



*If Wishes
Were Horses*

Bernadette Kelly

Chapter One

Annie Boyd pulled down the last of the horse posters from her bedroom wall. Her eyes swept the room. The place looked bigger now that all the furniture was gone. The walls glowed white and bare without their decoration. In the rectangular space where the bed had been, the carpet looked different. It was soft and new-looking. In contrast was the worn carpet patch surrounding it where she had stomped back and forth over the years. The large bedroom window stared



into the street like a giant eye. Behind the glass pane, a million glittering city lights danced and winked in a black night sky. Floating among the lights, Annie's pale reflection gazed back at her.

She wasn't sure how she was supposed to feel at this moment. No longer was the city a place she would call home. Now it was a location she would visit, perhaps on special occasions, to eat at a fancy restaurant with Mum and Dad or to spend a night at the movies. It felt strange to be leaving the apartment for the last time. Annie was moving away from everything she had ever known.

Annie knew her mother, too, had mixed feelings about this move. Back in August, her dad had been offered a new job with a country real estate agent in the small town of Ridgeview.

Her mother had been pleased for him. But she'd also been concerned about the

If Wishes Were Horses

changes it would bring. 'What about Annie's school, Rob? And there's my teaching job. What about our friends?' she'd said.

'But what an opportunity, Susan,' her father had coaxed. 'A new life in the country with fresh air and room to move. Think of the space. We can buy a lovely big house, maybe on a few hectares. You can have that vegetable patch you've always wanted. Ridgeview has a good school for Annie and you can work there. I've made enquiries. They have a vacancy for a maths and science teacher. It's perfect for you. As for our friends...they can all come and visit whenever they like.'

'It sounds like you've thought of everything,' said her mother lamely.

Of course her father had won. He always did. And now here they were, about to start a whole new life. New house. New school. New friends. Leaving her city friends behind was hard. What if she didn't



fit in at the new school? What if she didn't find a friend? What if the kids thought she was a stuck-up city kid? Even worse, what if *she* didn't like any of *them*?

Annie thought about the last time she saw her friends, at school. She didn't even get to stay until the end of term but was having a few extra weeks holidays because of the move. She'd thought they might at least be a little sad about her leaving. But everyone was excited about the school carnival on the weekend. They'd left her in wave of giggles and excited chatter as she collected together her books and pencil case.

Her best friend, Jade O'Brien, was the only one who seemed to care. She was horrified when Annie told her that Ridgeview didn't have a cinema. Worse still, it didn't even have a decent shopping centre.

'What do you mean they don't have

If Wishes Were Horses

a shopping centre?’ demanded Jade. ‘How do they eat? Buy magazines? Buy clothes?’

‘They have a few shops,’ explained Annie. ‘Just not like the shops we’re used to. There’s definitely not a Kundle Mall in sight.’

‘But what about Dippin’ Donuts? Girlz Scene? Book Time?’

Annie just shook her head.

‘Annie, you can’t exist without those stores. It’s just...it’s just not right. You could report your parents for child abuse or something. They’re...they’re just being selfish.’

Jade look so horrified that Annie had to laugh. Privately she agreed with her friend. And yet, it just didn’t feel right to agree out loud.

‘Hey, it’s not all bad. My bedroom is nearly double the size of my old one. I won’t have to put up with Mrs Fraser’s bad music from upstairs. And I get out of



drama with Mr Trope on Thursdays — which has to be a good thing.’

Jade groaned, but still looked unconvinced.

‘And we’ll have loads more room. We’ve got lots of land. Which means I can finally get a pony. I’ll have plenty to do with a pony to ride and look after. I’m not going to have time to miss...everything here.’

It was true that Annie’s dad had always said he would love to buy her a pony.

‘But it just isn’t practical,’ he would often explain. ‘There’s no way you can have a horse in the city.’

Annie’s secret dream of owning a pony was the one thing that made moving to the country bearable. She hadn’t run the idea past her parents yet, but nothing was standing in her way of getting a horse. Not now.

‘A pony?’ Jade’s eyes narrowed. ‘Since when were you getting a pony, Annie?’

If Wishes Were Horses

Annie's uneasy stomach began doing somersaults.

'Jade O'Brien, are you calling me a liar?' said Annie hotly. Her stomach was making her feel sick.

'Hey, no. It's just... this is the first time I've heard about it—'

'Okay, so maybe I won't get it straightaway. But I'll definitely have a pony by the end of school holidays,' said Annie, her stomach flipping. 'By the time you see me again, I'll be the best rider in Ridgeview.'

Jade shrugged. 'So who am I going to sit next to in class?' she said, changing the subject.

Annie glanced down at the poster in her hands. It was an old glossy photo of a dazzling Arabian pony, decked out in full traditional costume. Annie loved horses. Any size, any breed.



Annie had only ridden a horse once while on a school camp. Her horse had been a dusty old bay with a white stripe down his face. His name was Toby and she could still conjure up the feeling of bliss as she sat in the saddle and stroked his neck.

Apart from that experience, the only horses she knew were the police horses. Annie knew quite a few of the mounted policemen and women who patrolled the city. She had often seized the chance to approach them and chat, spending precious moments stroking their horses.

Annie's whole life depended on having a pony. It might even help her make new friends. Without a pony, a lonely, boring summer holiday stretched out before her. She would have to talk to her dad — get him at the right moment. He had to agree. He simply had to.

'Annie,' Mum called from the living room. 'Time to go.' Her mother held

If Wishes Were Horses

a framed family photo that had been left hanging on the wall. Mrs Boyd stuffed the frame into her handbag. It didn't fit. More than half of the frame poked out above the zipper.

Annie could see her father's bearded face staring back at her. She'd been told her own brown eyes and dark hair were identical to his. Annie's mother's blue eyes and fair features were buried in the handbag.

Annie and her mother closed their apartment door for the last time. As Annie climbed into the car's back seat, the clambering paws of her dog greeted her. Jonesy had been Annie's birthday present two and a half years ago. He was a purebred Jack Russell and still acted like a pup. He soon settled down when the car began to move. Jonesy opened his mouth wide and uttered a whiny yawn.

That made Annie yawn too.



She wondered if her bed would be ready to climb into at the new house. The removalist truck hadn't arrived until lunchtime. Mr Boyd had followed the truck in his car. He wanted to be at the house when the family's belongings were unloaded. Her father was like that. He said he liked to be prepared. Her mum said he liked to organise everything and everybody.

Annie and her mother had stayed at the apartment to clean after everything was moved out. Now they were leaving for the long drive to Ridgeview.

'Excited?' her mother asked.

'Hmmm,' Annie answered with another yawn.

'Get some sleep, sweetie. I'll wake you when we arrive.'

Annie glanced at Jonesy. The dog's head rested lazily on his paws and his eyelids were half-closed. Annie settled

If Wishes Were Horses

back into the seat. She imagined the conversation she would have with her father — the conversation about getting a horse. She had some really good reasons why she should be allowed to have a pony. Annie fell asleep before she could imagine her father's reply.