



A YEAR AT THE YARD

A collection of funny, absurd and magical stories straight from the horse's mouth.

CHAPTER 1

Lofty's Day

Once upon a time in the middle of the peaceful countryside in Norfolk there was an idyllic livery yard. It was part of a big country estate and had once been a stud for breeding Arab horses. The buildings were brick and flint with red-tiled roofs, making them warm and cosy in the winter and cool and sheltered in the summer. There were lots of big stables and plenty of riding tracks and bridleways all over the estate. This really was horse heaven.

The livery yard had a collection of the most wonderful and magical horses and ponies you have ever seen, or could ever imagine. Let me tell you all about them and their owners.

Snowdrop was the perfect pony. She was pure white, although, of course, she was classified as a grey. She had a little pink nose, long flowing white mane and a neatly trimmed, white, flowing tail. She had pretty hooves and all of her tack was pink, except for her saddle. Her owner was Candy who was the perfect, polite little girl.

Candy was eight and three quarters and had been riding since she was five, so she was quite an experienced rider. She had long blonde hair and loved Snowdrop more than anything else in the whole world. Candy spent all of her spare time with Snowdrop at the stable yard.

Snowdrop's very best friend was Priti Pony. She was a bay with a shiny coat, a long black mane and tail, a white blaze on her face and a very special black nose. She had a fine head, dark intelligent eyes and believed that she was part Arab. Her owner was Grace who was very best friends with Candy and went to the same school. Just as the ponies looked very different so did the girls. Grace had short dark shiny hair and a dark complexion.

Snowdrop and Priti's stables were next to each other and Snowdrop was the only horse who knew Priti's special secret. Now this is very secret indeed so please don't tell anyone else, but Priti had the magical ability to find out what people were thinking. She would work her magic, wiggle her little nose and zing! The people's thoughts would appear right in front of her.

In the stable next to Snowdrop there was Bossy. She was a piebald cob who could be very bad tempered at times. She was owned by Big Jenny. There were two owners called Jenny at the yard and although Big Jenny was not very big at all, she was much older than Little Jenny, who had recently left school and was training as a veterinary nurse. They couldn't call her Old Jenny, that wouldn't have been polite, so she was known as Big Jenny. Big Jenny had been riding for years and was always willing to help the younger owners with riding tips or advice on how to look after the horses. She was always laughing and telling silly horse jokes and everybody loved her. One of her favourite jokes was: What disease is a horse scared of getting? Hay fever!

In the stable next to Bossy was Dodger who was overweight because ate almost anything, including the other horses' food. Dodger was a Welsh Cob and proud of it. His coat was light grey. It had been much

darker when he was younger but he was nineteen now and didn't get ridden much anymore. This didn't bother him, he was quite happy to laze around all day and eat. Dodger was owned by Mrs Plunkett, who the ponies called the sweetie fairy because she always had sweets and chocolates in her pockets. You see she worked in a chocolate factory and she got lots of rejects, the bent ones and the ones that hadn't been wrapped properly.

Then there was Rascal. He was a New Forest pony and the sort of horse who was always getting into trouble. He kept hiding things and swapping things around. Rascal was a bit mischievous but very nice with it and all the other horses loved him.

There were a few other horses, including Tramp and Charger. Tramp was a scruffy skewbald who was never groomed. He just plodded along and didn't care much about anything or anybody. Charger was a handsome ex-hunter and king of the yard, but even he was scared of his owner, Miss Crab Apple. She was a bit bossy – no, she was worse than that – she was a lot bossy and very bad tempered with it and all the horses called her Crabby.

All these horses and ponies had lived here a long time, but because this was a livery yard different horses came and went and there was always excitement when a new horse was due to arrive.

Among the people at the yard, the oldest was Jim (the horses called him Jim Khana). He must have been the oldest stable hand in the whole world. He was old enough to be a grandad.

Poor old Jim often got confused and was always getting things wrong. He couldn't even remember the names of the owners and always mixed them up with the names of the horses. For example, he called Miss Crab Apple, Miss Charger and he called Charger, Crab Apple. Nobody was quite sure if he did it on purpose and nobody said anything about it because everyone knew he loved the horses. In fact, Jim was a lot cleverer than anybody realised, and he liked the horses far more than he liked the owners. Jim was quite a private person and nobody knew much about him except that he lived in a little cottage in the village with his sister and that he was very good with the horses.

All of the horses had a special friend at the yard. He was a robin, so they all called him 'Robin'. That was easy. Robin flew all around the yard all day looking for insects and grubs, so he saw and heard everything, then reported back to Priti.