



Monday – I can't believe I'm really here at Pony Camp!

I feel EXCITED about being here, but NERVOUS at the same time!

I'm EXCITED 'cos I haven't ridden since we moved down here from London three weeks ago – I can't wait to get back in the saddle! And I'm NERVOUS because at the stables where I used to ride and help out at weekends there were these older girls and ... well, I don't really want to write all about what happened with them in my lovely new Pony Camp Diary. And, anyway, this is meant to be a new beginning.

Actually, me and Mum are both having a fresh start down here in Dorset. As it's the summer holidays I haven't started my new school yet, so it's been a bit boring 'cos I've just been helping Mum unpack boxes and paint the living room.



Sunnyside Stables



I felt extra NERVOUS when Jody showed us up here to my room. I wanted Mum to stay for a while, but she had to go back to the new house and wait for the gasman, so I ended up on my own. There are three beds in here, and Jody said the one by the window was her daughter Millie's, so I had the choice out of the bunk beds. I went for the bottom one, and as I started unpacking my stuff, I could hear all this noise and laughter coming from the room next door.



Sunnyside Stables



The two girls in there were really loud and confident – the exact opposite of ME! Then I heard all these footsteps on the stairs and someone yelling, “Hey, Harry!” at the top of their voice. For about one second I thought there was a BOY at Pony Camp, but then I heard this girl’s voice yelling back and I realized that Harry must be short for Harriet.

And that was when Frankie bustled in with her mum, who is also really loud and who kept on calling her Francesca. I felt really shy and I wished I could shrink into a corner and disappear. But when Frankie rolled her eyes at me, I couldn’t help smiling. She shooed her mum out and said hello, and after a few seconds of me blushing shyly with no words coming out I finally managed to mumble, “Hi, I’m Emily.”

Frankie said, “Hi, Ems. Call me Frankie, everyone does. Well, apart from *her*, of course!”



She waved towards the door, obviously meaning her mum. "And my big sister Harry when she's trying to annoy me! That's her loud voice you can hear, by the way – she's got such a big mouth!"



I smiled as she threw her stuff on the top bunk. No one's ever called me Ems before – I quite like it. I was trying to think of something to say when Harry put her head round the door and shouted, "Come on, Frog Face, we're all going down to the yard!" She grabbed



Frankie's arm and started pulling her out of the room. Frankie giggled and cried, "Don't call me Frog Face, Monkey Breath!" Then Frankie tried to grab my arm, and I wanted to go with them, but my feet stayed stuck to the spot. For some reason, I don't seem to be that good at joining in.

"I'll be down in a sec!" I told them, as brightly as I could. "I just want to start off my diary first."



So that's what I've been doing!

Oh, hang on, even the other room with the younger girls in has gone quiet so everyone must be outside. Right, I'm going to take a deep breath and put on my hat and body protector (and a big smile), and go down to the yard.

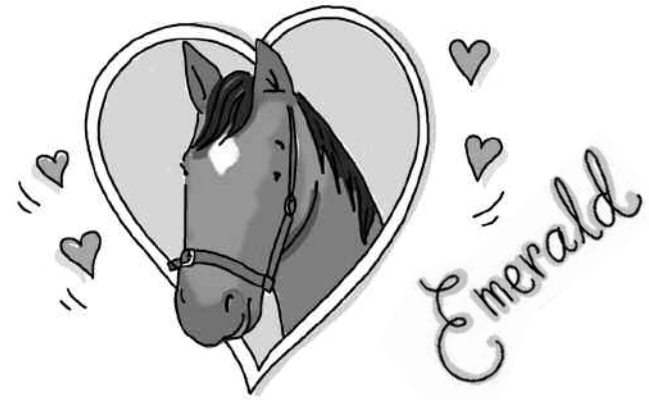


Monday 1.45p.m. - well, I still can't believe what happened this morning!

I'm so EXCITED and NERVOUS again! EXCITED because I have met the most amazing pony called Emerald, who I'm desperate to have as my own for the week. And NERVOUS because I'm waiting to hear from Sally, our instructor, about whether I can have her or not.

Sally's gone off to speak to Johnny about it (he's the yard manager and also Millie's dad), and she said she'll come and find me after lunch. We've finished eating now, and I'm writing this sitting at the picnic table outside the farmhouse so I can keep a lookout for her.

OK, well, this is a pic of (fingers crossed!) my fab pony, Emerald!



She isn't supposed to be one of the Pony Camp ponies at all, but as soon as I saw her I knew I wanted her, and Sally did admit it seems like Emerald has chosen me, too. But she also said I'd have to ride Flame first in the assessment and, oh whoops, I'm trying to say everything at once and missing things out. Right, I'll take a deep breath and slow down and write everything in order.

OK, so I headed over to the yard to find the others, and as I walked between the car park and lower field this pony came bolting towards me, completely loose, with a head collar on and



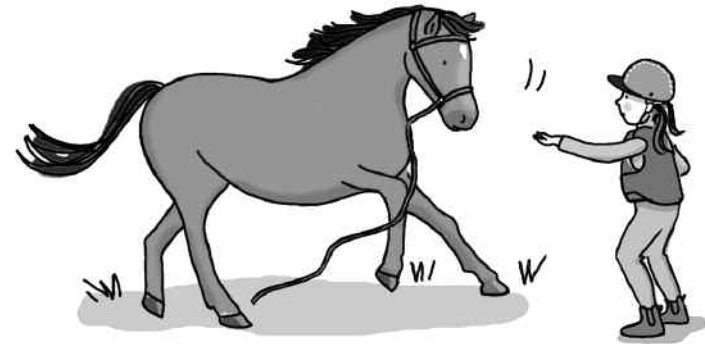
her lead rope dangling. It was Emerald! I didn't know her name then, of course. And I didn't know that she'd just arrived at Sunnyside and had gone bombing out of the trailer as Sally was unloading her. But I did know that she was the most gorgeous pony I'd ever seen.

She was skittering around, looking ever so frightened. For a moment I froze in shock, but then I thought how dangerous that dangling lead rope was, and how I had to stop her from tripping up and having an accident.



I stood my ground as she came right up to me, and I spread my arms out so that she couldn't get past and gallop off up the track to the upper fields.

I took a deep breath and tried to relax. Emerald lowered her head and snorted; she seemed to be calming down a bit, too. I stepped towards her and put my hand out for her to smell.



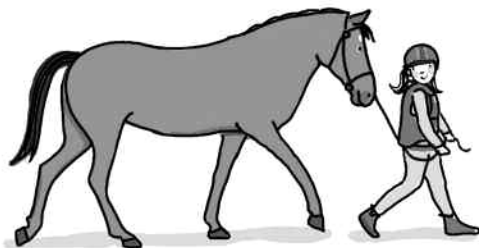
"Be careful!" Sally called, as she appeared round the corner. I gave a slight nod, then slowly turned so I was standing at Emerald's shoulder, and reached down for the end of the lead rope.



Then I stood there with both hands on the rope while Sally came over and took it from me. “Well done!” she said softly. “You showed a lot of horse sense by staying so calm.”

I smiled, and inside I was really proud of myself.

She asked my name, and just when I thought she was going to send me off to the yard to join the others she said I could help take Emerald into the barn instead. She told me to lead her into a small pen in the corner, away from the other ponies. As I walked her on, I kept glancing at her gorgeous, glossy bay coat and cute white star and big brown eyes, and thinking how beautiful and special she was.



We got some hay for her and filled up her water trough, and as I was stroking her nose to say goodbye, I blurted out to Sally, “Do you think, maybe, I could have Emerald as my pony this week?”

Sally frowned. “I’m sorry, Emily, but she’s not going to be ridden at Pony Camp for a while,” she said. “She’s very nervous and I need to work with her myself first.”

I tried to smile, but I couldn’t hide how disappointed I was. Emerald leaned her head over the railing and nudged my arm. I rubbed her neck and she snorted gently.



“It wouldn’t be an easy week,” Sally said then. I stared at her. Was she saying yes after all? “I’ve ridden Emerald myself and I know her temperament and capabilities,” she continued. “You won’t be able to jump her, and you’ll have to keep her calm in flat work or she might bolt off with you.”

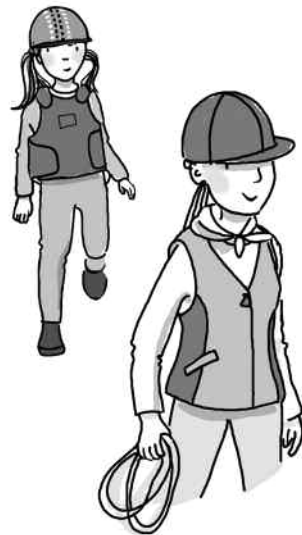


“I don’t mind,” I insisted. “I don’t care about any of that, I just want to be with Emerald.”

Sally smiled. “I know you do, Emily, but we have to be sensible. I’ll need you to ride another pony in the assessment lesson, so I can see what level you’re at. And then we’ll think about it. OK?”

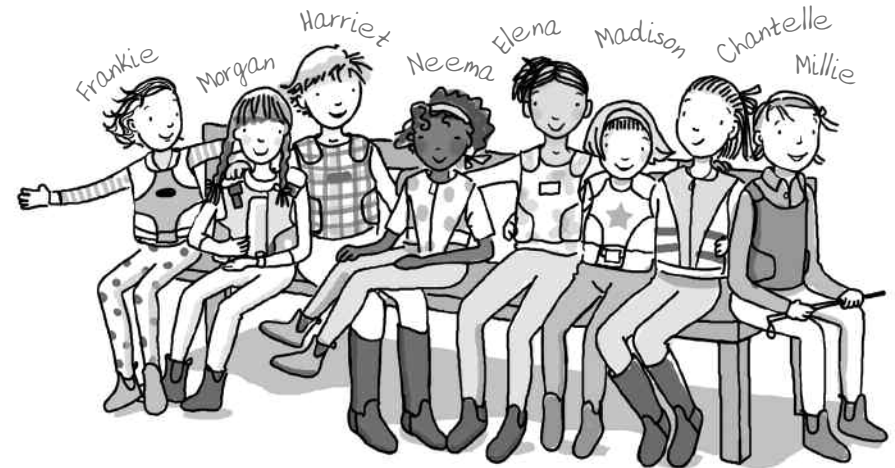
“OK!” I cried, grinning.

So I gave Emerald a last pat, and showed her that I had my fingers crossed for us. Then Sally and I went to join the others, who were all hanging around outside the office, squished on to the bench and chatting away. I hung back behind Sally as we neared them. I wish I could just talk to new people like that, as if I’ve known them for ages. Frankie and the others make it look so easy.



Everyone had already introduced themselves, but Sally got them to say their names to me, too, which made me the centre of attention and left me feeling completely embarrassed!

The other girls are:



Harriet said she and Chantelle and Elena (she’s Spanish so you say it as Elay-na) are all 12 and in the same class at school. They’re sharing



Sunnyside Stables



a room in the farmhouse, too. Madison and Morgan are 8 and 9, and they've come all the way over from New York. They're staying with their English grandma for the summer, and she had the idea of sending them to Pony Camp. I just love their American accents! They're sharing the other room with Neema, who's only-just-9. Me and Frankie are both 10-nearly-11 so our room is the middy-aged one, which we're sharing with Millie.

The girls all seemed really nice, and as Sally read out the Safety on the Yard rules I wished I could just pile on to the bench, too, but I stayed put. I didn't quite dare join in with everyone, in case one of them shoved me off. Maybe that sounds a bit of a strange thing to say, but the older girls at my last yard seemed nice at first, too, and they turned out to be really horrible, so I can't help thinking that kind of stuff.



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Luckily, everyone had to get up then 'cos we were going on a tour around Sunnyside. We found out about the fire drill meeting points, and we were learning the safety stuff as we went round – like in the tack room Sally told us that we must put any brushes or numnahs and things away after using them, and in the yard she showed us how to tie up a pony safely.

As we walked around, everyone was chattering together in a big group, so I just smiled and tried to join in here and there. When Sally showed us the barn everyone went completely crazy over the ponies that were being tacked up for us. But I was just gazing at Emerald, who was standing in her little pen, looking back at me.

Then it was time to get matched up with our ponies. Back in the yard, everyone started to pull on their hats and gloves, chatting excitedly. Sally got her list and read out who was on who, as



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Jody and Lydia, the stable girl, led the ponies out.

This is who everyone got:

Chantelle and Charm



Elena and Jewel



Just for the assessment. Flame's lovely, but I really want Emerald!

Madison and Sugar



Frankie and Star



Morgan and Monsoon

Harriet and Shine



Millie and Tally (her own pony!)

Neema and Prince



Sunnyside Stables



We all mounted up and rode out into the manège. As we began walking round the track, with Chantelle and Charm leading the way, I sat up nicely on Flame and tried to concentrate on riding really well, to prove to Sally that I'm good enough to handle Emerald.

When we'd walked round on both reins and done a few circles and walk to halt transitions, Sally called out for each of us to trot to the back of the ride in turn. When it was my go, Flame had a little buck and skitter and went sideways, and she wouldn't go into trot. I got a bit flustered in case Sally thought I was rubbish for not making a nice transition, but then I made myself take a deep breath, get down into my seat and steer Flame back on to the track. I took half the long side to get a really forward-going bouncy walk so that when I asked again she trotted on without messing around. And it worked!





“Good girl, Emily!”
Sally called out.
“Yeah, go, Ems!”
whooped Frankie.



“Ern, excuse me,
who’s the teacher here?”
said Sally sternly, but she wasn’t really cross.

Frankie giggled and I couldn’t help smiling,
too. I think maybe she is a really truly nice girl
and not just nice to you when she feels like it.

The rest of the lesson went quite well,
although Flame had a bit of a freak-out when
I asked for canter. But I kept calm and asked
again in the next corner, and then we got it OK.

After the assessment, I was worried about
not doing everything perfectly on Flame, but
Sally smiled at me on the way back to the yard.
She said *she* was impressed, but she just had to
go and speak to Johnny...

Oh, there she is...



Two mins later -
I CAN ride Emerald!!!



I’m writing down Sally’s exact words so I can
remember them FOR EVER.

She said,

“Flame really tested you today, and you kept
calm and in control. You’re not just a good rider, Emily,
you’ve got a really good understanding of ponies, too.
I think you’ll be OK to have Emerald as your pony
this week.”

Well, something like that, anyway!

I nearly hugged her, but I didn’t because she
is the instructor. I couldn’t stop beaming, though!

Gotta go – it’s time to get down to the yard.
I can’t wait to see my GORGEOUS pony!

MY pony – hee hee.

I can’t believe she’s really mine.