

HALF A HAND SHORT, middle grade historical, approx. 67,000 words

Chapter One: What Royalty Wants

He was my joy; he was my mission. When my yearling colt, Pippin, made a clean, high leap over his gate, he landed in a year of trouble for both of us. For the sake of my father, and to spite our king, I had to find us a way out.

I'd whistled for Pip from the lane beside his field. He raced to greet me, jumping wide across a tumbling brook. His dappled coppery coat gleamed in the late spring sun; his red-gold tail streamed like the banner of a king riding into battle. Yesterday, he'd slowed to a stop and pranced, feathery mane tossing as he waited for me to let myself through the gate. This time, he sailed over it with room to spare, and trotted down the lane to meet me.

My stepfather screeched. "Gillian, get that devilish animal out of here."

"Impressive," another voice said. "Your dowry, Gillian? I would stake gold on that leap."

Those were the two men who wished to control my fate, just as a decree by our king would decide the fate of my horse. Or so they thought—but not if I could help it!

This was the second time I'd given my heart to a horse or pony. The Lady Elizabeth had taken my first love, Cinder, when I was twelve. Now, two years later, I would not let my Pippin be subject to the whims of her father, King Henry the Eighth of England.

I, Gillian, was the daughter of Sir William Goodway, a knight who'd been in the service of King Henry. Father was as good a horseman as his monarch; I, his only child, had been sure of myself in the saddle for as long as I could remember.

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On a clear September day two years before Pippin's fateful leap, I was being considered as a companion to Lady Elizabeth, Henry's younger daughter. I had trotted across the grounds...