

*Chapter 16*

THE PULLY BONE

THE NEXT THREE MONTHS were filled with excitement for Phantom and her owners. Paul and Maureen were conditioning her for the big race. They fed her more liberally on grain. They rode her three miles each day, starting off at a slow jog, then trotting her, then asking for a burst of speed midway of the ride, then slowly jogging her back home again.

It was the early morning, when the world was all red and gold with the rising sun, that Paul and Maureen chose for Phantom's training period. They would take turns riding her — across the tundralike beach, hard-packed after a rain; up and down Main Street, where her hooves sounded like sea shells pinging against the pavement; over trails carpeted with pine needles, where she made no sound at all.

They rode her out to the pony penning grounds,

getting her used to the feel of the track and the sight of the white fence.

Before long the Phantom came to be a familiar and glorious sight. Her fame grew and spread. Now, on pleasant Sundays, visitors from the mainland began coming to see her.

Misty grew jealous of the attentions her mother was getting. She would nose in, trying to nip the buttons from the men's coats or the flowers on the ladies' hats. One time she lifted a hat all covered over with roses and dropped it in the water barrel.



This brought Grandpa Beebe running with a handful of gunnysacks. He pretended to be angry as he rescued the dripping hat and tried to dry it off with the sacks. "Paul and Maureen!" he would shout in his thunderous voice. "Hain't you never going to drive any sense into that Misty's head? She'll grow up thinkin' she's a baby all her days. Never seed a critter so mettlesome!"

As July came in and Pony Penning Day drew near, something came between Paul and Maureen. If Paul worked around the barnyard, Maureen made some excuse to go off down to the oyster boats to see if the men had brought up any sea stars in their oyster tongs. And if Maureen worked at home for Grandpa or Grandma, Paul went off treading clams for Kim Horsepepper or catching sea horses.

"What's the matter 'twixt Paul and Maureen?" Grandma asked Grandpa one night after the house was still.

"I don't know fer sure, mind ye, but I suspicion it's about the race," Grandpa replied.

"Why, I thought 'twas all settled. Hain't the Phantom goin' to run?"

"A-course. But the catch is — who's to ride her?"

"They both hankering to ride?" questioned Grandma.

"That's my guess," Grandpa nodded.

Finally, on the Monday morning before Pony Penning, Grandma asked the question right out. She and Maureen were hanging up clothes at the time, while Paul, perched on top of a chicken coop, was silently whittling a pole into a clothes prop.

"Which of ye," Grandma said, as she removed a clothespin from her mouth, "which of ye will ride Phantom in the big race?"

A long silence was the only answer.

"Well! Well!" said Grandma brightly. "If ye won't state yer rathers, I got a fine idea."

Still no answer. Maureen shook the creases out of a tablecloth as if her life depended on it. Paul kept on whittling furiously.

Just then Grandpa Beebe came by. He glanced around sharply. "Why's everyone so hushed?" he asked. "Except fer the flappin' of the clothes I'd think 'twas Sunday meetin'-time."

"Why, I just asked who's to ride Phantom come Pony Penning Day," replied Grandma, hanging her clothespin bag on the line and looking from one to the other.

"Oh," and Grandpa strung the little word out un-

til it seemed to have springs in it. He dropped the posthole digger he was carrying and toed it with his boots. Seconds went by.

"If I wasn't in my seventy-three," he shook his finger, "if I wasn't in my seventy-three going on my seventy-four, I'd settle the hull matter and ride her myself."

Grandma straightened up from bending over the clothesbasket.

"Clarence!" she said, speaking loud enough so her voice would reach Paul. "Seems like somethin' told me to save the pully bone from that marsh hen. It's hangin' above the almanac in the kitchen."

Grandpa slapped his thigh. "Nothin' could be fairer than a pully bone!" he exclaimed. "The one that breaks off the biggest part gits to ride."

"I'll fetch it," Maureen called over her shoulder as she disappeared into the kitchen. She came out holding one end of the wishbone very gingerly, as though it might break off in her hand.

"Now then!" Grandpa cleared his throat nervously.

Grandma picked up the empty clothesbasket, then set it down again in the very same spot.

"Now then," Grandpa repeated, "stop that goldurn whittlin' and step up, Paul."

Paul's legs seemed as wobbly as a colt's. He came forward very slowly, and his hand shook as he grasped the other end of the wishbone with his thumb and forefinger.

"Squinch yer eyes tight," Grandma directed. "Make yer wish. And when I count three, *pull!*"

Paul and Maureen each took a long, deep breath as they clutched the tiny wishbone that was to decide their fate.

"One," Grandma counted slowly. "Two it is — and three!"



With a slight cracking noise, the wishbone broke. The larger half was in Paul's hand.

He gave a whistle of joy. Then his face sobered as he caught sight of Maureen, who was burying her half of the wishbone in the sandy soil. She looked up, trying to cover her feelings with a little smile.

"You won, Paul," she said, blinking. "You'll ride her better anyhow."