

PADDOCK GROVE



RIDING
FOR GOLD

J. P. ROSE



To Poppy and Rosie, with love. This one's for you xx

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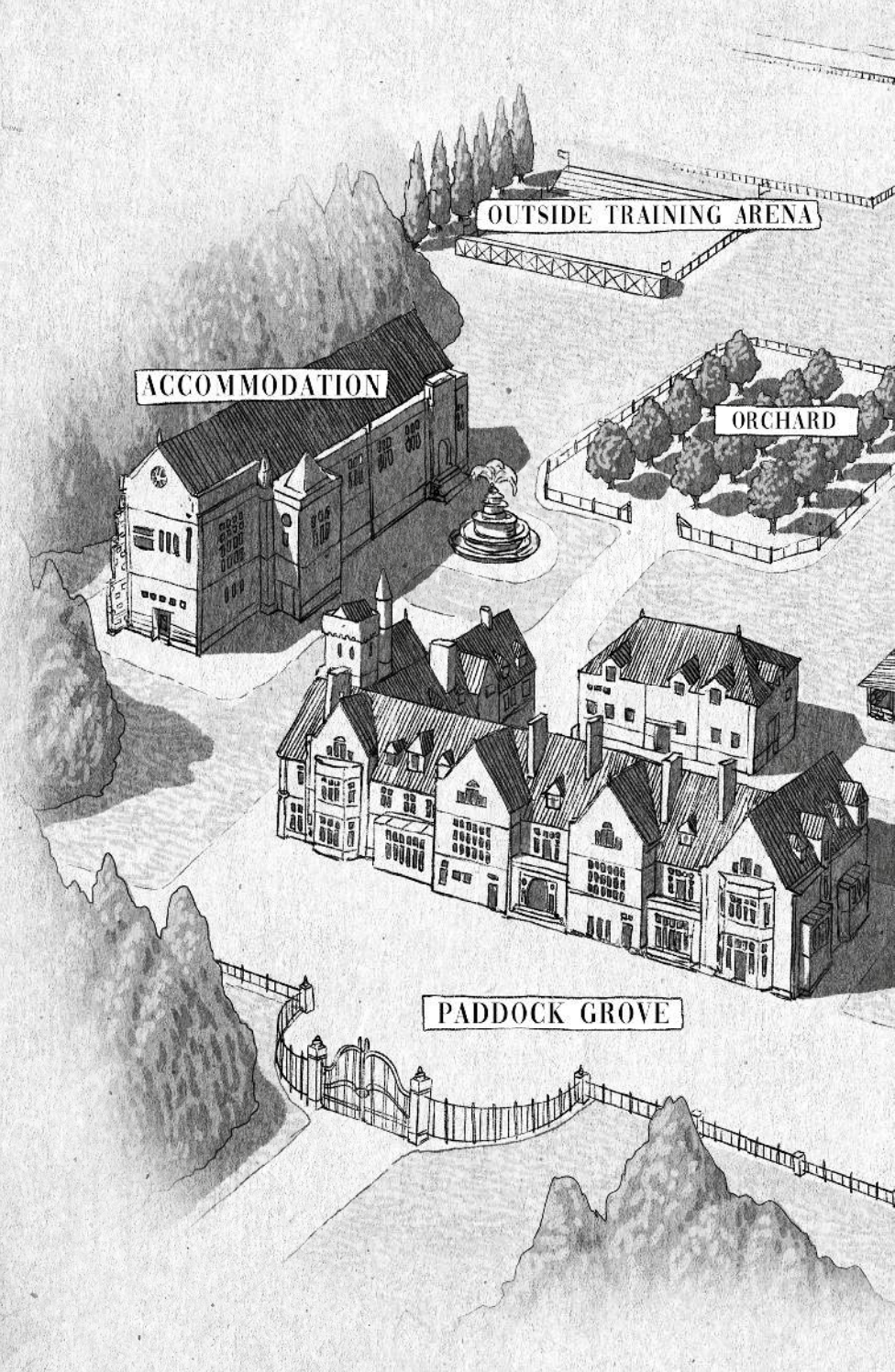


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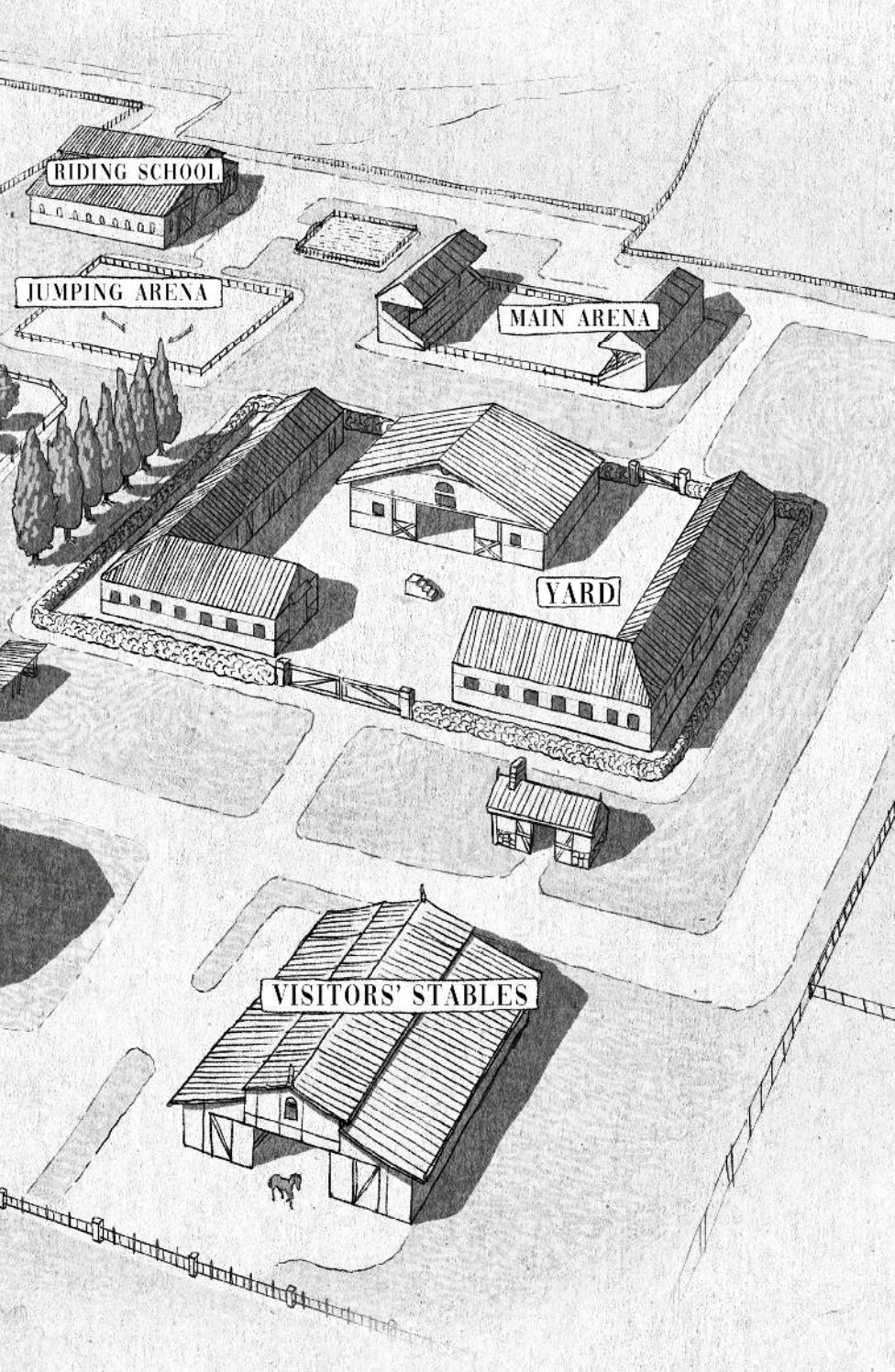


OUTSIDE TRAINING ARENA

ACCOMMODATION

ORCHARD

PADDOCK GROVE



RIDING SCHOOL

JUMPING ARENA

MAIN ARENA

YARD

VISITORS' STABLES

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Katie Ellis – Sensible and kind-hearted. Katie takes school very seriously (sometimes a little too seriously). She hates to let people down and is a good friend. She tries her hardest at everything she does.

Sheriff – A darling homebred bay gelding all-rounder that Katie helped train from a foal. Has a strong, trusting bond with Katie.

STROLLER HOUSE

Georgia ‘George’ Harris – George is a rider always keen to prove that she deserves her place among her classmates. She is popular and a trusted friend.

Bear – A scruffy, mischievous piebald cob belonging to George. He has a big appetite and a mind of his own.

Lili Nagata – Light-hearted Lili is fun to be around but sometimes struggles to take things seriously.

Ted – Lili’s horse, a beautiful warmblood whose show ring name is Lord Moonbeam but goes by his stable name, Ted.

Tabitha Bailey – Can be standoffish and strong-willed. Sometimes she comes across as insensitive. Loans her horse from the school.

Misty Dumas – A student from France who is skilled in dressage.

Dream – Highly trained palomino belonging to Misty.

OTHER PADDOCK GROVE STUDENTS

Meg Lopez – A student who likes to get her own way. From rival Frankel House.

Jessica Travis – Unfriendly and snooty. Also in Frankel House.

Poppy – A member of the Paddock Grove youth team.

Rosie – A member of the Paddock Grove youth team.

THE CLEAR FIELDS TEAM

Theo Silva – Captain of the Clear Fields youth team. Owner of Maximus.

Farrell Johnson – A rider from Clear Fields. Owner of Apollo.

Mrs Silva – Coach of the Clear Fields team.

Mr Rodgers – A staff member from Clear Fields.

SCHOOL STAFF

Mrs Hawsworth – Headmistress of Paddock Grove.

Ms Stopcroft – Head riding coach.

Mr Thatcher – Yard manager.

Mr Mannington – Visiting school farrier.

Gemma – Head stable girl who works with Mr Thatcher.

Mrs Winters – Housemistress for Stroller House.

BACK IN THE SADDLE

The chatter filling the long corridor made Katie smile. Although she always enjoyed going home for the holidays to see her parents and her brother who, at ten, was three years younger than her, Katie loved being back at Paddock Grove. The autumn half-term holiday was always busy, as her parents were equine vets: since it was trail hunting season, they were occupied tending to horses who'd picked up various jumping injuries. She'd hardly seen them and had instead spent most of her time with her horse, Sheriff, so it was lovely coming back to school to be amongst her friends.

Katie felt a buzz of excitement as she looked around at all the girls. Even though she'd been at Paddock Grove for over a year now, she still thought she was lucky to

go to school here. Paddock Grove was a dream come true for her – and for most of the other girls – with its beautiful grounds and state-of-the-art facilities, unlike anything she'd ever seen before. Not to mention the chance to ride every day. She couldn't imagine being anywhere else. There was a special magic to this place.

"George!" Excitement at seeing her friend broke through Katie's thoughts and she waved. She'd only known Georgia Harris – George – and Bear, her pony, for half a term, but the two girls had already become firm friends. The two of them were both in Stroller, one of the four "houses" that the school was divided into, and George was one of the three other girls who slept in Katie's dorm.

"Katie!" George shouted with equal delight, as Katie rushed up to give her a hug. George's eyes sparkled, and her long, brown curly hair tumbled onto her shoulders as she squeezed Katie hard before letting go. "I just said goodbye to Mum and Dad after taking Bear to his stable. I think he missed being around other horses after he only had me and farmer Albert's sheep to keep him company, which he didn't like! But it was great to be

home and show my parents how much Bear had come on in the first few weeks of term.”

Katie laughed, remembering all the problems her friend had originally had with her pony Bear, then sighed happily as George linked arms with her.

“Did you manage to finish off all the assignments we were set?” George asked.

“I finished them all last night. Did you?”

George nodded. “Yeah. My scholarship doesn’t rely on my grades, but Mum and Dad said it’s important that they don’t drop.”

Katie glanced at George. “I bet Lili never bothered to do hers – she never does!” Their friend Lili wasn’t the sort of person to worry like Katie or George did about getting into trouble with schoolwork. All Lili really cared about was having fun and riding.

The two friends continued to stroll down the long wood-panelled corridor, avoiding banging into all the groups of girls chattering away, most of whom were dressed in their Paddock Grove winter jodhpurs topped off with the school’s riding jacket.

Just then, Katie heard a familiar laugh and saw Lili

coming round the corner by the main entrance. She was with Tabitha, the final one of Katie's dorm mates.

Lili squealed with delight as soon as she saw them and skipped over, her face lit up. Tabitha followed behind looking a lot less enthusiastic – she and Lili were total opposites when it came to their moods.

“We were just talking about you, Lili,” Katie said with a smile. “And about our half-term assignments.”

Lili frowned, tucking her long black hair behind her ears, and a flush appeared on her deep, sandy complexion. “Did we have assignments?”

Katie and George laughed as Tabitha rolled her eyes.

“I knew it!” Katie said triumphantly. “And *yes*, Lili, we had lots of assignments: French, Maths, History, the field management essay *and* Chemistry.”

Lili shrugged and twirled around. “Oh well, I guess I'll have to catch up later.”

Katie shook her head as if she disapproved, but really she wished she could be more like Lili and not worry so much. Actually, Katie doubted Lili *ever* had to worry – as she'd recently learnt, Lili's parents were royalty in her home country of Lekoala, an island in the South Pacific.

“Did you spot the new fences out in the jumping arena?” Lili changed the subject, her eyes shining with excitement. Paddock Grove had an indoor riding school and three different outdoor arenas – one for jumping, one for training and one for competitions. “They look amazing. There’s a proper puissance jump wall with lightweight plastic bricks and new wings and fillers on the jumps. I can’t wait to try them all out with Ted.”

Katie smiled at her friend. Lili’s horse Ted was a beautiful warmblood – a Holsteiner – with an impressive bloodline. His official name was Lord Moonbeam – although no one ever called him that. To everyone at Paddock Grove, from the staff to the students, he was simply “Ted”. Beautiful, brilliant Ted.

Katie had a thought. “How about we go and check them out after supper? We’ll use the arena lights, so it won’t matter what time we go. It’ll be great to have a ride with you all.” She clapped with excitement and once again she felt lucky to be here.

“Thanks a lot,” Tabitha said with a scowl. “What am I supposed to do?”

“Sorry,” Katie said. “I didn’t think.”



She was cross with herself for being so insensitive. Not every student at Paddock Grove was able to bring their own horse, and Tabitha was one of them. Instead of riding her own horse like Katie, George and Lili, she had to ride one supplied by the school.

“Maybe if there’s a school horse free you can join us?” George wondered.

“Yes, what about Link? You always love riding him,” Lili added.

Tabitha’s green eyes narrowed, her mouth turning into a straight, flat line. “There’s never a school horse free in the evenings at short notice, *especially* Link – everyone wants to ride him.”

Katie sighed, wishing there was something she could do to make it better, but Tabitha had already marched off in the direction she’d just come.

Chapter Two

TEAM SPIRIT



The three friends were still in the corridor when a sudden hush fell over the students. Ms Stopcroft, the riding coach, was striding purposefully towards the notice board, a sheet of paper in her hand.

“What’s going on?” Katie whispered.

George shrugged, her eyes fixed on their coach. Without saying anything, Ms Stopcroft pinned the paper to the board and stepped back, keeping her face from giving anything away before she smiled at everyone and nodded towards the paper.

For a moment, nobody moved, then Poppy, a girl from one of the other houses, let out a shriek. “It’s the team list for the eventing challenge! It’s the list!”

At once, the corridor was a lively, bustling scene as



everyone surged towards the notice board, jostling each other. Katie glanced at George. Her heart was pounding. The eventing challenge – or the Under-14s South Coast Challenge Cup, to give it its full title – was a highlight of the equestrian calendar for Year Eight and Nine students at Paddock Grove. While it wasn't as prestigious as a national competition, it was still important enough to draw competitors from schools and riding centres throughout the region – and the top two qualified for the inter-regional stage of the National Eventing Challenge.

Katie stood on her tiptoes and tried to look at the notice board over the heads of the taller girls. “Can you see anything?” she asked Lili, who was the tallest.

“No.”

“I can't either.” George was trying to push her way to the front of the crowd, but there were too many excited girls.

Too impatient to wait, Katie squeezed through and scanned the list. Suddenly, she saw it: *Katie Ellis*, written in Ms Stopcroft's neat handwriting. A scream of delight burst from her lips. “I made it! I made it onto the team!”

“So did I!” George shouted right next to Katie's ear.

They high-fived each other, then Katie continued to scan the list. “Oh my gosh, Tabitha’s on the list too!” Then she saw Poppy’s name, as well as Rosie’s.

There were eight names on the list – although only four would actually compete as part of the team. There were two girls from Frankel House, two from Milton and one from Seabiscuit, but three from Stroller and all from Year Eight: Katie, George and Tabitha.

Katie turned to Lili then, her smile disappearing. “Lili, your name’s not down. I’m sorry.”

Lili grinned. “Don’t be sorry, Katie. I’m pleased. Ms Stopcroft knows I worry about Ted getting injured doing cross-country. But that doesn’t mean I can’t help you practise for the showjumping – I’d enjoy that!”

Lili was one of the best show jumpers in the school. She was an amazing rider, but it also helped that Ted was one of the most impressive horses in the stables, not to mention the most expensive. Lili looked between George and Katie. “I’m so happy for you, though. You deserve it. Congratulations.”

As the reality sank in, Katie felt a wave of pride wash over her. They were going to represent Paddock Grove

at the youth eventing challenge. *She* was going to! This was huge. It was a dream come true. She knew that it would be a lot of hard work, but she didn't mind. She and Sheriff would do everything they could to make sure that they stood the best chance.

Paddock Grove had only ever won the South Coast Cup twice before, and the last time had been three years ago. Last year, Fallow Hall, an equestrian school from Dorset, had won it, and the year before that it'd been Aldgate Pony Club, who narrowly beat Clear Fields Manor, the boys' equestrian school that was on the other side of the nearby village of Willowbrook.

The rivalry between Clear Fields and Paddock Grove was legendary. Whenever the two schools met, there was always a sense of excitement and tension. But Clear Fields wasn't the only school to worry about. Willowbrook Riding School and Oakburn Equestrian Centre, which were in the same county as Paddock Grove, were also exceptional. There was a lot to play for. The top two teams from this competition would qualify to compete against other regional champions from around the country at a national level next year.

Katie's stomach tightened. She hoped that the team from Paddock Grove would be good enough to advance.

"Katie, look!" Jumping up and down, Lili squeezed her arm, pointing to the list again. "Look!"

There, at the bottom of the page, was another surprise. The best surprise. *Team Captain: Katie Ellis.*

"Oh my gosh, oh my gosh!" Katie breathed deeply, trying to steady herself. She couldn't believe it. "I'm team captain!"

"What?" George, who'd been talking to one of the other girls who'd made the team, peered over her shoulder. "Katie, that's amazing!"

A swirl of pride and nerves fluttered in Katie's chest. This was a huge responsibility. There were older girls in Year Nine on the team who were more experienced and probably wanted this opportunity. Could she really do it? Could she help the team win this year's challenge?

Katie turned to Lili and whispered, "I don't know if I can do this."

"You can." Lili spoke with absolute confidence. "You'll be brilliant. Ms Stopcroft and Mrs Hawksworth

know you can do it, otherwise they wouldn't have chosen you."

"Thank you." Katie smiled, determined to prove them right.

"You'll be riding for gold." Lili beamed at her proudly.

"Riding for gold? Huh, as if! There's no way you're going to win." A drawling Californian accent cut through the chatter and Katie, Lili and George turned to see a group of Year Nine girls watching them.

It was Meg Lopez who had been the one to speak. If Mrs Hawksworth hadn't disqualified her as a punishment for bad behaviour before the holiday, Meg's name would almost certainly be on the team list.

"Just because you're not on the team doesn't mean we'll lose!" Lili argued back.

Meg smirked. "You're *so* sensitive." She flicked her glossy black hair out of her eyes.

Lili scowled at Meg and put a comforting hand on Katie's back where Meg couldn't see it. Meg was a great rider but was always trying to bully people younger than her.

“I’m talking about how good the Clear Fields team is,” Meg continued. “Haven’t you heard of Theo Silva? He’s one of the best riders out there – they say he’s unbeatable. Now he’s got his new horse, he’s won every competition he’s entered this year. Apparently, he’s the team captain for the South Coast Challenge too, which means *you’ll* have to go up against him in the special captains’ jump-off.” She sighed dramatically. “Maybe if we had someone *quality* as captain, like Jess, it might be different.” Meg gave Katie a sneering look, then turned and walked away, joining her friend, Jessica, who was on the team and also in the year above. “But I guess now we can kiss goodbye to that trophy,” Meg shouted over her shoulder.

“Ignore her,” Poppy said briskly. “She’s just jealous. Can’t be on the team, can’t be captain.” Poppy was a no-nonsense kind of person and a no-nonsense kind of rider, although even she was giving Katie a curious look. “Still. There’s four Year Nine riders on that list. It’s unusual for Ms Stopcroft to pick someone younger to be captain. You’re really lucky.”

Katie chewed on her lip. She appreciated what Poppy

was saying, but just last week she'd seen the name Theo Silva in one of the riding magazines that got sent to her parents' veterinary practice – something about junior international showjumping.

Once everyone else had walked away and left Katie with her friends, her shoulders slumped. "Meg's right. How will I ever be able to beat a rider like that in the captains' jump-off?"

"Theo from Clear Fields might be good, but Paddock Grove have something special too," Lili said. "You and Sheriff are the most incredible team, and I'll help you practise. You'll be amazing."

George nodded. "All we have to do is start training hard." A grin spread across her face. "This is going to be epic." She swung her arm around Katie's shoulder. "I'm so proud of you."

Katie looked at them both and tried to push her doubts to the side. "You're right," she said. "We've got a championship to win!"