

Dream Rider

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Prologue

"Well if you have just joined us you do so at a pivotal time for the equestrian team." The commentator paused looking down at the arena, the coloured jumps had been arranged and it was obvious that everything was ready. "There is just one rider left and that is Caroline Gibbs, she has the chance for both the individual and team gold medals. All she has to do is to jump clear. This is truly a unique situation and what a lot of responsibility Caroline has on her shoulders right now as she prepares to ride."

Caroline was oblivious to the commentators words as she sat on her horse in the collecting ring, Mozart playing in her earphones, an idea from the team trainer to block out anything that could disturb her before she rode in such a nerve racking environment. She closed her eyes for a moment allowing the piano notes wash over her. She knew that she could do well, she had ridden well throughout the previous rounds and she had a wonderful horse, together they were unstoppable. She felt a hand on her knee and opened her eyes, her groom looked up to her smiling. Caroline pulled the earphones out from under her helmet and handed her iPod to her.

"You can do it..." The girl was close to tears in just another couple of minutes it would be over, she paused, gulping in air. "Good luck!"

Caroline smiled taking up the reins and rode into the arena. If she had not been aware of the near deafening sound she was now, she briefly glanced up at the stands all filled to capacity and the many cameras which would be beaming the event around the world. It had been said that this had one of the largest audiences because of the unique situation that Caroline found herself in with the two gold medals in her grasp.

She cantered her horse on allowing the cheers and applause to bolster her, then there was the sound of the bell, a hush fell over the stadium and it was time for her to perform. She pushed the horse on and towards the first jump. It was a simple upright; she approached counting the strides before pushing on. There was a moment when she was hanging in the air, and then clear one jump cleared and ten more to go.

Caroline pushed on clearing jumps, she knew that she had to be quick but could not make a stupid mistake she just had to jump clear. She took a tight line into the next jump... 'Slow down' she said in her mind, she was showing off trying to trim strides on the approach, the jump was clear but it had been close.

It was now onto the last approach, it was towards a simple upright. She pulled the reins checking her horse's progress towards the simple fence, this was it, jump this clear... She put the thought from her mind.

Caroline counted the strides, four, three, two... Suddenly something was wrong; there was someone in front of her. She blinked there was a woman standing in front of the jump, she was facing away from the approach, seeming to study the fence. There was only one stride left, she was about to hit the woman who seemed to be oblivious to her approaching. The horse started his take-off stride, Caroline stared at the woman who was unflinching she could not hit her.

It was a split second decision; Caroline hauled on her horse's reins as he took off and leaned out of the saddle to the side dragging the horse to the right. The horse was unbalanced and hit the wings of the jump landing heavily, its legs buckled beneath it and Caroline felt herself

hitting the ground hard before the full weight of the horse slammed into her body.

"...And at the last moment she seemed to pull out of the jump. Team captain Sebastian Bowen-Smyth was unwilling to comment..." The television was re-showing the show jumping and in particular Caroline's spectacular last jump.

Caroline slowly opened her eyes, the light blinding her as she blinked and tried to fathom where she was and what was happening. Caroline attempted to sit up but found that she was unable to move. Even her head was prevented from moving, her neck held in place with a solid brace.

"Oh, you are awake. What a shame..." Caroline froze she recognised the upper class drawl of Sebastian Bowen-Smyth. He sounded angry, this was not difficult or unfamiliar as he was always angry with Caroline, she had risen through the ranks from the lower classes as he had once sneered at her. She did not fit into the moneyed nature of the team and he had made it his aim to ensure she knew her place even if it was that she was one of the best riders. She could hear footsteps moving around her bed and the scent of Sebastian's aftershave before he appeared in her line of sight.

"Do you want to tell me what you were doing?" He paused, his usual sneer playing across his face, Caroline stuttered to afraid to answer. "No?" He sniffed. "Shall I tell you? I think that you tried to sabotage the team, I don't think you wanted to share the gold and wanted it all to yourself."

"No..." Caroline's voice croaked her mouth dry.

"Shut up!" He snarled. "I am not asking you Miss Gibbs. I know that you hated your team mates," He paused. "It is just good news that you are unlikely to be able to ride again."

"What?"

"Oh have they not told you..." Sebastian stared down into her face; a sudden smile crinkled his features. "You are not going to be able to walk again!" He laughed shaking his head. "Serves you right you stupid girl..." Caroline started to sob. "Oh shut up you snivelling bitch!"

"But the woman..." Caroline blinked. "There was a woman standing in front of the jump..." She gulped. "I had to stop, if I had hit her..."

"What are you babbling about?" Sebastian snarled. "There was nobody there. What are you trying to say?" He paused. "You pulled your horse through a jump for no reason." Caroline felt a sudden pain as Sebastian grabbed her neck brace and dragged her into a sitting position. "Look!" He gestured towards the television, which was high on the wall in the corner of the room. The screen showed the jumping again and a slow motion review of Caroline's last jump. She watched as the camera tracked showing her dragging her horse into the side of the jump. She gasped, there was nobody there. Sebastian let go of her and her body slammed back onto the bed. "There you vindictive bitch. You saw what you did. You had a clear jump and you blew it." He stood up. "You know they had to put it down?"

"What?"

"The horse... It had a broken leg. It had to be shot in front of the crowd." He stopped with his hand on the door. "Just think of the shame you have brought on us all. I pity you..." He paused and turned stepping back into Caroline's view. "I have a word of advice for you Miss Gibbs." He snarled. "Go away. And by that I mean get out of the UK. You will be a hunted

person; you know the police are standing outside this room, for your protection." He laughed. "I should send them away, let the public at you." He stood up. "So my advices, get out, go and hide because you are no longer welcome here." He reached across to Caroline's show jacket and ripped the union jack badge from the pocket. With that, he stepped out of the door slamming it as he left.

Caroline tossed and turned in her bed, sobbing silently as she slept, Jacqui her roommate lay quietly snoring. In the shadows the woman stood unseen a smile playing across her face.

Chapter 1

Sunshine, warmth, the smell of horses, the sound of brushing and the laughter of grooms as they mucked out and swept down the yards. Adam Bishop stood at the foot of the yard and paused for a moment looking across the stable blocks, the horses and the staff. It never failed to make him happy, this was all his, even the responsibility for paying the bills in a recession, keeping staff and customers happy and constantly trying to make ends meet was pushed from his mind when he took the time to pause and take it all in.

An outside observer would probably see without Adam's rose tinted glasses and see the ramshackle stables some with peeling paint and rusting hinges, the unremarkable riding school horses and the slightly shabby nature of the whole yard. However the staff were happy, the horses were well looked after and the contingent of clients and liveries kept coming back even if some of them could no longer afford weekly lessons.

Thirty-two years old, well-built and slim, brown haired and admired by the female staff and customers, spending his life working outdoors had left him tightly muscled and tanned, his regular uniform of tight black jodhpurs, long leather riding boots and polo-shirts often drew longing glances and lost moments. But he was obvious to his admirers as he was devoted to his wife Kate who often joked that he missed the effect he had on women around him. There was little jealousy and almost a sense of pride from her when she saw others spending time watching as he walked across the yard, however she was clear with others that he was hers. It was an unspoken understanding on the yard, hands off, look but don't dare touch.

Kate was chief riding instructor and co-owner with her husband. She was thirty with messy blond hair and a similarly toned body borne of many hours each day riding horses and working hard. Although her face was always free from make-up she had a natural tone and warmth that made those that spent considerably more time and money on their appearance green with envy, however they would console themselves by looking at her short, cracked nails and rough hands.

Adam and Kate had met some years before when they had both been instructors at the yard, thrown together by fate before a romance grew between them and fate and circumstance had allowed them to take the reins literally as the owners of the yard. It had been a great moment and both of them could remember it well; they had been married at the local church and had held the reception on this very yard. However, since then the responsibility had hit home, it was like growing up. The fun and simple life of waking, working and playing had been hit with paperwork, accounts, cash flow, health, and safety. Adam took the lions share by mutual arrangement and would spend many hours struggling with regulations and bank statements wishing he had spent less time staring out of school windows and more time learning maths. But for now, that was behind him with this moment of clarity as he took in the sights, his small empire.

His reverie was brought to an abrupt end as he was knocked from behind by a wheelbarrow slamming into the back of his legs. He stumbled as the barrow toppled spilling its stinking contents over him as he lay on the yard.

"Oh shit!" Caroline scrambled to right the barrow. "Shit! Shit..." She took Adam's hand and helped him up. "Are you okay?" She started to brush him down. "Look. I am so sorry."

Adam smiled pushing her away. "Okay, no harm done." He paused. "Are you okay?" Caroline stepped back turning slightly and looking down. "What's up Caroline?" Adam took

her hand and drew her closer. Caroline shivered involuntarily. "If something is wrong, you know you can tell me..."

Caroline glanced down at her boots. "Sorry. I have just been really tired for a few days. I haven't been sleeping too well." She paused. "I have been having nightmares." She shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry, I am just being stupid." She grabbed the handles of the wheel barrow and started to walk away. "I'll sweep that up."

"Caroline wait a moment..." Adam shook her head as she walked away. Caroline had been a member of staff and a good friend for as many years as he could remember. They had worked together as grooms and now she was one of the team of riding instructors. She was a hard working local girl, twenty-six years old with mousey brown hair which she pulled back into a ponytail. She had always been slightly flighty, always a little nervous but she was well respected by the rest of the staff and loved by her customers. Adam always ensured that nervous or unsure riders were taught by Caroline, she had the patience and caring nature to ensure that they built confidence.

"Morning scruffy!" Kate grabbed Adam round his waist and they kissed deeply, he held her in his arms. "You left early this morning, didn't want to wake me up then?" She laughed. "And what have you been doing?" She brushed wood chips and straw from his legs. "Been having an early roll in the hay have we?" She hardly finished her sentence when Adam grabbed her around her waist tipping her up and hefting her onto his shoulder. "Oi!" She laughed.

"Go on say that again..." Adam laughed as he strode across the yard until they were standing beside the muck heap. The heap was steaming and stood in a morass of thick black mud. He teased her pretending to drop her in a particularly deep puddle.

"Okay! You win..." Kate laughed, kicking her legs. "Put me down, I have my best jods on..."

"Put you down?" Adam paused looking innocently towards Kate.

"No..." She shrieked. "Don't you dare!" She struggled as he lowered her until she was just inches from the mud. "Adam!" He laughed and swung her from his shoulder and back onto the yard. She slapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, you would have regretted it if you had dropped me." She laughed.

"Promises, promises!" He laughed and kissed her lightly. "When are you teaching today?"

Kate glanced at her watch. "Oh shit! About five minutes ago! That's your fault!" She ran across the yard where there were five horses being mounted by customers, Caroline was holding a piebald gelding for Kate to mount. "I am so sorry!" The women laughed, they had been kept amused by Adam's antics. Caroline gave Kate a leg-up and they walked their horses across the yard and towards a bridle path onto the moor.

Adam waved as Kate rode off and walked towards the office, there was work to be done. How he wished he could just spend his day riding and mucking out but there were important things to attend to.

'Mr Bishop - I feel we need to have a conversation'

Adam shuddered as the machine stopped and informed him that this was the end of messages. The voice was so familiar to him and it chilled him to the bone, it needed no number or further information he knew that he was being summoned and that he dare not refuse. He hit the delete button and slumped down into the chair.

At that moment the door swung open, Adam nervously looked up but it was just Jacqui, one of the younger grooms. She had left school last summer after having spend many years working as a helper during the weekends it was a natural progression to become a member of the team full-time. "Kate forgot her phone!" She grabbed the mobile from the desk. "Are you okay?" Adam looked up.

"Yes..." He paused. "Sorry, I'm fine Jac's, just a bit distracted that's all." He smiled and watched as she stepped from the room and dashed across the yard where Kate was waiting. Adam smiled she he watched the other riders laugh and joke with Kate, she was blushing as they rode out onto the moor. It seemed to be a day for distraction.

Adam sat back down at the desk, he felt it was best to immerse himself in work. He grabbed a box file and started to sort through receipts and invoices.

Caroline turned the corner, she glanced up at the woman who was standing beside one of the stables, pausing, there was a moment of recognition but Caroline could not think where she had seen the woman before. She shook her head and stepped towards her. "Hello, can I help you?"

The woman turned round slowly. Caroline felt a sudden urge to run away, a chill running down her body. "Hello... Caroline."

"Do I know you?" Caroline stuttered.

"Not yet..." The woman smiled. "Oh but you will..."

"I'm sorry?"

"Don't be..." The woman reached forward and touched Caroline's cheek. Caroline pulled away, stepping back quickly as if from an electric shock. The woman laughed. "Oh Caroline... We are going to have such fun!" The woman turned and started to walk away.

"Are you okay?" Caroline jumped as she was touched on the shoulder, she span around and saw Sarah standing on the yard beside her. "Sorry, you were just standing there, you seemed to be lost in your own world."

"Do you know who that woman was?"

"What woman?" Sarah frowned. "There was nobody here?"

"She was just here..." Caroline's voice faded.

"I have been here for a minute or so, there was no one here Caroline."

Caroline shrugged. "Sorry Sarah, just me being daft."

Kate turned around in the saddle and saw that her riders were all keeping up. She enjoyed this group, they came once a week for a hack across the moor, supposedly an hour but over time Kate had ensured that they would stay out riding for at least a couple of hours. They were good company and there was always laughter and good conversation between them as they rode. The path in front of them opened out into a vast expanse of moorland. Kate took a deep breath, she had lived and worked around this part of Dartmoor all of her life but it still impressed her. She felt free when she was out here in the open with miles of open country before her. Of course it could be dangerous out here, the weather could change at a moment's

notice and there were cliffs, mine workings and bogs which presented hazards to the unwary but that was part of the attraction. There was laughter from behind her, Kate pulled her horse across and rode beside the rest of the riders.

"Go on..." She laughed.

"Oh we were just laughing about you and Adam this morning..." Sue smiled putting her hand on Kate's thigh. "You are so lucky to have him."

"He has his moments you know..." Kate smirked. "He snores terribly you know..."

"Yeah! Well if you decide to push him out of your bed, just send him to me!" Sue winked, there was loud laughter from the other riders. Kate blushed.

"No chance ladies!" She laughed. "I've told you before. Hands off!" She pushed her horse on into a canter. "Come on girls, race you to the top of the ridge!"

The five women cantered and then galloped towards the top of the hill pulling up their horses at the ridge. They were all laughing and joking as the conversation moved on to a terrible blind date from one of the other women and deeply descriptive discussions of the date's failings in bed.

Caroline splashed cold water on her face, the meeting with the woman had left her shaken. She stared into the cracked mirror, she was looking gaunt and gray, she looked at her bloodshot blue eyes, there were bags beneath them showing her lack of sleep. She sighed, turning ready to face the world when she froze. She span back towards the mirror, blue eyes? Surely she was not going totally mad? She leaned forward staring into her eyes which had been brown. She suddenly felt a wave of fear flooding her body, she felt as if she was watching the world as if it was a film, her reality slipping away.

"Hello Caroline..." She spoke, watching her lips move and her voice filling the small bathroom but aware that this was not her. "It's time for me to play now..." She laughed manically.

The postman pushed the office door open and dropped a pile of post onto the desk. Adam looked through it, at the bottom of the pile was a grey plastic mailing bag addressed to Sarah. "Caroline...?" Adam stood up pulling open the office door. "Could you do me a favour please and give this to Sarah?" He handed Caroline the bag.

Adam picked up the telephone and dialled a number without looking. There was a click and it started to ring, he hesitated and started to put the handset down when he heard a voice.

'Hello...'

The voice was harsh and spoke with an unseen authority. Adam shuddered. "You called me..."

"Mr Bishop?" There was a pause. "Now why do you think that I would need to talk with you?" Adam stuttered. "Oh come on, I am sure that you know. But I don't like to do these things over the telephone. It has been sometime since we met, I think it would be good to see you again."

"Please..." Adam sobbed.

"The usual place. Eight o'clock." A pause. "Please don't be late Mr Bishop. I cannot abide lateness. It makes me, angry." The conversation ended with a click and Adam replaced the handset. He slumped onto the desk tears pricking his eyes.

"Hello Sarah, Adam gave me this for you."

Sarah took the bag excitedly. "Oh great it's here." She ripped open the plastic bag, taking out a pair of blue jodhpurs. "I have been waiting for these. They have a sticky bum... It's supposed to improve your riding position." She smiled. "I can't wait to try them on."

Caroline stood smiling for a moment. "Sticky bum?" She laughed.

Sarah checked the list and saw that she was riding Major. She grabbed her riding hat and crop and stepped out onto the yard. Caroline was leading Major from his stable. "What do you think?" Sarah twirled around showing off her new jodhpurs.

"Very nice, they suit you!" Caroline laughed. She held onto the far stirrup as Sarah mounted up. "I hope the sticky bum works well." Sarah laughed as she led her riders out of the yard.

Caroline watched as they left, she could not help herself giggling and had to stop herself before anyone saw her.

Sarah felt that there was something wrong but put it down to her new jodhpurs. She was certainly sticking in the saddle, in fact she was stuck to the saddle, the description for the sticky bum jods has said that they helped you stay in place in the saddle but this was pretty full on. She pushed her horse into a trot and was worried to find that she couldn't even do rising trot.

She was clearly distracted, Penny, one of her riders called out to her. "Are you okay?"

Sarah shook her head. "Look this will sound weird but I am stuck in the saddle."

"I know you have a really deep seat, and those new jodhpurs must be helping."

"No Penny." Sarah tried to stand up in her stirrups. "I can't move at all..." She struggled. "I am completely stuck."

Penny laughed. "Come on! Don't pull my leg!" She stopped as she saw the panicked look in Sarah's eyes. "You aren't joking are you?"

"Sorry guys!" Sarah frowned. "We will have to go back to the yard. I have a problem..." She sheepishly turned her horse around and led them back to the yard.

Adam glanced at his watch as he saw Sarah leading the ride back, he walked out of the office and went over to her. "You're early, is there something wrong?"

Sarah leaned down and whispered to Adam. "I'm stuck..."

"Stuck?" Adam shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"I can't move." She tried to move in the saddle. "Adam I am completely stuck. Help me please."

Adam grabbed one of Sarah's boots and tried to pull it away from the saddle and then did the same with her left knee, but both were stuck firm. "Ah..." He paused. "You are stuck."

"Thanks. Now could you do something to help me?" She shook her head.

"I am not sure what to do?" He paused. "Let me have a think..."

Adam and Kate had tried everything from brute force to large quantities of washing-up liquid but Sarah was still firmly attached to Major's saddle. They had lifted her off the horse and placed the saddle on one of the fences surrounding the yard when Major had become too fidgety. Sarah was blushing with embarrassment as a small group of staff and customers gathered watching what was happening to her.

"Look I am sorry, we have tried everything." Kate sighed. "I think we had better take you to casualty." She paused. "Sorry Sarah."

Kate and Adam lifted Sarah with her attached saddle from the fence and laid her down in the back on the Land Rover. "I am sorry this is not the best way to travel, but at least it should be reasonable comfortable with the rugs in there." He shut the back door and sat behind the wheel. "Okay back there?" He paused. "Sorry I know it's a stupid question."

It was clear from the shocked and amused faces of the nurses in accident and emergency that Sarah's predicament was unusual. They were sympathetic and tried a number of options before eventually having to cut away the leather of the saddle. "It seems to be some form of epoxy glue." The doctor frowned. "We have tried all of the solvents we have and have removed all we can." He paused. "It's just that the glue seems to have seeped through your jodhpurs and stuck to your flesh. I am very sorry."

"So what happens to me now?"

"Well the skin will wear away over the next few days."

"A few days?" Sarah shrieked. "I have to stay like this for a few days?"

"We will remove as much of the glue as we can, then you can go home. Have lots of hot baths."

It was dark when Sarah returned to the stable flat. Kate had brought her spare clothes but she was massively uncomfortable in her old jeans with the remains of Major's saddle and her new jodhpurs still stuck to her legs. She dashed past the staff sitting on the sofas and bolted herself in the bathroom, starting to run a bath, she swore as she realised that the meagre supply of hot water had run out. She sat on the toilet and cried.

Chapter 2

"Who the hell did that to Sarah?" Adam growled.

"And good morning to you too!" Kate smiled, placing a mug of coffee in front of him on the kitchen table.

"Sorry..." Adam sipped the hot coffee. "Thanks... I am just so annoyed."

"I am sure it was someone's idea of a silly prank."

"Silly prank?" Adam snorted. "Sarah hurt, hours in casualty, clients pissed off and let alone a destroyed saddle."

"Okay..." Kate massaged his shoulders. "Look I will try to find out who did this."

"And fire them!"

"Okay Mr Grumpy..." She laughed leaving Adam protesting.

"And go large..." Caroline yawned loudly.

"Sorry am I boring you?" Tracy laughed.

"Oh..." Caroline blushed. "No I am so sorry..."

"Don't mind me." Tracy pushed her horse into a trot around the arena. "You do look to be a bit tired today, good night?" She smirked.

"I wish." Caroline blushed even more deeply. She had not had a boyfriend since the embarrassed fumbling at school and now she worked in an environment where there were not so many men around. However this suited her quite well, she was so easily embarrassed by the idea of having a relationship and was quite happy to throw herself into her work. "Sorry, can you do a twenty meter circle at A and then..." Caroline stopped, she could see someone standing by the arena fence. They had not been there a moment ago, she didn't recognise them.

"...And?" Tracy circled her horse and returned to the track.

"And?" Caroline shook her head and turned towards Tracy. "Oh, do a diagonal from K, through X to M." She looked back towards the fence but the woman was no longer standing there. Caroline walked towards the fence and looked around, there was nobody there and the only people were on the yard some metres away. She shook her head and turned round and stepped back towards the centre of the arena. She stepped onto the track unaware of the fact that Tracy was riding towards her, she shouted but Caroline was hit by the horse who was cantering around the arena. The horse smashed into Caroline's shoulder she fell heavily onto the sand of the arena floor.

Kate shook her head she laughed at the antics of her riders, they had just suggested that she join them for a night out. "No, look I am not a night club sort of person." The riders laughed joshing with her. "And I have nothing to wear."

"We can sort that out and give you some proper make-up and those hands, when did you last have a manicure." Sue smiled.

"What's a manicure?" Kate smirked innocently. The women laughed.

"Okay, that's sorted then."

"What?" Kate gasped. "What's sorted?"

"We are taking you out, I am sure I can lend you something to wear and we will get you a beauty session at my salon. Hands, hair and make-up." Sue paused. "We will get you ready to hit the town and do some pulling."

"I am a married woman!" Kate snapped.

"So, you will go home to your husband at the end of the night, there is nothing wrong with flirting." Sue winked at her, Kate sniffed.

"I think you are making fun of me, I am not just some innocent country girl!" The laughter at Kate's comment lasted until they were almost back on the yard.

Tracy knelt beside Caroline's prone body, she looked up as Adam vaulted the arena fence and knelt beside her. "I don't know what happened, she just stepped out in front of Toby." Tracy wiped her eyes with her gloved hands. "I tried to pull up."

"Don't worry, it was an accident." Adam smiled at Tracy. "Anyway, Caroline is pretty tough." He was reaching down to check her breathing and pulse. She was breathing but clearly unconscious, he knew the dangers of moving her so made sure that she was able to breathe clearly. "There is an ambulance on the way." He paused. "We'll give you a refund for this lesson."

Tracy shrugged. "Look you don't need to as long as Caroline is alright." They both looked down as Caroline gasped and tried to move.

"No, stay still." Adam gently held her still on the warm sand. "You've had an accident, help on its way."

"Oh!" Caroline groaned. "It hurts..."

"I am sure it does." Adam comforted her. "You will be fine soon, they will take the pain away."

Caroline felt a wave of nausea come across her she breathed deeply which caused a pain in her chest. She slumped down deeper into the warm sand. It engulfed her, the warmth was so comforting. Her eyes started to close.

"...Well if you have just joined us you do so at a pivotal time for the equestrian team..."

Caroline's mind started to drift she was riding. She could hear other voices but pushed them from her mind she had to concentrate she was about to jump, she let the music wash over her.

"Push them away..." Her groom looked up at her. "You don't need them..." She smiled.

"I don't need them..." Caroline smiled.

Kate panicked when she saw an ambulance standing on the yard. She quickly dismounted and

ran towards Adam. "What's happened?"

"Caroline has had an accident. She stepped in front of Toby as Tracy was riding him."

"Oh goodness! Is she okay?"

"She's unconscious, she came round for a moment but then seemed to go again." Adam paused, he was looking ashen and scared. The ambulance was almost ready to leave. "I had better go with her."

"Look let me..." Kate took his hand. "She may prefer a woman with her. I'll make sure she is okay." Adam nodded. Kate stepped up into the back of the ambulance, they were just shutting the doors when she stood up. "Hang on...!" She released her chin strap and took her riding hat off and handed it to Adam. "Call her mum, her number is in Caroline's file." The ambulance doors closed and they slowly drove across the yard.

Caroline slowly opened her eyes, the light blinding her as she blinked and tried to fathom where she was and what was happening. Caroline attempted to sit up but found that she was unable to move. Even her head was prevented from moving, her neck held in place with a solid brace.

"Oh, you are awake? What a shame..." Caroline froze she recognised Kate's voice. She sounded angry, she could hear footsteps moving around her bed. "Do you want to tell me what you were doing?" She paused, a sneer playing across her face, Caroline stuttered to afraid to answer. "No?" She sniffed. "Shall I tell you? I think that you tried to sabotage the yard, I don't think you want us to do well. You hate everyone don't you?"

"No..." Caroline stuttered.

"Push them away Caroline..." Kate snarled. "We don't need you..."

Caroline sobbed, a sudden wave of pain washed over her and she cried out, screaming in agony.

"Oh Caroline, I'm here..." Kate took her hand. "They are going to give you some pain relief, it will make it go away." Caroline looked to the side as there was a sharp prick in her arm, a nurse was injecting morphine into her left arm.

"Kate..." Caroline whispered, her voice croaky. "Please don't hate me..."

"What?" Kate looked deeply into Caroline's pale blue eyes, she could see fear washing over her. "I don't hate you. We love you Caroline. I'll be here for you." Caroline started to close her eyes as the morphine took hold. "Sleep well."

"Yes, they think she has broken a couple of ribs and has dislocated her shoulder. Thank goodness she had a riding hat on, but as she was knocked out they want to keep her in at least overnight. Did you call her mum?" Kate was standing outside the hospital as mobile phones were not allowed on the ward. Caroline was sleeping deeply with the help of a good dose of morphine. "Okay, well I will stay here as long as I can."

Kate stepped back into the ward followed by a nurse who was spraying air freshener. She blushed, "Sorry I was mucking out earlier..." The nurse stopped her, smiling.

"Oh don't be silly, it's not you! After the meals have been served you need to get rid of the smell of cabbage. Ugh!" She paused. "You were here with Miss Gibbs weren't you?" Kate nodded. "Her mother is here, she is by her bed."

"Thank you." The nurse went down the yard spraying the air. Kate walked into Caroline's room, beside her bed was a grey haired woman, she looked like she was fifty or older. "Hello? Are you Caroline's mum, I don't think we have ever met." The woman stood up facing Kate.

"No..." She looked Kate up and down. "We haven't."

"Sorry, I am Kate Bishop, I run Redbridge Equestrian Centre with my husband." She paused, the woman sat down sighing. "Is something wrong?"

"No, I am sorry, I have some history with the place, I didn't want Caroline to work there." She looked up. "No offence."

"None taken." Kate shook her head adding 'I think' under her breath. "Have they told you what happened to her."

"Yes, and thank you for bringing her in." The woman looked at Kate, she seemed to be wishing her to leave.

"I would like to stay with her too if I can." Kate smiled. "She is a good friend to us all."

"I suppose I can't stop you can I?" Caroline's mother sighed as Kate pulled up a chair on the other side of the bed.

Adam pulled up the Land Rover in the empty car park. He glanced at his watch, five minutes to eight. He opened the car door and stepped out into the fresh air urging his legs to stay strong beneath him. He wanted to turn and run away, but he knew that he would make his situation ten times worse. He heard a car approaching and watched as a large four wheel drive car pulled into the car park. Its windows were blacked out but it was soon clear who was inside as two large men stepped out followed by a blond haired woman, she was well dressed in a business suit and what looked like expensive shoes. She stepped towards Adam flanked by the two men.

"Good evening Mr Bishop." Her voice was toneless. "You're early."

"I didn't want to keep you waiting." Adam's stuttered.

"Are you afraid of me Mr Bishop?" Adam shook his head. She smiled. "Liar! But you have every right to be afraid. Unless of course..." She paused. Adam knew what the question would be, he wavered slightly. "You have the money you owe, don't you?"

There was a long silence between the three people.

"I need time..." Adam stuttered.

"Did I ask that Mr Bishop?" She shook her head. "No, do you have the money you owe me, the money you promised that you would repay."

"Business has been so bad..." There was a sudden pain across Adam's back she fell heavily to his knees. Looking up he saw one of the men holding a riding crop.

"Now, Mr Bishop, I am being gentle with you. I thought you might appreciate the irony of the riding crops, my little joke."

"Very funny..." Adam gasped.

"One more time, Mr Bishop." She smiled. "No more little jokes. The money." Adam looked up with tears in his eyes. "Oh dear..." She paused. "Well, this is just a little reminder for you, just in case you forget again?" She turned and opened the car door. "And I will want double by this time next week or it will not be something as gentle as a riding crop."

Adam watched as she sat in the car and closed the door. The two men stood before him raising their hands bringing down the crops onto Adam's back. They left him lying on the rough surface of the car park before returning to the car and driving off.

"Hello..." Kate stepped into the front room of the cottage.

"Hello beautiful..." Adam winced as he stood up. Kate put her arms around him, causing him to cry out.

"Oh what is wrong with you? Are you okay?"

"Sorry my back is killing me..."

"Oh I am sorry, perhaps you should have a hot bath?"

"No! I think I will just go to bed." He paused. "Anyway, how is Caroline?"

"Oh well, she was fast asleep when I left her. Her mum was with her and the doctors said she will be back home in a few days although she will not be working for a while." She shook her head. "Poor girl, it was such a freak accident." Kate sat next to Adam on the sofa. "What is wrong?"

"Oh, I am just worried about Caroline. Sorry I am distracted."

"You are such a big softy!" Kate laughed.

"Come on wake up!" Caroline turned round, standing before her was an event rider, she was dressed in a coloured polo shirt and jodhpurs. "Look this is Badminton and I am about to ride in the cross-country, I would appreciate it if my groom stopped day dreaming!" The woman snatched her horses reins from Caroline and, turning to face the horse held her leg out to be lifted into the saddle.

"I am sorry! I don't know what happened." Caroline grabbed the cold leather of her riders boot and pushed her up into the saddle. "Are you okay?"

"I am fine. It is you who seem to be away with the fairies." She leant down in the saddle and whispered into Caroline's ear. "Push them away Caroline." She smiled. "You don't need them. Right I am ready to go, wish me luck."

"Good luck..." Caroline was distracted. "Yes, I don't need them."

The woman rode to the starting box, the starter nodded to her before waving her off. Caroline watched as she galloped away towards the first jump. She turned to walk back to the finish line, she absent-mindedly listened to the public address system.

'A good start over the first, clear and fast away towards the second.'

Caroline shook her head and continued to walk, she didn't know what was wrong with her,

she was distracted, tired. Suddenly she heard her riders name being announced followed by a call for first aid.

'...to confirm Annabel Lloyd-Harrison has fallen at the third fence, the ditch. It looked as if she had a tack failure, almost as if her girth snapped...'

Caroline was running down the course pushing through the crowds of curious spectators. She approached the third jump, the horse was being held by one of the officials. She looked down into the ditch, there was her rider there were two paramedics beside her. Caroline gasped as one of them stood up and shook her head.

Caroline's heart sunk, a chill running across her.

"I think she's dead." Caroline span around, there was a woman standing behind her, she was about the same age as her and wearing riding clothes. "Fall like that?." She whistled. "No, there is no way that she could have survived that." The girl turned and looked at Caroline. "I bet that they will want to talk with her groom, especially as the girth was cut."

Caroline stared at her. "What are you saying?" The woman took a knife from Caroline's pocket. "I bet that is the knife that did it. Why would you do it Caroline?"

"How do you know my name?"

"I know lots of things." The woman smiled. "I know that you did this, you did it to hurt Annabel. Well, you seem to have succeeded."

"I wouldn't hurt her..." Caroline was sobbing. She jumped as a strong grip was placed on her shoulder.

"Miss Caroline Gibbs. I am arresting you for the murder of Annabel Lloyd-Harrison." Caroline pulled away from the police man and started to run. She could hear the police chasing her this was futile, she glanced back and saw the woman waving at her. Suddenly her boots slipped in the slick mud and she was rugby tackled to the ground her face slammed into the grass as handcuffs were roughly snapped onto her wrists. She was dragged to her feet the crowd jeering and shouting, one woman spat in her face. She was bundled into the back of a police van and rapidly driven away.

Caroline woke with a start, tears running down her face. She looked around, this was not a police cell, she had a drip in her arm and a heart monitor was bleeping quietly beside her bed, there was a woman standing in the corner.

"Hello?" Caroline spoke softly. The woman turned around slowly to face her. Caroline gasped as she recognised the woman who had spoken to her at the event.

"Hello Caroline..." She smiled and stepped towards her bed. "Please don't get up..."

"I must be dreaming."

"No, not." The woman smiled.

"What?"

"Here, let me prove it." The woman reached down and grabbed the needle which was on the back of Caroline's hand, she twisted the needle. Caroline cried out.

"Please stop..." Caroline sobbed. The woman shook her head, reaching down she lowered the bars on the side of the bed, she dragged Caroline's arm until she fell from the bed landing on

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