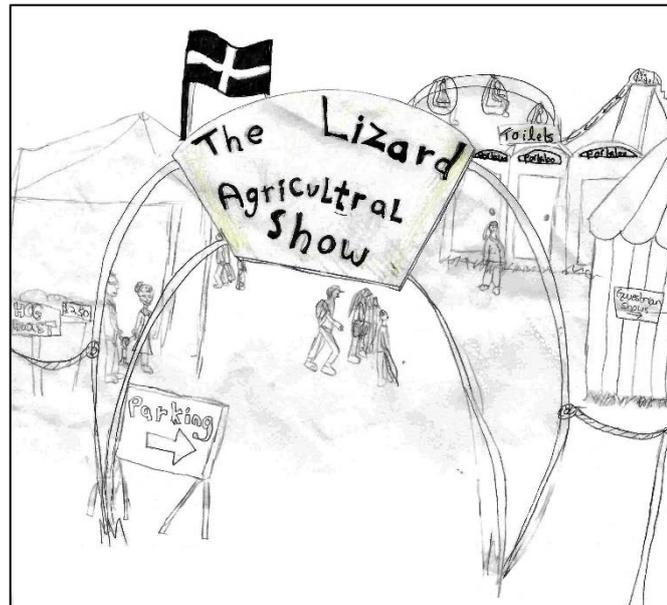


## EVENT ON THE LIZARD

The moment I hopped down from the cab, that fizzy, summer feeling reached down from the sun and tickled my racing heart. The buzzing sea of people radiated a unique, friendly warmth.

Glistening tractors twinkled as their proud drivers manoeuvred the rumbling vehicles into position for the show and shine. The squeals of children filled the humid air as they thundered past the first stall, a hair's breath away from bringing the hog roast tumbling down the freshly mowed banks. I stood posed, unable to draw my eyes away from the unfolding excitement, a deer in headlights as Mrs Gallot managed to squeeze the beastly horse lorry through the archway. Makeshift and swaying, the sign above the archway read "The Lizard Agricultural Show".

"Hey Faye, could you unload my tack and brushes whilst I grab Steren out the back?" Angela's roaring voice snapped me out my trance, and I turned to see the horse lorry was now parked amongst the gathering of trailers and shining ponies with smartly plaited manes. Some of the younger riders were already warming up for the gymkhana games, and judging by the green and brown smears on their pony club sweaters, there has already been a couple of falls! It was going to be an eventful day. Angela and I chattered nervously as we tacked Steren up and gave her some last minute finishing touches to her sleek, bay coat before the first show jumping class. Then the scream.

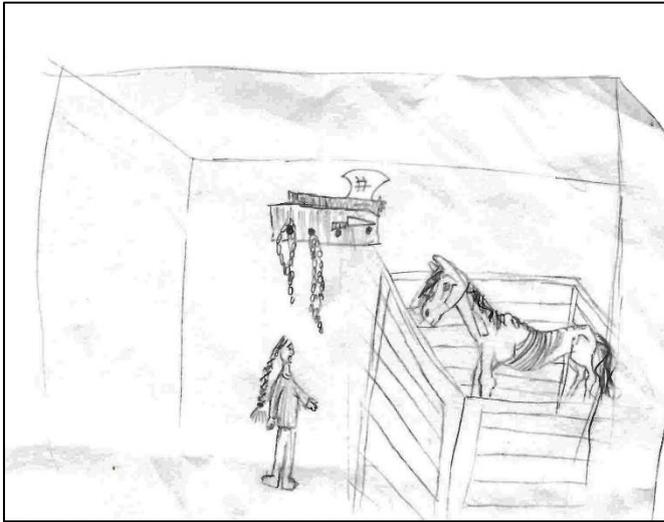


A ghostly howl rang out across the busy village green. It's cold, sharp tinge of death sliced clean through the warm atmosphere of the village green. Possessed, everyone's heads snapped round and stared cautiously and curiously at white bell tent labelled "win a pony". Dropping Angela's tack box and hurling myself towards the tent, I fought my way through the resistance of hands that grasped at my shoulders in a feeble attempt to stop me.

"Faye! Faye, don't..." Angela boomed, slapping her leather gloved hand against her pristine white breeches in exaggerated dismay. I didn't hear the shouts of disapproval, I was deafened by desperation. I made a dive underneath the tent and scrambled through with all the strength I could summon.

A nauseating stench instantly seeped through me, leaking through my veins and chiselling it's way to the marrow of my bones. As my eyes adjusted to the dismal darkness, I could just make out the wriggling worms of filth that trickled down the rotten walls. Flashes of silver chains and sharp utensils glinted in the bleak lighting. The tent poles creaked and screeched eerily, desperately crying out a warning. Cold fingers of fear teased my soul, threatening to take my lungs in it's inescapable fists. I pleaded with myself to turn and leave, but my heart drove me forwards.

The awful scream of an animal sounded again, but this time it was cut short in one sharp gasp and followed by a series of dry, rasping coughs. I craned my neck over a makeshift wall of fungus ridden pallets and squinted. My heart skipped a beat. Skeleton. Camouflaged against the darkness, I could just make out a shape of a black pony. Trembling, coughing, and with legs as limp as cotton buds, the wretched animal looked on the verge of death.



Hot tears of disgust pricked at my overwhelmed eyes. I reached out to run my fingers over the pony's hollow neck, but my arm was grabbed and twisted vigorously. A sly voice hissed through the silence "No escape now, pony girl," the man reached round my back with his other clay like hand and firmly grasped his unyielding fingers around my dry, gasping mouth to prevent the screams from leaving my shaking body. Fear strangled me, piercing my throat with its harsh, hooked talons and drawing me in. A cool iceberg trapped itself within my rib cage and momentarily stopped my heart from beating.

The man reached out an arm to take hold of one of the glinting chains strung up on the grimy tent canvas. In doing so, he took me in a neck lock and released my arm from behind my sweating back. If it wasn't for what happened next, I would have submitted myself to this inescapable imprisonment. Perhaps I would have been rescued, and look back on today with a sceptical view. But that didn't happen.

The skeletal frame of the lifeless creature beside me fell to its scarred knees. A few dry breaths rasped their way through the pony's blood spattered nostrils. Driven by horror and compassion, my body took action. In one swift move, I used my free arm to grab the most robust looking knife from beside the cold, silver chains. As my arm sprung back to me, I used the solid handle of the knife to knock the man against the his temple, bringing him down with a heavy thud. The blade of the knife proceeded to pierce open the harsh, canvass of the disguised jail cell of a tent and I pulled the knife towards the ground, creating a large slot as big as a door.

My eye were wide as saucers as I surveyed my surroundings. Hot beads of sweat tumbled from my forehead. The plump man on the floor began to stir, caressing his injured temple with his meaty hand. I felt like a vampire, blinded as the light flooded in from the door I had created. At the smell of fresh air, the light at the end of the tunnel seemed to surface in the pony's once dull, hopeless eyes of sorrow. With trembling knees, the pony managed to stand. I reached out and softly rubbed the animal's thin skinned forehead. The pony cautiously swiveled his ears and showed the whites of his eyes and, although untrusting from what may have been a life of pain, I noticed him sigh a deep breath of relief in my presence and his muscles noticeably relaxed. I felt my heart swell with deep admiration for such a strong soul. Tears welling in my eyes as the pony fought to stay on his feet, I knew I had to help him, he looked desperate to escape. I grasped his ropey mane led him towards the exit.

His creaking frame strained to add a spring to his step as he trotted out on to the green as if he couldn't believe his luck. Filled with new found energy of hope, he took off in a stiff canter. His sides heaved with effort as he broncked and bucked like a youngster and flicked his heels in the air with great bounds of joy. I laughed with delight, it was all I could do to stop myself from dancing! Then, drained from the eruption of energy, the pony trotted wearily towards me. But this time, there was a glint of love and content in his large glossy eyes. I ran my hand lovingly over his gaunt frame and allowed him to lean against me. He still shied cautiously away from me with his head, but strong trust would take a while to build.

Unable to hold himself up, the black skeleton of a pony dropped to his knees and tucked his stick like legs neatly beneath him, he lay resting in the rich summer grass before me. I felt a firm hand on my shoulder. The man? Fear! Panicking, I snapped round dramatically. It was Angela. She crouched beside me and gazed quizzically at the skeletal pony.

“You know, if we fed him up a bit, he looks as though he’d have a fair bit of life left in him.” Angela’s knowledgeable voice gave me comfort. “Tell you what, let’s get him in the lorry with Steren. We’ll take him back to our stable and get the vet out. He’d be yours, and there’d be no guarantee he’d pull through. A lot of responsibility, but you’ve proved yourself for me and Steren over the years,” Angela’s generous words left me speechless. My gaping mouth transformed to a huge grin. I swung my arms around Angela’s broad shoulders and thanked her again and again. Then I turned back to the pony.

“From now on...” I spoke soothingly and excitedly to the bag of bones, “From now on your mine, and your gonna be living the dream!”

*Anna*

