

Chapter 12

I CANNOT BELIEVE that after years of yearning to do this, we are at last on our way to the beach. A lovely breeze is blowing through Bella's mane and around my cheeks. I glance around to slowly take in this beautiful scenery. To the left I can see Aunty's house, to the right I see beautiful green fields rolling away into the far distance to meet the sky. I listen carefully to hear numerous birds singing happily around us and somewhere in the distance, sheep and their baby lambs bleat loudly. I am in my element.

I stop daydreaming as Bella trips on a stone. Note to myself, I need to concentrate.

"Hey baby, are you ok?", I ask her, gently stroking her neck.

"Girls just be very careful, for the next few minutes. There are quite a few large stones on the track ahead", Aunty calls.

I loosen my reins slightly and allow Bella more of her head. She is very sure footed, and I trust her to find the best possible way to avoid the stones.

Aunty keeps having to stop to let us catch up as Crystal's stride is twice as long as Bella and Hope's.

Bella is doing a great job of avoiding the larger stones. I glance over my shoulder to check Freya is ok and she gives me the thumbs up.

"The rest of the track is smooth and even. Who is up for a little trot?", shouts Aunty.

"Yes please", Freya and I shout back at the same time.

I watch as Aunty asks Crystal to trot. Her trot looks as though she is floating on clouds, her movements so soft and graceful. I gently ask Bella to trot, and for a slight second she has other ideas as she very cheekily attempts to go into a couple of strides of canter. I collect her back, then relax and sit deep into my saddle and enjoy her beautiful collected trot. Aunty is quite a way ahead and the ground beneath us is a dusty but even track. I can see Aunty slowing down and cannot resist asking Bella to do a collected canter to catch her up. I can hear hoof beats close by and from out of nowhere appears Freya and Hope to my right. Hope is taking a very strong hold and is now upsides Bella.

Bella takes a strong hold of her bit and for a moment I have a feeling this could turn into a full-blown gallop. Thankfully the nearer we get to Aunty, Bella and Hope sensibly slow down to a trot, eventually a walk and a finally a halt. Freya and I look at each other with a big grin on our faces.

"I think Bella and Hope have got a bit of the wind up their tails", laughs Aunty. "A good canter up and down the beach will soon calm them down".

"How long until we get to the beach Aunty?" I ask.

"Only five minutes away. Have you noticed the wind smells different? Can you smell the sea salt in the air?", she asks.

To be honest, I hadn't really noticed. I take a deep breath in and concentrate as I inhale. I can immediately smell the difference.

My tummy is jumping around. It feels as though I have a hundred butterflies dancing inside.

Aunty suddenly stops.

"Look Ems. Here we are", she says, looking at me with a big smile on her face.

I ride up alongside her and stop to take in this fabulous and precious moment. I have never, ever seen anything so beautiful. The blue sea is slowly moving in the distance and in front of us lies a carpet of golden sand which entwines magically into the sea. I have my mouth wide open. Bella's head is high in the air as she breathes in the salty sea air. I quickly get my camera out of my bum bag and take a photograph through Bella's ears. I have taken so many already today, but this is by far the best.

"Follow me girls", Aunty says.

"We need to check the beach is clear. Let's have a walk up and down first just to make sure", she continues.

The texture underneath is changing. It feels soft and I look down to see the sand flipping to the sides of Bella's hooves just like it does in Mrs Evans's sand school.

The three of us walk side by side in a very neat line as Aunty tries to keep Crystal to a slow walk. I look over at Freya to see she has a massive grin on her face.

"Isn't this just fabulous Ems?", she asks me.

"Breath taking Freya. You are both so very lucky to have this literally on your doorstep. I would be coming here every single day if I lived here", I reply.

We walk towards the sea. I can see the waves in the distance gently splashing onto the shore, it is truly mesmerising. The closer we get to the sea, the deeper 39

the sand beneath us feels. Bella lets out a couple of snorts as she suddenly notices the waves are gently flowing towards us.

"The sea is not going to hurt you Bella. The sea is made up of tiny little waves. Do you feel brave enough to have a paddle?" I ask her.

"We are very lucky as I cannot see anyone here at all today", announces Aunty.

"Sometimes you get families who bring their dogs down here for a swim, but most tend to use the beach about a mile away to the left where there is a café and free car park", says Aunty.

I look to the left and then over to the right and I am pleased to say there are no humans in sight, just miles and miles of sandy beach. I cannot stop grinning. The cool sea breeze is blowing around my face and I can taste salt inside my mouth.

"Crystal and Hope love going into the sea Emily. Why don't you see if Bella will follow us and see what she thinks?", asks Aunty.

"Let's go. I can't wait", I reply in a very excited manner.

Crystal walks beautifully into the sea, closely followed by Hope. They both come to a halt. The wind is blowing through their manes. What a truly awesome sight this is. I urge Bella closer, and she snorts as the sea water touches her hooves and vanishes beneath her. She inquisitively lowers her head to see where it has gone. I can't help but laugh at her. She still has her head down when the next wave comes flowing through her legs. She jumps and snorts as she is taken unaware. I can hear Aunty and Freya laughing.

"Come on Bella, you need to be a brave girl. Let's go and see Crystal and Hope", I say softly, as I urge her forward.

I can feel the cold sea water splashing through my jodhpurs and onto my skin. Bella is gaining confidence and within seconds, I cannot believe we are standing three in a line with the waves gently flowing beneath us. We stay still in complete silence whilst we take in this beautiful and truly magical moment. I cannot find enough words to explain to you how I am feeling as I listen to the sound of the waves, so therapeutic and relaxing, as the wind gently blows towards us. This is pure ecstasy and beyond my wildest dreams.