

We wanted to be horse riders, jockeys, trainers. We wanted to be equestrians. We liked that word best - practised saying it, spelling it out, until we got it right. We loved everything about horses: the velvet of their muzzles as they snuggled into our sugar-cubed hands; the clop-clop of hooves on tarmac, the stealthy walks in fields, the rhythmic thuds against the dried mud on the gallops; their firm smooth flanks, their strong straight backs, the thick trails of hair in manes and tails.

We made reins out of old belts and string and strapped them across our chests in turns. We'd trot and canter, whoop as we just made it over the final winning horse of the year jump, and flick our identically tied ponytails to keep off flies. We wore those plastic jelly sandals with ridges and indents in the soles - ideal traps for pebbles. We'd bend back a leg, extract the embedded stones from our pink horse-hooves with the old penknife we'd nicked from a drawer at home. One of us cut ourselves and the other one neighed in sympathy.

When Winston arrived at the stables, the day we turned teenage, we fell in love - blue-eyed, dapple-grey, broad-backed. Mum *wouldn't normally accept a non-racer, Mr Brash*, but she'd *make an exception this one time*. Belonged to Oliver - blue-eyed, blonde, thick-set - given to him by his father, Jimmy Brash. *Award winning actor*, Mum said. *Brash by name and nature* our Grandma said, but our mum didn't seem to mind that in a man.

We soon twigged Ollie was no natural horseman and, despite our many tips, he still couldn't find the joy in it. We thought he might fear disappointing his dad so we played on this and struck a deal - if he gave us a tenner a week, we'd ride Winston for him. He got to do whatever he wanted. We got to have Winston to ourselves. He'd ride Winston into Copse Wood, sit himself down on the fallen tree truck, get out his cigs. One of us rode Winston up to the top field and the other ran on behind.

Then one day one of us said their ankle hurt so she wouldn't be running up behind Winston and she'd wait with Ollie instead. And one of us was glad because she'd have Winston all to herself for a change. And one of us smelt of smoke when we took Winston back to the stables and looked full of smugness when Ollie said goodbye and winked.

One of us said she was *absolutely forever heartbroken* when the summer hols ended and Ollie went back to boarding school. The same one of us said *you'll never know what real love is*. The same one of us cut off her pony tail as *an outward sign of inner despair*. And the other one of us rode Winston whenever, wherever she liked, long hair flowing free behind her, not giving a flying fetlock.