*. The pages were full of horses in Western corals, and she read avidly the descriptions of far-away ranches, in Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, Montana, lingering especially over the Wyoming pages. It was like eating cotton candy: a sweet taste in her mouth for a moment, without touching the deeper hunger that gnawed at her.

About nine o'clock Neil came through the terrace door, whistling, "I want to be near you, you're the one, the one, the one!" He looked cheerful and carefree. When had he ever looked otherwise? she thought, with a little throb of wonder.

She said, "Where have you been all this time?"

"Where would I be?" he wanted to know. "Horses, horses, horses. Business to attend to. Things to do. What are you moping about?"

She tried to be light about it. "The same old thing. Just a nag I can't forget."

He looked at her for a minute, and she wondered what he was thinking about. Something in his eyes was very comforting.

"Isn't there a big dance at the high school tonight?"

She nodded, flipping the pages of the magazine to indicate her indifference.

"What's wrong with going?"

She stared up at him, foggily, incredulously, and he took her hands and pulled her up out of her chair.

"The night before you graduate is no time to be brooding about the past. All the rest of your life is before you! Come on, Toots. If you can dress in about fifteen minutes, I'll take you out to celebrate!"

"Celebrate what?" she asked. "It seems more like a funeral to me."

"That's all an illusion," he told her. "Brace up, Margo. Get out on the dance floor with that music and that moon, and see what happens. There's nothing like a change of scene to get your troubles off your mind."

She stood still a moment, her mind whirling with the idea. It would be fun to go dancing again, and it *was* her senior prom! She stole a glance at Neil under her long black lashes, and saw him watching hopefully for her to say yes.

It *would* be wonderful to go dancing with Neil!

"Give me half an hour!" she said suddenly. She dashed for the stairs.

Never had she showered and dressed so fast. Thank goodness her hair was looking good: shining black, and turning up just enough at the ends. Her eyes were dark blue, and sparkling with the anticipation of the evening before her, and she had three evening dresses in her closet that she had not worn since a year ago.

She chose a white one in crisp tulle, with a strapless bodice and a pert skirt that made her waist and her ankles small and fine. It was a warm night. The only wrap she needed was a filmy scarf to wrap about her shoulders.

The door slammed at the end of the corridor. Neil was coming back from his room to wait for her. It was nine

twenty-five. She waited until she heard him in the living room, and then she ran lightly down to meet him.

At the expression on his face she was suddenly shy. She met his glance, and looked away quickly, noticing that he was very handsome tonight. She hadn't realized he was so tall. He wore his dinner jacket with the same easy grace that he wore riding clothes, and he moved with a casual rhythm that bespoke a good dancer.

"How come we haven't done this before?" he demanded, offering her his arm.

"How did I know you'd look so dazzling in formal clothes?" she jested.

"Just waiting to bet on a sure thing!" he complained. "Be a sport and take a chance. Now just for tonight, we're Cinderella and the prince. Let's act as if we had a million dollars."

"I don't mind if I do," she agreed. "It's a glamorous kind of night, isn't it?"

When they said good-by to Mrs. Macintyre, Margo thought her mother looked pleased to have her daughter going dancing again. Poor mother, she thought, remorsefully. She knew her sorrow for Scarlet had been as hard on her mother as on herself. Well, for tonight, she wasn't going to think of that.

It was a clear, delicious night, with little clouds wandering across a star-spattered sky and a fragrant breeze that touched Margo softly and caressingly. She breathed deeply of the odor of summer, sweet green grass and mockorange, mixed with faraway green-growing corn and new-budded evergreen.

Neil put her into his little black car as if she were

something fragile, and they spun down the road. He knew a florist that stayed open late for just such emergencies. Neil knew how to do everything, she thought, with a sigh of surrender to enchantment. He bought her an orchid, and she pinned it in her hair. She had had orchids before, but no flower had ever thrilled her as much as this one.

The dance floor was crowded with Margo's classmates, and putting a strong arm around her, Neil led her into a waltz. She had never seen his social side before, and she had had no idea he could be so smooth.

"I can't seem to get used to you without a horse in the background," she said, lifting her eyes. He held her close a minute.

"I like horses," he told her, "and girls on horses. But once in a while I like a girl dancing even better."

She dropped her eyes and gave herself up to the rhythm of the music. She had forgotten how much she had loved dancing, and Neil was the best dancer she had ever known.

When she looked about the floor, she met admiring eyes following him, and read the open question in the faces of the girls: "What boy has Margo latched onto now?" She was amused to remember how much that recognition enhanced the value of a date. Neil's value needed no enhancement. She felt that she was falling in love with him, and tonight she was not even resisting.

Perhaps she would pay for this tomorrow. But for tonight, love was delightful, and tomorrow did not matter.

Ginevra danced past with Dan, and when she saw Margo's escort her face stiffened and her eyes narrowed



dangerously. Margo glanced from Ginevra to Neil. He was smiling at Ginevra, and Ginevra with flushed cheeks turned her head away and began to talk to Dan with a supercilious expression.

For one hesitating moment Margo's heart plunged. Was Neil going the way Dan had gone? She had to know at once.

She looked up, carefully gay, and inquired, "Would you like to trade a dance with Ginevra?"

"Not me," he assured her. "I think the lady wants to quarrel, and I'm in no mood. Did you have designs on her partner?"

"Heavens, no!" Margo was appalled. "If you wanted to trade, I'd spend the dance in the powder room. I can't stand her partner!"

She said that with a new sense of freedom. Dan's memory had lost all the pain and defeat it had once held for her. She really could not stand him.

But what would Neil and Ginevra have in common to quarrel about?

"Ginevra feels the same about me," Neil assured Margo. "I did her dirt once, and she'll never get over it."

"I didn't know you knew her at all," Margo murmured.

"I'll tell you all about it someday," Neil promised, "but not tonight. Tonight we eat, drink and be merry. Tomorrow we begin to live. Anyway, I think the senior prom has lost its interest for Ginevra. She's leaving, isn't she?"

Ginevra was moving toward the door with Dan, head high, back stiff, as if she were leaving a field of battle in

dignified retreat. Neil and Margo danced around by the door and saw her, wrapped in gold brocade, walking down the hall with Dan.

"I thought she wouldn't be pleased to see me," Neil said with satisfaction. "Come on and dance again. There's my tune."

The orchestra was playing "I want to be near you." He swept her into his arms again and onto the dance floor, and she realized, laughing up at him, that she was his girl if he wanted her, and that tonight was truly gay and glamorous and carefree, as life had once been long ago.

At three in the morning they drove to a popular night spot for waffles and coffee, and talked until dawn. Now that she had given up her resistance, now that she was responding to the interest Neil had shown from the beginning, Margo was wondering how she could have been blind for so long. He was delightful and wonderful and admirable.

They talked about his horses in Wyoming, his father's ranch, his studies. He had a lively curiosity about all the things there were to learn; he talked about medieval history and world government, about the French language and his science courses, music and mountains. He wanted to travel and see for himself all the things he had read about. But for his life work he wanted to live in Wyoming and raise horses, as his father was doing.

They drove over to the lake front to watch the whispering scarlet dawn, and then back to Green Meadow, through fields swathed in mist and alive with birdsong. And Margo was at peace with her world and herself.

For the first time she thought of Scarlet Royal, with

a small pang of regret still, but with the knowledge that tonight she had found someone else to love, something else to care about.

"What are you going to do this summer?" she asked, as they came into the Green Meadow driveway and stopped before the hushed house.

"I'm going home next week," he said. She was astonished at the way her heart dropped.

"Oh," she murmured. "I'd forgotten it was so soon. I'll—miss you, Neil."

"Have you any time to miss a mere man?" he teased her. But under his jesting tone, the question was serious. Margo got out of the car before answering, and together they stood before the door a moment.

"Yes," she told him. "I think after tonight I can begin to live without Scarlet Royal at last. Thank you for that, Neil!"

He bent unexpectedly and swiftly kissed her. Then he said, "You had to do that for yourself, Margo. You couldn't warp yourself forever. No horse should mean that much."

"It was more than the horse," she said, looking out toward the paddock. "It was Ginevra and the idea of letting Scarlet be treated as she treated her—probably I hated her too much. But I'm over that now. I still miss Scarlet. But I won't be quite so morbid about her from here on. Now I've got you to miss, too!"

"That's a comforting thought for the day," he said, for himself. Then he said, "I'll be coming back to Northwestern before Labor Day, Margo. And if you'll have me, I'd like to come back here then."

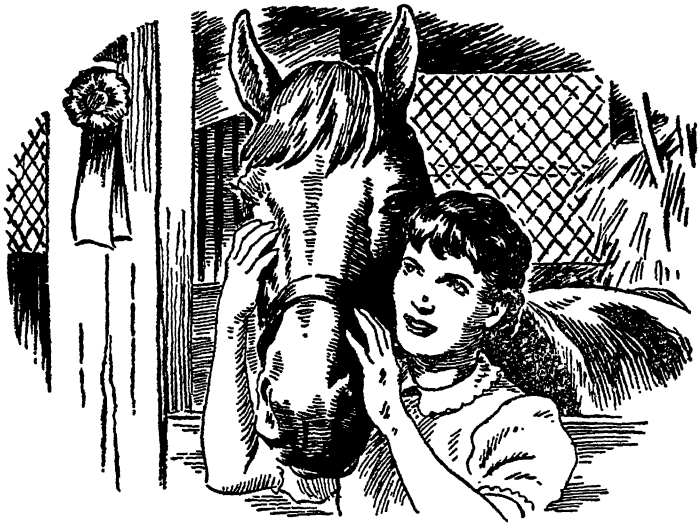
"Will we!" said Margo with a quick breath of relief. "We couldn't get along without you, Neil. We need you to keep us going, now! I'm going to Northwestern next year, too——"

"We can drive in to the campus together," he said, with the drawling inflection that meant everything was settled.

"Next year is going to be fun," she said, with a hushed kind of wonder.

"It really is," he assured her. "Tomorrow is the beginning of the brave new world, honey. Take my word for it, life is going to be better!"

She stood looking up at him, believing him, and he said suddenly, "Margo, darling!" and kissed her again, holding her close.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

MARGO woke at ten in the morning remembering last night's glamour and happiness, starry-eyed as she dreamed of Neil and how completely now she was in love with him. She lay very still, thinking back over every hour of the evening, how wonderful Neil had been, how much she longed to see him again.

He had told her he would not be able to see her graduate at two this afternoon, because of a final examination. But he would be back by five at the latest, he had assured her. She thought again how handsome he had been in his evening clothes. And then she thought, with a quick desire to reassure herself that last night had not been a dream, that she liked him even more in his riding and work clothes. She wanted to see if he was the same today

in jeans as he had been last night in midnight blue broadcloth.

She bounced out of bed and dressed for a morning ride, hurrying with impatience to confirm last night's delight. Her mother was already out in the garden, spraying the budding roses, and Margo cried gaily, "Hi, Mom! What a wonderful, wonderful day!"

Her mother smiled at her, pleased with Margo's happiness.

"Where's Neil?" Margo demanded, moving toward the stable.

"He's gone," her mother said. "He had a nine o'clock exam this morning."

The edge was off the day. Her gaiety fell with a dull thud to disappointment and unsatisfied longing. Her steps slowed with uncertainty, and she lingered near the rose bushes, wondering why they were so slow to bloom, when the weather had been so hot. Then she said, trying not to betray her change of mood, "I guess I'll take a ride. I'll be back in an hour to change for this afternoon."

Fear dragged at her heels again, as she walked past Counterpoint's empty stall to saddle Red Queen. What if she had been imagining that Neil really cared? What if he didn't come back after this summer? Was there anything, after all, that she could really count on?

She would ride over to the Cranshaws and have one more visit with Scarlet who would not be there much longer, if they had determined to sell her.

She rode down the lane, not noticing the brilliance of the warm June day, not caring now for the greening fields nor the fragrant woods, berating herself for a fool.

Was she looking for trouble, she demanded of herself, that she should be thus cast down just because Neil had gone off to an early exam and she hadn't seen him this morning? How could she doubt last night's enchantment?

And yet, how could she believe in it, until she had confirmed it by daylight?

The paddock contained only one horse, Coquette. Staring at the saddle horse resentfully, Margo threw caution to the winds and rode up to the stable door. It didn't matter now who knew, she thought. She found Jones raking out the stalls.

"Yes, miss?" Jones didn't remember her.

"Where is the chestnut filly that you had?" Margo inquired. "Scarlet Royal?"

"That one?" he looked up in sudden recognition. "Oh, you're the young lady that handled her so easily a couple of weeks ago. She's gone, miss. They sold her yesterday. And good riddance, as far as I'm concerned. She was a handful, all right."

Sold!

Hearing her voice thick and unsteady, Margo said, "Who bought her, do you know? Anyone around here?"

"That I couldn't say, miss. Seemed to be someone Miss Cranshaw had never seen before. Younglike. Tall. She hardly looked at him. When she found he wanted the horse, she let her go as quick as she could."

Jones doesn't think much of her horsemanship either, Margo thought. He went on talking, leaning on his rake as if he was glad of the chance to dally.

"He seemed anxious enough to take the horse. Give her a check and said he'd be back in an hour with the saddle.

She asked if he was from around here, and he said he was just staying with friends for a while, and he could put the horse in their stable till he could arrange to ship her home. Then in an hour he took her away."

"Could he handle her?" asked Margo.

"Fair enough. Better than Miss Cranshaw, but not so good as you did."

"And you don't know where she's gone, now?"

"No idea, miss. He talked of shipping her away. That's all I know."

So Scarlet was gone. Really gone, now, where she'd never see her again.

"Thank you," Margo said dully.

She mounted Red Queen and rode back home. She had thought she could live without Scarlet when she had Neil. But this morning she felt that there was nothing she could count on at all. Last night Neil had said they were Cinderella and the prince. Last night had been a few hours of romance, a dream of happiness. Today the thin ice of romance had broken under her, and she was floundering in the icy water of reality, her belief in Neil's sincerity shaken with the shock of this final loss.

She tried to tell herself, desperately, that she could believe in Neil, she had known him all spring, she had always known that he was the kind of person she could believe in. But how did she know? Her bitter disappointment taunted her. How could she be sure?

She arrived home, cared for the horse, stumbled into a shower. Indifferently, she pulled on her graduation dress. The hours were passing in a foglike distance, they were going by on the face of the clock. But in her heart



time was standing still at the horrid combination of losing Scarlet Royal and Neil's absence when she needed him. She knew she was being unreasonable. Neurotic, Neil had called it once. All right, so she was neurotic.

Her mother, helping her to dress, looked at her sharply, but asked no questions. Connie and Molly were chattering gaily of last night's parties. Madeleine Macintyre diagnosed Margo's frame of mind as exhaustion from the party last night, and Margo did not try to correct her idea.

"Your graduation present will be here when you get back from commencement." Her mother's voice hinted a gleeful secret.

Margo felt the weight of trying to be appreciative. People loved to give presents. "I hope you haven't spent too much," she said. "I didn't need a present."

"It didn't cost too much," her mother said.

In the barnlike gymnasium of the high school, Margo sat on the bench among rows of graduates, and smelled the gardenias pinned on her shoulder. The corsage had arrived at one o'clock with a card that said, "Congratulations! Neil." How formal can you get, she wondered cynically. It was nice of him to send flowers. But flowers said so little, when you were uncertain.

She tried to follow the ceremony. This is your only high school graduation, she told herself. Buck up. You don't want to wind up all this part of your life in a fog.

But she couldn't keep her mind on the address. The noted minister, from the big church on the North Shore, was trying to inspire the graduating class with hope and confidence and ambition and faith and a lot of other

things with which he said young people of today must face the world.

Then, while the high school orchestra played soft music, the class moved, five hundred strong, in single file across the platform to receive their diplomas. Margo took hers with a mechanical "Thank you," and regained her place. The ceremony was over.

She met her family in the hall, accepted their congratulations, said wearily, "I'm glad that's over." They climbed into the car and drove home.

As they came into the driveway, Mrs. Macintyre said suddenly, above the noisy chattering of the younger girls, "Don't you even care about your graduation present, Margo?"

Politely Margo said, "Of course, Mother! I can hardly wait. Where is it?"

"Back in the stable."

She walked across the lawn, strangely reluctant. She wished, passionately, that Neil had been here, that she could have seen him first. She should show some enthusiasm, she thought bitterly, but this was a hard time to get excited about a new horse.

Keeping herself firmly under the control that her long-time riding discipline had developed, she stirred up a credible show of excitement as she approached the door. It was almost four-thirty. Neil should be home any minute.

Then she heard a familiar nicker. She took three running steps to the stalls. And there stood Scarlet Royal.

"Mother!" she cried, her arms around the horse's

neck. "Whatever happened? Where did she come from? Oh, this is too wonderful!"

As Scarlet nuzzled her and lipped her cheek affectionately, she laid her head against the horse and broke into tears of happiness.

"We thought you'd be pleased," said Connie, as proud as if it had been all her doing.

"Now you can take care of her again," remarked Molly. "Remember when no one else could manage her? But I must say she looks good, back home again."

Dazed and incredulous, Margo turned from the horse to the family, crying, "But how did you do it? Ginevra said she wouldn't let us have her—Jones told me this morning she'd been sold to a stranger——"

"Oh, honey!" Madeleine Macintyre understood immediately what Margo had been through that day. "If we'd known you'd discovered that, we'd have told you this morning. But Neil wanted to be here——"

Neil was there, Margo discovered, smiling at her with all the warmth and affection she had remembered and not been able to believe.

"But how did this wonderful thing happen?" she repeated.

"I was the stranger," Neil told her, stepping over to the stable door and patting the horse as he talked. The Macintyres, all grinning widely, listened to the story they had heard before.

"Your mother and I talked it over last Sunday, after Ginevra refused to sell you the horse. We figured she wouldn't know me. She'd never seen me here, she didn't see me with you at the show. It was a chance worth tak-

ing. So your mother put the money in my account, and I went over there yesterday with a check in my pocket, ready to sign.”

“But she must have heard your name,” Margo argued.

Neil grinned, and shook his head. “I guess not. You remember, just last Sunday even Mrs. Wadsworth wasn’t sure of my name. All she knew was that the Macintyres had a student living in. Nobody has heard much of me. So we thought we’d just work that chance. I even talked to the bank about not giving out any information: so long as there was money in my account, it was nobody’s business.

“So I called Ginevra on Monday and told her I’d heard she had a horse for sale. Then I said I’ll be out Tuesday. But Tuesday I was busy. I put her off to Wednesday. Finally Thursday I got there, and by that time she was all stirred up, thinking she couldn’t get rid of the horse at all. I found out from Jones that a couple of buyers came and looked at the horse and tried to ride her and couldn’t manage her, so they changed their minds. You can see what Ginevra was thinking: she was getting frantic to sell the horse.”

Margo stared at him with admiration.

“So I tried the horse—and she’s touchy, all right. I complimented Ginevra, which put her in a good humor. Told her she must be really expert to handle this mean creature—” he apologized to Scarlet with a pat on the nose—“and then I acted kind of uncertain. Didn’t know if I really wanted such a jumpy animal. But on the other hand she’s pretty. And I talked about shipping her out to my ranch. You could see her look pleased at the

idea of getting the horse out of the country. So I offered her fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred!" Margo gasped. "But she paid twice that to us!"

"Sure she did. But then she wanted to buy, and now she was dying to sell. Her father was in on this conversation, at the end, and he seemed reluctant to lose so much money. But she said, 'Oh, Daddy, for heaven's sake! Just give her away. She isn't worth anything as a riding horse, and we don't want her cluttering up the paddock when the new one comes in.'

"So her dad kind of shrugged and said, 'Well, this is the last horse I'm buying or selling for you, Ginevra. You thought the chestnut was such a good buy, and here she is a dead loss.'

"But he gave up. You could see he'd let her do practically anything she wanted, and besides a thousand dollars one way or the other wouldn't make any difference to him. So I wrote out the check for fifteen hundred dollars, and told her I'd bring a saddle over and ride her to my friends' stable inside of an hour. And that was that!"

"Didn't she want to know where you were staying?" Margo's eyes were dancing with amusement.

Neil grinned. "Oh, she pried around a little. But I knew she's new enough here not to know everybody. So I told her a made-up name, about eight miles off in that direction, and acted real surprised that she didn't know such famous horsemen, and important socialites, and she let it drop. I suspected she wouldn't inquire too far, because she was too anxious to get rid of the horse. So I got back over there and rode Scarlet away before any-

thing could come to light, put her in the Wadsworths' stable overnight, and brought her here while you were at commencement."

"I think you're wonderful," Margo said simply.

Molly burst into shouts of laughter. Connie looked very wise. And Mrs. Macintyre said, "I think so, too, Margo! I can't tell you, Neil, how grateful we are for this effort."

"Glad to do it, Mrs. Macintyre," he said.

"Besides," Madeleine Macintyre glowed with her own pleasure, "Neil has saved us so much money on this purchase that we can easily buy the school horses, and add quite a bit to that fund for the indoor ring."

Margo suddenly turned and dashed toward the door.

"Scarlet will build that ring for you yet," she promised. "I'm going to take her out for a ride right this minute."

Dressing, she remembered Ginevra's face at the dance last night. No wonder she had been upset, after all her precautions against selling the horse to the Macintyres!

When Margo returned in riding clothes, Neil had saddled Scarlet Royal and a horse for himself.

He held her foot as she mounted, and together they rode out on the bridle path. Beneath her, Scarlet Royal moved with remembered grace. Beside her, Neil rode, lounging slightly in the Western saddle he preferred, silent as she was silent, gazing on the new green of the trees, the small dark folds in the rolling hills, the blue sky above them, the first pink wild roses climbing over the fence at the turn in the road.

Margo quivered with the delicious knowledge that she

could ride Scarlet Royal tomorrow, next week, every day from now on, that her horse would be in her own stall, or the Macintyre paddock. And then, glancing at Neil, she felt the sweet certainty that last night had been real, after all, that she was his girl, as he had been telling her she was.

He grinned at her, then, as if he had been waiting for her to come out of her coma of happiness, and said, "What have you been thinking about, Margo?"

Flushed with happiness, she said, "Lots of things. But all put together, this is the only life I would have chosen, if I'd had the world to choose from—and how lucky I am to have it."

He nodded. "This is a great life for now. Say for the next few years. But wait till you can come out to Wyoming!"

She knew what he meant. "I'll love that life even more, Neil!"

Heads up, they cantered together toward the next turn in the road.

THE END

















