

Risen

Risen

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A story about a girl and her horse. Getting through the struggle of loosing your horse and moving on with your life through helping another. -Unfinished and not been proof read so will have mistakes etc. Just putting it on here to see what people think so far :D -



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The high-pitched sound of my mobiles alarm woke me. I turned in my bed and picked up my phone. 6am. It was a Saturday. Yep, I get up every weekend, and weekday, at 6am. No I'm not crazy. I'm 17 years old and I have my own horse. Lucky, I know. But unfortunately having my own horse also means no lie-ins. But I wouldn't trade in Topper, my beautiful chestnut Hanoverian, for all the lie-ins in the world. Stretching, I kicked off my bed sheets, relieved to find outside my covers it was warm. I could tell before even opening my curtains that it was already a warm, sunny day with no clouds in the sky. I rushed to shower and get ready. Downstairs I quickly grabbed a breakfast bar. I never really ate breakfast with the family anymore. Before I got Topper it was kinda a family tradition. But that was another thing I was more than willing to give up if it meant having my own horse. The rest of the family got up at about 9ish and ate together. My dad always made the most amazing breakfasts on Saturday. The whole works. But Topper was more important, and I was happy with my breakfast bar. I smiled to myself as I quietly opened the squeaky cupboard door to where we kept all of our keys. Grabbing my car keys I dashed out the front door. I stopped for a while as I breathed in the sweet morning fresh air. I checked my phone for the time, 6.26am. I was on time. Today was an important day for me and Topper, I couldn't be late. The car journey to the stables only takes me 10minutes in the car, and this morning it felt really good to be up and getting to the stables. I was very excited about what the day held for us both. I met my two best friends at the early morning café. Jenna and Sam. Laughing. I parked the car and put the window down. I stuck my head out and shouted, "Last one to the stables has to muck out Toppers stall!" leaving my window unwound I drove off at speed to the stables still smiling as I looked in my wind mirror and saw them both scrabbling to get into their cars. Sam had been my best friend since primary school, dark blonde hair that was never neat no matter how often I had attempted a brush or gel. He had once shown an interest in me but that was all in the past as I had said riding was the most important thing in my life and he had found Jenna. We often joked how Topper, and his 17hh grey Dutch Warmblood, Sennie were totally attached to each other jus like we were. Again that was until Jenna came along with her beautiful, 15.2hh bay Andalusian, mare came to stay at the stables. Sennie had taken an instant liking to Fantasia Vida. However, Jenna was possibly the single most amazing person I knew. She was amazing with horses. She alone had backed Fantasia to ride and had taken her to Premier Dressage tests which she often came home with 2nd or up. Although Fantasia herself isn't much of a jumper, Jenna has coached Sam and Sennie and they have now become an almost unbeatable team. They would be unbeatable, if me and Topper weren't around. Jenna turned up almost 3years ago, and she literally turned my world around, but it was for the better. Now Topper isn't followed around 24/7 by Sennie, and I'm not followed around 24/7 by Sam. It feels better this way and me and Topper can both concentrate on our training for A level show jumping.

I reached the stables before them both. I grinned to myself wondering which one of them was going to be unfortunate enough to muck out Toppers stall. Toppers one flaw was that he was the messiest horse I had ever mucked out. He didn't care what he slept in and long as he was comfortable and made enough mess of himself for me to spend at least an hour on him everyday just making sure the poo smell was out of his coat. locking my car I walked round to the back 6stables where they kept the majority of the show liveries. I looked around at the big all-weather arena where there was an area for show jumping and then a separate area for dressage. Then there was the outdoor area that we were only allowed to use in the summer months to save the horses feet and the ground from bogging up too much. As it was still early I decided to take my time getting Topper ready to ride. I always kept his halter and lead rope tied next to his door so nobody from the riding school side of the livery used them. I had had them specially made for Topper on his 6th Birthday and he had won me my 1st 4star show. "Hey boy." I said gently. Topper was lying down his muzzle between his front legs resting on the soft straw beneath him. As soon and I had spoken his head lifted and he nickered gently and stood. His great body towering above me. He hadn't gotten his name Topper for nothing. He

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had been a very tall foal and that had followed as he had grown and he had finally settled at an enormous 17.2hh the tallest that a registered Hanoverian had been. But despite his height, he was in proportion to his body. He wasn't long-backed or heavy headed. He was perfect. As I clipped his lead rope to the halter I heard Sam and Jenna coming up the path to collect their two horses. "So which one of you two is mucking out Toppers stall?" I asked innocently. They looked from each other and back to me.

"Neither," Sam laughed, "we have our own horses to muck out. Besides," she stopped and grinned cheekily, "Sennie's grey. Means more work, so I wouldn't be doing it anyway." He gently nudged Jenna's arm before dashing off to get Sennie ready to ride. Jenna came over and said hello to Topper. He snorted and she got covered in snot.

"Urgh! Topper! That's gross." she laughed as she wiped her face. Topper nodded his head and nudged Jenna's arm. "You could get around anyone couldn't you boy." she said softly and rubbed his noble head between his eyes. It was true, not only was Topper an amazing jumper, he had an amazing temperament and he was also blessed with looks that could get him anywhere. He was a fiery chestnut, with a wide blaze running down from the centre of his eye to his muzzle. It grew wider at the top into more of a circle. His left front leg and his two back had small white socks and his right front had a big white stocking. He was recognised wherever he went because of his looks. But the thing that made me love him the most were his eyes. They were so big, so deep like big black pools of love. And they were soft and intelligent eyes. Like he knew exactly what you wanted of him. Jenna got Fantasia out and tied her next to Topper and we started to chat and laugh. Topper had a particularly large stable stain on him today which really annoyed me because Sam, Jenna and I had all planned a ride out around the tracks before the stables got too busy. I was the last to tack Topper up as usual. Jenna had bought me Toppers tack. Not only did Topper excel in English riding and jumping. But we had recently begun Western riding for my birthday present. I was loving it and Topper had taken to it really well and didn't get English and Western mixed up at all. So today I was taking Topper out in Western tack. I mounted and quickly settled into the beautiful soft leather of the Western saddle that was so comfortable and relaxed to ride in. I gathered up the reins into one hand and gently shifted my weight, asking Topper to walk without leg aids. This was another thing I had been practicing. I rode over to Jenna and Sam. Next to Sennie, Fantasia should of looked small at only just 15hh, but she somehow managed to make up for her height. Her magnificent stride and the graceful way she always held her head in a gentle ark never failed to take my breath away.

"You ready?" Sam called.

"You bet." I answered. "Which track are we going to take?" I asked looking at the two of them in their familiar English tack. Jenna answered my question.

"We were thinking of going up the Medowcreek walk. Then take the route that takes about an hour after that around the race stream. What do you think?" she asked. I grinned with excitement and Topper pranced on the spot underneath me, his muscles rippling with every move.

"That sounds amazing to me and Topper," I grinned looking at both of them. We were all just as excited as the other, "who's leading?" I asked.

Two and a half hours later we arrived back at the yard. All three horses were sweating and puffing gently and all three of us were most defiantly sweating. The heat had really gotten up, so we had stopped in the stream and let the horses drink and paddle. There had also been a big solid log lying across the path. Sennie had taken it with ease with inches to spare, and Topper, not wanting to be outdone, had also jumped it with style. Both Sam and Jenna had congratulated me on my Western riding and I was thrilled that my two best friends thought I was doing well. But now it was time to work.

"I'll see you guys later," I said to them both, "I'm going to give Topper a hose down and turn him out. Then I gotta get on with my job." I smiled at them gratefully.

"Yeah, us too. We'll see you later. You wanna hang out when your finished?" Sam asked. Unlike me they didn't work at Steep Ridge mucking out stables and cleaning the horses ready for the riding school kids. They both worked in offices. I didn't know how they could stand to be sitting at a computer all day. Stuck inside all day everyday. But they enjoyed it for some reason.

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“I can't, sorry guys, I've got a really important competition this weekend so me and Topper have got to keep practicing.” I felt really bad. I often did this. Pushed them away because Topper needed work. But Topper was, and always had been my number one priority. And I hoped both of them understood that. Or at least knew that. I looked down feeling ashamed. “I promise I'll make time for us to go out to the cinema or something.” I looked up at their faces. They looked slightly hurt but I could see Jenna understood. She was often very busy with Fantasia and getting her ready for her dressage tests.

“Yeah we know, Kristy. We both know how much this competition means to you. We'll see you here tomorrow?” she asked hopefully

“Yeah. Defiantly. I'm working again so I'll defiantly be here.” I replied. Sam smiled at me slightly.

“You'd be here even if you weren't working Kris.” He and Jenna both said their goodbyes and left. I sighed heavily and began to hose Topper down. Sensing my uneasiness Topper nuzzled the top of my head. I patted his great shoulder and hugged him. Breathing in his musky, horsy smell. He just stood there. Like he knew I needed peace.

One, two, three. Over. I counted Topper's strides perfectly as we made the jump in perfect harmony. We cleared it with ease. I laughed and stroked his neck lovingly. I dismounted and put the jump up a couple more holes. I guessed this was now at about 1meter45centimeters. I felt really good today, so even though me and Topper usually stuck to 1meter20, I decided to go for it. Touching Topper's muzzle to the pole I asked him “So what do you think boy? Too big?” I looked into his eyes and they shone. He gently pushed the pole so it rocked in its holders. I laughed as he began nibbling the pole. I gave him a firm rub between the eyes and mounted. I took him around the ring. His long strides just eating up the ground beneath us and before I knew it, we had come face to face with the jump. I began counting strides again. But as usual, I didn't need to. Topper took the big jump with ease, collecting himself and flying over it with air to spare. We landed with such a gentle thud and he easily collected himself up and steered himself for a big oxer jump that was very solid and stood at both a meter tall and just under a meter wide. Gathering my position I pushed him on, knowing he would need more speed for this jump. My heart seemed to stop and his became mine. We were one again. That was the main reason why I enjoyed jumping Topper so much. I had never ridden another horse like him. If you asked him to jump something he would. He gave you his heart as he soared over jump after jump. I jumped the last and began a warm down when someone called from the side of the ring.

“He sure is a magnificent jumper,” the man said, “just takes it all in his stride doesn't he.” He finished. I knew this wasn't a question so I rode Topper over to him to see if I recognised who it was. It was Steve, the yard owner.

“Yeah,” I replied, “he loves it. Always jumping his heart out this boy.” I said and dismounted, running up Topper's stirrups and loosening his girth, I took his reins over his head so I was ready to lead him.

“You coming out?” Steve asked.

“Yeah. We're both done for the day.” I said as Steve opened the gate for me, allowing me to easily lead Topper through. “Thanks” I said gratefully.

“No problem,” he replied, “you all ready for the show on Sunday?” he asked

“I hope so.” I replied fiddling with Topper's reins.

“Well, if you and Topper continue to jump like that you are going to have no problem placing.” Steve said, “See you tomorrow.” he said as he patted Topper's neck and walked up to his house. I began un-tacking Topper when he yelled from his front door.

“Kristy! Make sure that you set the alarm on the tack room please.”

“Okay.” I called back.

Once Topper was all settled in his stall happily munching on his hay net, I took a broom and had a quick tidy of the yard before checking on the horses and setting the alarm on the tack room. Then left to go home, but not before planting a final goodnight kiss on Topper's velvet soft muzzle.

At home I answered emails, showered and got into bed with a hot cup of tea. By the time my mother got home from work it was 11pm and I was pretty tired but she came up into my room and sat on the end of my bed.

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“You know Kristy,” she began. I sat up knowing this wouldn’t just be a quick chat, “I was talking to Sally at work today. She said that there’s a really good horse husbandry course just starting up and the local college.” she paused. “We’d had a talk like this many times before, “How would you feel about applying for it?” she must of seen the expression on my face because before I could even talk she began again. “I know that you think you’ve got your life planned ahead for you and your eventing career on Topper, but you’ve been working at the stables almost every day of the week since you finished school. And I would just like you to have options if circumstances changed.” she smiled and patted my leg onto of the duvet.

“Mum,” I started, “nothings going to happen. Toppers going really well at the moment and Steve thinks that me and him are going to really go places. I’m fine without college,” I thought for a second, “in fact I probably know a lot more than they could teach me anyway.” she looked into my eyes for a second.

“Okay love. But that option is always open for you. Remember that.”

“Yes mum. Can I please sleep now? Topper needs training in the morning.”

“Of course love. Sleep well.” she said and gently kissed my forehead before going to join dad downstairs watching TV. I settled again and quickly fell to sleep.

The week flew by too fast and I didn’t see Jenna or Sam outside the stables for the rest of the week unless they were riding. But I hadn’t really had much time to think about that. I had been so busy with Topper and work that I didn’t realise it was Saturday when I arrived at work until Sam asked me if I was all ready for the show tomorrow.

“It’s tomorrow!” I exclaimed.

“Yep. Me and Sennie are really ready for it,” he smiled, “in fact, I think this may be our show to beat your ass.” he joked. I laughed along. Grinning at Sam’s teasing.

“Yeah, it might just be,” I paused for dramatic effect, “but I bet Steve didn’t tell you me and Topper have just begun jumping 1meter50?” this was more a statement than a sentence. But I watched with enjoyment as I saw Sam’s mouth drop.

“Your kidding me?” he asked

“Nope.” I replied grinning to myself. Him and Sennie obviously hadn’t got to that height yet.

“Aw great. Yet again another show you have the upper hand on,” he nudged my arm, “I may have to start competing in different shows from you. Me and Sennie are getting tired of seeing your and Topper’s arse in front of us in the lap of honour.” he joked.

“Well, maybe you’ll get lucky tomorrow and win.” I stuck my tongue out and squirted his boots with the hose I was using to hose down Millie’s feet. Millie was a dun riding school pony and one of the kids had just walked her through a whole load of mud which meant more work for me.

“Hey!” he exclaimed, “How about you hurry up doing her feet and come get the boys ready for tomorrow. We both still need to bath and braid them so I’ll meet you round the back.” and off he went with Sennie’s head collar. I grinned and carried on hosing Millie’s legs.

I finished 10mintues later and I had turned out all the horses I needed to and had finished for the day. So Topper was now my number one priority. I loved that thought. Smiling to myself as I walked around to Toppers stable to see him already tied up. I was slightly confused but I just took it as Sam getting him in from the field for me. I walked to the front of Topper and noticed he had a bridle on. This shocked me more than anything because it wasn’t his bridle, and nobody else rode Topper apart from me. I was about to ask Sam if he knew anything when a tall woman walked around the corner with Toppers show saddle that I had left out to clean for tomorrow. I stood there looking at her, feeling very confused for a moment and she continued walking, ignoring my confused stare. She walked right up to Topper and chucked his saddle on his back, startling him. This woke me from my trance.

“What are you doing?” I asked. She looked at me sceptically.

“Taking up this horse. I have come here to look around and ride, and was told to tack up which ever horse I wanted. And I liked this one.” she finished. She had a very clipped Yorkshire accent with a hint of poshness. Obviously she had been brought up well and around a lot of money. her spotless white breeches told

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me this. Anger was slowly welling up inside me. How dare she choose to ride my horse when my horse isn't a riding livery he's a show livery. How dare she ride my horse when she had no right. How dare she just chuck the saddle on his back with no regard for him or check to notice that the bridle she had put on him was so obviously too small. He turned his head to me with questioning in his eyes. I shook my head and took off the bridle. Knowing that he wouldn't wander off with me here. And then before she noticed too much I quickly and swiftly pulled his saddle off his back and gently placed it on the floor beside Topper. The woman looked at me angrily.

“Excuse me, but what on earth do you think you are doing?” she asked. I was shocked at her tone of voice.

“How dare you even think of asking me that. I am this horse's owner and he is not a riding school horse.” I said and slipped on Topper's head collar ready to lead him away. She stood in front of me. She was quite a bit taller than me, but this didn't deter me in anyway. Topper was my horse and she had handled him too roughly for my liking.

“I was told to choose a horse of my very own choice. I will not be told what I can and cannot ride by immature children.” her eyes bored into mine.

“And I will not have you riding my horse. He is very valuable and is on a very rigorous training session. Having somebody else ride him wouldn't do him any good at all,” I stopped before adding, “I will not be told what to do by some beginner rider with my horse.” she looked as if she were going to snap back when Steve came around the corner. He assessed the situation quickly.

“Is there something wrong Kristy?” he asked looking from me to the woman standing beside me.

“Yes,” I began, “this woman is being very forceful with Topper and telling me what to do with him. She cannot ride him because he isn't on riding livery. I'm sure there's a nice safe horse for a beginner that's on the riding livery.” the woman took in a sharp breath and Steve looked shocked.

“Kristy, I'm sorry, I told her she could choose whichever horse she wanted. I apologise.” she said

“I don't want your apology Steve. I want one from her. You should of seen the bridle she had on him.”

The woman beside me cleared her throat.

“I am sorry young lady. I had no idea that this horse was on a special livery. I just thought you were some over-protective riding school kid wishing he was yours that's why I got so defensive.” she said and she sounded sincere enough.

“That's okay. But next time, if there is one, then please make sure you use the right fitting bridle and the correct saddle. And put them on gently.” I finished
She smiled slightly.

“I can see you have the horse's best interest at heart. And that's a wonderful thing to see. I'm sorry about the roughness it's just that I am in a terrible rush today so I didn't look at the bridle size like I would usually.” she looked about ready to continue when Steve interrupted.

“Kristy, I'd like you to meet Jane. She's the new show jumping instructor we have here.” I drew in a quick breath and I know understood why Steve had looked so shocked at the situation. She held out her hand to me and I shook it

“It's nice to meet you Kristy.” I nodded back. Shit. I thought to myself. What a great way to talk to my new instructor.

3 hours later it was beginning to get dark at the stables. Topper was rugged, braided and bathed. And he looked like a dream. I had massaged his legs to keep them strong and supple for the show tomorrow and he had fallen asleep whilst I had been doing so. I gave him a kiss on the nose and said goodnight, slipping out of his stall and quietly shutting the door behind me before he had a chance to wake up. Once in my car I checked my reflection quickly and applied a small amount of lipgloss. I had arranged to meet Jenna and Sam at the local pub for good luck drinks before the show tomorrow. It was like a religion to us to do so. One of Jenna's amazing ideas. I arrived and we chatted about the usual stuff. Jenna and Sam in their own little love world, whilst I sat, head in hand, stirring my coke with a straw. Not drinking. Just thinking. Thinking about what tomorrow would bring. A first place ribbon I hoped, laughing at myself for thinking like that. I knew, as well

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as everyone else, that I didn't care about getting placed really, as long as Topper did his best for me and I did my best for him. Which I hoped I did, because his heart was always in my possession whenever I rode him. I knew that we would place, we always did. Topper was too good to not place. I imagined myself onboard Topper, riding around the arena, in the winners lap. With a big red sash and flowers around Topper's neck. Him blancing his strides perfectly, his head proudly arched as he knew he had won. And made me happy. He always did. I couldn't imagine my life without him. He is definatly a horse in a million.

â Hey, Kris!â Sam had interrupted my daydream and was currently waving his hand in my face whilst Jenna watched amused. â You planning on leaving anytime soon? Its half ten.â he gestured at his watch. I looked down at mine just to make sure he wasn't joking.

â SHIT!â I jumped up, grabbing my coat. â Im really sorry guys! how long have you been waiting?â I asked

â Oh, not long,â replied Jenna with a small smile on her face, â only about 20minutes. We didn't want to disturb you.â Sam chuckled and I apoligsed again.

â I will see you both tomorrow yeah? Meet at the reception at the show at 6?â I asked still rushing to pay for my drink bill.

â Yeah you sure will Kristy.â Jenna smiled

â See you there.â Said Sam as I hugged both him and Jenna and left for my car.

My alarm woke me at 4am. I hadnt gotten that much sleep. I had gotten home at eleven last night. And I had to have a shower before getting into bed. And once I was in bed I found it really difficult to get to sleep. I had done eventually, but it had left me with around 4hours sleep. I was shattered. But knowing I had to get up made me force myself into the bathroom and splashing cold water on my face. Just before I left I wrote a note on the pad on the fridge reminding my mum where the show was and what time my class was. I skipped breakfast today and just jumped into my car and drove to the stables. On arrival everyone on the show team was up and about, and one of the grooms, named Emily, had already groomed Topper until he shone for me,

â Thank you so much Emily, I havent really been on the ball this morning.â I apolised.

â Hey, don't worry about it,â she told me smiling, â Topper was amazing as always, and he had actually managed to keep himself stable stain free.â She laughed, always happy this girl. â I think he knows he has to do well today, so he decided to have a good start to the day.â She finished, â Good luck Today Kristy.â She said as she walked away,

â Thanks!â I shouted after her. I made my way over to Topper who had already noticed me and had said his hello in a way of a wicker. I quickly inspected him for cleanness. Emily had done a wonderful job. So I gave him a pat before quickly putting on his travel rug and wraps before taking him over to the show trailer. Sam had his own trailer so he had already left. Me and Topper had to use the yards lorry as I couldn't afford my own one. But this lorry was nice and big so Topper could comfortably stand. After 15minutes of waiting to leave we finally did. Me following behind in my car, keeping careful watch of the trailer. As we drew closer to the show ground I began to have a good feeling about today. That was until I saw the course I was entered in.

The jumps were big. Solid. Scary, and had a lot of tight turns. I had expected big, but not this bold. I wasn't even sure Topper had seen fillers like this before. Steve had come over and put a comforting arm around my shoulders.

â You have nothing to worry about,â he explained, â You know Topper better than anyone. And even I know that he will try his heart out for you.â He smiled giving my arm a gentle squeeze before telling me to go get Topper warmed up as my turn was in an hour. I turned away. Not really wanting to look at the course I would soon go over. I took a deep breath before registering what Steve has just said. The more I thought about it the more I understood. He knew as well as I did, that if anyone could clear that course it was Topper. The warm up ring was busy, so I took Topper into the quietest corner I could find and took him through his paces. Asking him to extend and collect his strides as I knew he would need to. Once I felt he was loose enough to jump, I aimed him towards the small striaght that probably stood at about 75cm. Topper bounced over it with a flick of his tail, as if to say â we can do better than thatâ . As I collected him into a canter a fimilar flash

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of grey sped past me and jumped the bigger jump which stood at a large 1m40cm. It was Sam and Sennie. I smiled as they cleared it, then took Topper towards it, knowing Sam would now be watching. Topper pricked his ears at the large jump and with a gentle nudge from me I felt his confidence pick up and he collected himself over the jump. Clearing it with inches to spare. I gave him a massive pat as we landed and pulled him back into a trot, and finally a walk until I stood next to Sam.

â Woah Kris.â Sam looked shocked, â That was amazing. I thought Sennie took that well, but Topper hardly looked at it. He looked effortless when he jumped that!â I laughed knowing he was telling the truth or he wouldn't of said it.

â He did feel amazing,â I replied, â When are you in?â I asked.

â Two before you, I checked just so I knew if I could watch you. And I can!â he smiled. He looked very reassured and I wish I felt like he looked. But I didn't want to knock his confidence so I left the subject of how nervous I was about the course and wished him luck as I went to let Topper rest before we went into the ring. I was number 12. Meaning I had the grueling task of watching 11 other riders on there horses struggle with the high-tech course. Only one rider had gone clear so far, a red headed girl riding a black arab, but she had gotten time faults as she was careful about picking her routes around the jumps. The more I watched the riders the more I thought into my strategy. I knew I had to take it fairly steady, and even in a steady pace Toppers long strides could easily eat up the ground and keep me in the allocated amount of time before I started to get penalties put against my name. Most of the horses were struggling with the big triple bar jump, the wide oxer and the 3 straights which were spaced very closely together. I knew Topper well enough to know that he could easily do the 3. They were simple, they just required a very collected canter. The Triple bar would be tricky as you had to have enough speed to get your horse to really pick up his feet and stretch, or all three bars would be down. Too rushed, however, Topper could loose his footing and fall. The oxer looked like a simple jump. One of the simplest on the course, but the angle it was placed, so close to the other jumps when in reality it was necessary to perfectly angle your horse to enable him to make a perfect jump over the oxer. That, I decided, would be the hardest fence for me to navigate such a big horse around. As the 9th person left the ring, horse in hand walking by the horses head, I realised he had fallen on the 3rd fence. He had wrongly navigated his horses stridings and had asked the horse to take off too close to the fence and the horse had stopped dead at a quick canter. A fall was an automatic disqualification. Horse nor rider seemed harmed by the fall however, which was what the rider was thankful for. Thats all I could ask for if Topper had a nasty fall like that. My nevers were now beginning to get the better of me as I watched as Sam and Sennie entered the arena to start their course. Topper had senced by tension and had began to pace. Steve noticed and told me I should go give him a quick jump before it was my turn in. Although his voice was calm and reassuring I could tell he was nervous. It was in his eyes.

â No,â I said, â I have to watch Sam. Make sure he gets round okay.â I attempted a small smile. It ended up feeling more like a grimace.

â He will be fine,â Steve assured me, â You both will be providing you start relaxing.â he said sternly. I took a deep breath and nodded. Then turned my attention to the arena. Sam had picked Sennie up into a steady collected canter, and before turning him through the starting line made sure his weight was perfectly balanced and he was sitting lightly in his saddle with gentle hands. Then he turned Sennie to the first fence. A brightly coloured Straight, fairly simple and Sennie took it beautifully. The big grey horse seemed to be at one with his rider. He seemed to know exactly what Sam wanted of him and did it, without any fuss. Sam had completed the triple bar with no complications, and he turned Sennie into the three fences. Sam managed to collect Sennie for the first and the second jump, but Sennie had over thought the third jump and added an extra stride, taking one pole down. Sennie seemed upset about the knocked pole and began to toss his head, Sam had no time to settle him before the next jump, the large oxer. At the angle Sam was at it would be dangerous to turn Sennie in so tightly. My heart was in my throat as I wondered what Sam would do. He could always turn Sennie in a circle near the jump, it would take precious time off his score but wouldn't put him or his horse in danger. It became clear what Sam was going to do. Sennie was rushing towards the jump, head in the air, his canter unbalanced. For one heart-stopping second I thought Sam was actually going to jump Sennie, he wouldn't surely? No. No, he didn't. I let out the breath I hadnt realised I had been holding in. Sam had managed to steer Sennie away from the oxers course, opting not to jump the fence.

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and that's rider Sam Trinket riding his own horse SennieStar, pulling up at the last fence. Ending his course in a disqualification.

The crowd gave Sam a cheer for doing so well and not risking his horse's health in order to possibly place. Sam smiled and waved to the audience before wishing the next rider in good luck and making his way over to Steve and me.

Woah Sam. You sure gave me a scare! Steve exclaimed, You did the right thing though. It would have been way too dangerous to take Sennie over that jump. He wasn't ready for it.

Thanks, Sam replied jumping off Sennie and allowing Steve to take Sennie's saddle off before giving his horse a pat he made his way towards me. Be real careful out there Kris, he looked at me sternly, I'm not kidding. It is really dangerous. One foot out of place and you're screwed. He explained. This was the first time that Sam had come out of the ring and warned me about the course. Usually if Sam didn't do well, he'd come out and tell me that he knew I'd do better as I had Topper. But today the worry in his eyes was real.

I promise you I will be careful. I looked into his eyes as I said this, and I knew he believed me.

Thank you Kris, he said, going around to Topper's head. Topper lowered his noble head to Sam's eye level and blew a raspberry in his face. Sam managed a smile and rubbed Topper between his eyes, You look after yourself and Kris out there boy, Sam began, It's dangerous and she's gonna need you to put your heart into it. Like we all know you do anyway. Sam smiled and Topper snorted and gently shoved Sam back before blowing into Sam's face. Sam blew back and he knew Topper would look after me.

And that was rider number 11 Shannon Hurly riding Yousie Lander with 12 faults and a refusal. Next in we have Number 12, Kristy West riding her own horse Too Far Tower.

Holy shit! That's me! I exclaimed. Startling Topper slightly. Just at that moment, Jenna came running over,

Oh my gosh Kristy! Good luck in there, I know you will do wonderfully, just put your faith in Topper and he will get you around safely. You know he will. She smiled encouragingly at me. This gave me all the confidence I needed. Jenna was like a breath of fresh air in the tense atmosphere.

Thanks guys, I said, We will both see you on the other side. I pushed Topper into a gentle trot, not daring to look back, just in case my nerves took over me again.

You could feel the tension in the audience as soon as I went into the arena. Everybody was now expecting the worst. I was determined to get through this. And as Jenna had said. Put my faith in Topper and I would be fine. So I did. He collected his strides brilliantly for the straits and spreads. We came to a bold upright with large wings and a huge wall as a filler. I had to have Topper collected for this or it would easily be knocked. So far we were clear and with only the triple bar, the three straight and the oxer left I had to judge myself perfectly. I didn't need to work very hard though, as Topper had collected himself up for the fence wonderfully and cleared it with inches to spare. I began to look towards the triple bar fence as we were going over, and realised I hadn't quite set up Topper's angle correctly. Topper was turning himself in the direction I was looking. Following his instinct. But I didn't think this through. What if Topper missed a stride. We would have the fence down for sure. Abandoning my mind of everything I had been taught, all that had been said to me. And even abandoning my trust in Topper, I began to slow him down. Topper fought with my hold, knowing that he needed the speed, that I wasn't giving him. But I wasn't thinking straight. Fear had overcome me and my mind was going over and over with what ifs. Topper needs to slow down and collect himself if he's going to clear this. I told myself over and over again. I needed the reassurance. I held him and held him back, until, with two strides to go. I released my hold on his mouth, realising what I had been doing was wrong. This confused Topper, but it was way too late to pull him out of the jump now. Cursing myself out loud for not following Topper and his instinct. I hadn't listened to him, and I had gotten us in this mess. I could now only do my best to get us both out of it safely. So I gave him a massive kick as I told him to jump. He knew when he needed to take off. But he didn't have the momentum to lift himself high enough or stretch himself enough to clear the bars. I could feel his whole body tremble as he tried his heart out to get me over safely. And for one amazing moment, the time stood still. It seemed as though we had cleared the fence. But as Topper began to land his body gave an almighty shudder and I realised what had happened.

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Topper hadn't been able to clear the fence. The first pole had caught between his front and back legs, causing him to become unbalanced, he had attempted to rebalance himself by straightening his front legs to early and the third pole had been knocked into his chest by his front legs. I felt him crash. I can honestly say I have never felt anything so scary in my life before. I felt his front legs hit the floor and buckle under the weight and strain of staying upright. And suddenly I was being hurtled over, away from Topper and his great body. As I flew, everything went into slow motion. The whole world seemed silent. And I didn't want to be the one to break it. I heard an almighty crash and tried to turn my head in the direction of the noise. As I did, I crashed into the fencing around the arena and landed on the soft sand. I layed still for what felt like hours. Everything was still silent. A soft ringing filled my ears as I slowly moved my head. Although I was happy staying still, the ringing began to get really irritating, and the more I moved my head, the clearer the noise around me became. I heard an ambulance, lots of people shouting. People crying. Others shouting my name. My name?! What. Someone gently touched my arm,

"I need you to stay very still Kristy," Sure. I thought. Why not, I'm comfortable here, "You have had a very nasty fall and we need to get you to a hospital." The voice continued. A fall? What was he talking about. As I lay there listening to the voices around me talk about how my arm looked broken and a rib felt broken too, I heard a heart wrenching sound. A horse, whinnying. It was shrill. Violent almost. But I recognised it even though I had never heard a noise quite like that in my life. Topper. My eyes shot open from my trance, the light hurt my head like a thousand nails ramming through my skull. I struggled to move, the man beside me, was a paramedic,

"You need to stay still Kristy, I need to get you checked over before you go anywhere," he said firmly. I wasn't staying here whilst Topper yelled to me like that.

"NO! I have to get to Topper!" Again I struggled to get up, "I'm fine I just need to see my horse!" I shouted. Upon hearing my voice Topper let out another shrill whinny. I couldn't bear this anymore! Why weren't they letting me move?! "I promise you I will stay still. After I have seen my horse! Please!" I looked into the paramedics eyes, and I saw understanding.

"Okay," he said, "but we can't be long, your not really in the shape to be walking around."

"That fine, just take me to my horse." I said, and he nodded. As he was helping my up, I felt my stomach crease in pain. I tried my best to stop the pain that was scorching my body affect my sight. I managed it slowly. I noticed that a big blue sheet had been put up around the area of the jump. Sam came running towards me out of nowhere.

"Kristy I am so sorry! I couldn't get in any sooner. They told me you weren't allowed anyone near you until you got up. I was so worried!" he said. His eyes looked red as though he had been crying. He stepped in to hug me,

"..N..No Sam.. I need to get to Topper." I explained to him shakily.. He wouldn't look me in the eye.

"What aren't you telling me Sam?" I asked. I had no reply, and I couldn't stand the silence, "SAM JUST TELL ME!" I yelled, clenching my side as the shout had really hurt my chest. At this Sam looked up at me and looked me straight into the eye. Tears were welling up in his eyes again.

"L..It's not looking good Krist. I'm not going to lie to you." I continued staring at him as he said this, then slowly moved my gaze to the blue circle that surrounded my best friend. "Kris! I don't think hes gonna make it!"

"NO!" I exclaimed, "NO! You cannot think like that Sam! Hes my horse! he can get through anything! Hes strong!" I told myself, believing it. Shaking the paramedic off my arm and barging past Sam, I walked as quick as I could towards my horse. My best friend.

I somehow managed to get through the blue sheet. And in some ways I began to wish I hadn't. What I saw made me feel sick. There was blood over the sand, and a pole had snapped. But try as I might I couldn't connect those two things to the main thing that stood out in my view. My magnificent horse, Topper. Standing. Looking first at his head, he looked fine to me and I couldn't understand where the blood had come from. Topper's ears were back, and his nostrils flared as he went to bite one of the vets holding him steady.

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“Topper!” I exclaimed, “Bad boy, you know not to do that.” On hearing my voice Topper’s ears pricked forward and he turned his great head to look at me. He wickerd gently to me and began to move forward. I hadn’t prepared myself for what happened next. Topper’s great body, the body that towered over so many others, that had kept me safe and happy for as long as I could remember, fell. His front left leg gave way completely, and I quickly realised he hadn’t been putting any weight on it. His body tumbled forwards and he collapsed. I ran forward, ignoring the pain that was now searing through my whole body and threw myself at his head. Looking into his eyes, the pain in them seemed to disappear slightly as he felt me near him and smelt in my familiar scent. I looked down towards his left leg slowly, and I could tell without needing further inspection that it was broken. At least in three different places. He had grazed all of his right side, starting from his shoulder, going all the way down to his rump. Now I understood where all of the blood had come from. I couldn’t bear to look at it anymore. I couldn’t. I picked his head up and cradled it in my arms. He looked as though he was merely a foal, so calm with me there. The vet then came over to me and explained to me that Topper had fallen and broken the pole, that was the reason for his graze, that same pole had gotten caught and had snapped as he had tried to free himself, which is how he first broke his leg, the other two places had broken on the landing. She then also explained how he had fractured his right hind leg as he had gotten up and twisted around to fast. She assumed it was in an attempt to find me. Although I took all of this information in, none of it seemed real. I sat for a while, stroking Topper’s ears, until I managed to get my voice back,

“So? Fix him then,” it was all I could think of saying, “That’s your job right? fixing horses who need fixing. So do it!” My tone at the end had upset Topper a little and he was attempting to get up. “No boy,” I said, “you have to stay down until you’re fixed.” but Topper didn’t listen. He struggled to lift his weight up so he could stand on his two good legs. Almost as if to prove that he could still do it. He was being so brave. I thought to myself, as tears came into my eyes. But I quickly wiped them away. Topper almost had himself steady when his back leg failed him and again he fell, this time grazing the side of his face. Jenna came in at that point, with Sam and Steve following close by. Upon seeing Topper, Jenna took in a sharp breath and then cried into Sam’s arms. Steve patted her on the shoulder and told her she needed to be strong, but to not go any closer. I apprehended this. I didn’t want anyone to see Topper until he was better. Steve came over to me and knelt beside me, softly stroking Topper’s neck.

“He did amazingly for you today Kris. You know that right?” he asked. tears welled up in my eyes again and this time I allowed them to flow. I knew what was coming. “He saved your life too. I hope you know that.” he added.

“How..?” I asked curiously.

“As you fell,” Steve began, “Topper bucked to get you away from him and to stop you from going underneath his back. If he hadn’t done that, you would have been crushed.” he explained, “You should be very proud of him.” he finished.

“I am! So very proud. But they won’t help him! I don’t understand why!” I exclaimed.

“I think you do Kris.” Steve said. I glanced up at him for a second. And saw in his eyes what he meant.

“NO!” I yelled. “NO! Topper can get through this! I know he can he just needs the chance!” I stuttered. My tears were falling freely now. Falling down my cheek and onto Topper.

“He’s had his chance Kris. You have given him a wonderful life, no horse could ask for better.”

“NO! I don’t want to hear you say that Steve! I want you to say that you believe he will get better. You have to believe in him Steve.” because I didn’t. My voice had faded towards the end. Topper drew his head up to mine and blew into my face. His sweet breath covered me in the familiarity that I have known forever. “He needs to get better Steve. He’s got to.” He has too.. At this point the vet came over towards me and put his hand on Topper’s stomach.

“I know you don’t want to hear this Kristy, but we have no other option. If we keep him alive he will just continue to suffer. With an injury like his there’s no chance in his leg repairing, and if either of his wounds get infected he will stand even less of a chance.” She told me softly, but with a firm tone in her voice

“I can’t lose him.” I managed

“Sometimes Kristy,” started Steve, “We have to lose those closest to us in order to free them. It’s not fair for him to be in pain Kris. I know you know that. I know you do.” Steve let me think about this for

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a while. He was right. I knew he was. I owed this to Topper. I looked into my noble horse's eyes. The pain was hidden by his love and trust for me. But I could see it. Every breath he was taking now seemed to be getting more hoarse. He was struggling. Anybody could see that, and I was being cruel and selfish by holding onto him. I took a deep breath, and looked up at the vet. My tear-stained face was now being washed away by a few droplets of rain, but being replaced by new tears.

“Okay. Do what you need to do.” I whispered, lump in my throat, “Just don't let him suffer anymore.” I finished, as I wound my hands tighter around Topper's head the vet went off to get the injection ready. So I still had a little bit of time. “Steve?” he looked up at me, “could I please have a minute alone?” I asked.

“Sure Kris. Just call if you need me.” he said as he patted my shoulder and went over and stood with Sam and Jenna. I knew I was alone now, so I took my opportunity.

“Hey boy,” I began, fighting to stop my tears as the rain beat down harder. It was almost as though the world was crying with me, “Thank you for being so brave today, and protecting me. I want you to know that no matter what my decision, or what happens after this, I will always love you Topper. Always. You have made my life worth living. You have been my life Topper. I don't know what I'm going to do without you.” Topper gently wickered at me and then coughed. He was putting too much strain on his body, “shhhh boy, you need to keep still and quiet.” I took a deep breath as the vet returned with a needle. “Now he won't feel anything ok hun? It will be just like he's going to sleep.” she explained. I felt like exploding, my throat was killing me, I could barely see through tears and the rain wasn't helping. Topper's great body was getting soaked and I finally saw that he looked very sick. The hard truth hit me that he wasn't ever going to recover. A burst escaped my lips, before I fought it back. I needed to be strong for Topper.

“I'm doing this for you Topper, please don't hate me. I can't stand seeing you in pain. And I won't have you suffer because I don't want to lose you.” the vet administered the injection,

“it will take about 30 seconds” she said. I nodded.

“I remember the time that we won our first class together boy. How proud I was of you. And how I was so upset one night I came and slept in your stall with you and you kept me warm,” his breathing was getting seriously slow now, the vet had her hand on his chest, counting his intakes of oxygen, “I love you boy, please don't ever forget it. If I had any other choice I would keep you. I would,” my tears were now blending into his skin I drew my head away from his to get one last look into his big, brave eyes, I saw so much understanding in those eyes. So much love, so much of my life. I just looked, hanging onto everything that was left of him whilst I could. In his last breath he lifted his muzzle to my cheek and softly nuzzled me, when his head fell back down I knew he had gone before the vet had even told me. All the light has gone from his eyes. Topper, the horse who had given his heart and soul to make me happy and protect me, was finally gone from the world. And gone from my hands. His eyes were blank. And it was all my fault. I let myself go now. Falling into a heap onto my brave horse. Sobbing into his fur. Breathing in his smell for the last time. His last affection to me seemed to be a reassurance to me. As if to tell me that he forgave me, and didn't blame me. And, I hoped, that he loved me still.

I was in hospital for the next week. My arm was in a cast and my ribs were very bruised and swollen. I barely even felt the pain. Truth was I barely felt anything. The doctors gave me anti-inflammatories but nothing for the pain, as I didn't once complain. People came to visit me everyday but I didn't even see them, I can't think. I don't want to hear or see anything. The people I love are just reminders of all the pain so blanking out them and everything else has become a necessity. I wait for visiting hours to be over. So I can be alone, I don't like people seeing me like this, not just with the cuts and bruises on my face, I don't care about those, I feel as though I'm letting everyone down by blocking myself out. But I don't know what else I can do to make the hurt go away. The day of my release the doctor came by to chat with me before I left. I had already packed my few possessions that were there, which wasn't a lot so I was sitting on the end of my bed, with my hands in my lap staring at the blank screen of the tv.

“How are you feeling the Kristy?” asked Doctor Miller, which had interrupted my stare. I didn't even need to think before answering. It was the same answer I had used for the last week.

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“I am fine thank you. Feeling fine.” I replied keeping my eyes firmly on the tv. I could feel the doctors gaze on my back. Full of sympathy and confusion, it was the type of look that says one thing “why aren’t you opening up?”. Truth is if I did I wouldn’t even know where to begin. I had made myself forget. Forget everything, it was just easier that way.

“So,” he began breaking the silence, “excited to go home? get out of this dreary place back to your friends and you job?” In any normal circumstance I would be thrilled to be going home and back to my job, Steve had promised me I would still have it when I was recovered and ready to return and Sam and Jenna had already planned going out for a meal as a celebration of me getting better, But I didn’t want any of that. I wanted to just go home and stay there.

“Yes.” I replied, “Very.” The doctor got up and patted my hand as he walked away

“Your parents are here to take you home, any problems with the ribs and arm let us know and come straight back, if not we will see you when you get your cast taken off,” he smiled gently as he turned,

“Good luck Kristy.” and with that he left me. I remained on my bed for a while and then decided that I had to leave at some point. had to face the outside world again. So I stood up, grabbed my rucksack and walked to the door. Hesitating slightly before pushing I opened the door to the cold hospital corridor and my parents watching me intently before slowly smiling at me

“Its going to be so lovely to have you back Kristy!” Exclaimed my mum as she embraced me gently, over her shoulder I saw my dad, smiling back at me. He looked “happy”? He walked over to us and took the other side of me and they both started leading me out the hospital and towards the car,

“we’ve left your room how it was, we were going to redecorate it but didn’t know what colour you would prefer so you can pick out one when we’ll.” My dad had begun talking but none of it processed and he slowly trailed off, every now and then on the journey home I would nod to whatever it was they were smiling at and would occasionally hear my mums laugh through my barrier, but I never heard it for long. I was thankful for the car coming to a stop. I grabbed my bag and walked to my front door, mum and dad following. Opening the door I smelt the familiar sent of my dads Breakfast. Surely its not breakfast time? I thought to myself. Dad must of seen the look on my face as he laughed

“No, its not saturday but I know how much you loved my breakfasts so I thought I’d treat you!” He beamed at me. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t want to smell this and think, I didn’t want to see this, my breathing had for some reason increased. I needed to get away from here.

“Im not hungry.” came my excuse and with that, I found the staircase and made a be line for my room. I regretted doing this straight away, as soon as I opened my door of my mint green bedroom as I saw were the pictures. The rosettes. The trophies. The horse shoes. I couldn’t escape it. Not knowing what to do I flew out of my bedroom slamming the door, ran down the stairs and grabbed my car keys before anyone could stop me and ran to my car. And I just drove. I had forgotten what it had felt like to feel and I never wanted to have it again. I just carried on driving in silence. Until my cars petrol light beebed at me telling me I was almost out of fuel. So I pulled over in a drive way and just stopped. turning off my car engine I tried to see in the darkness where I was, but not even the moon was out so everything was dark. I had no idea where I was and didn’t have my phone. Sighing heavily, then wincing slightly from my ribs I settled into my chair. This is where I was going to stay until light, I was not driving anywhere else in the dark that I didn’t know.

The flame was coming close and closer to me. Squeeling and roaring at me. I couldn’t escape it, there was no heat coming from the fire though, this confused me. I reached my hand towards the flame and felt something soft like velvet. I moved my hand up and felt hair. I didn’t understand and immediately retracted my hand. “What is happening?!” I exclaimed. I pulled myself away from this strange flame and just stared at it. The more I stared the more my eyes began to adjust. I saw ears, a muzzle, a beautiful mane and a white blaze down this horses great head. “TOPPER!” I yelled, “get out of the flames! move! You’ll be hurt!” but no matter what I shouted Topper continued to run around in the flames. Then he stumbled to the ground. BANG BANG BANG! My eyes flew open. I lifted my hand to my forehead, I had been dreaming and I was soaked in sweat. I turned my head to where the bangs had come from. Steve was standing next to my car waving, half smiling. I wound down my window

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“Kristy! what a lovely surprise, wasn’t expecting to see you here already.” he said. Where? I thought, I wasn’t any where I recognised. I looked around. A sign read “Willow Tree Farm” hung on the old willow tree that over hung the driveway. before I had a chance to say anything Steve had opened my car door and was helping me out the car. “We have all missed you here, the kids have been bugging me about you since you had your..” he paused for a second, “well, they’ve been asking after you.” he smiled gently at me. Why was I here. What would possess me to stop outside the one place I really didn’t want to be. “How about you come and say hello to the ponies, I’m sure they have missed you too.” Steve suggested and lead me over to the small barn where the riding school ponies lived. I followed him not even thinking. Shutting myself out again. This place would bring me nothing but pain, and after that strange dream last night? I needed to be more careful with my thoughts. Steve went up to each pony and gave them a pat, I stayed away, keeping my distance but following Steve, Apple, the small grey welsh Section A reached her nose over and nuzzled my arm. I flinched away from her touch, startling her. And slightly shocking myself and Steve. Steve walked over to Apple and gave her a polo, “It’s ok girl, you just shocked her that’s all, she’ll come and say hi now she knows you’re here.” He looked at me, eyes pleading. I had never, not once in my life, flinched at the touch of a horse. I couldn’t bare this any more. and I ran for my car. Once in I started the engine and made my way home, not once did I look back to see if Steve was following. I got home and ran up to my bedroom. I was so angry. With myself. With what had happened, for flinching, for being so weak. I was just angry at everything. I grabbed at the rosettes up on my wall and ripped them down, I went over to my cabinet and threw the trophies on the floor. I didn’t want to feel anymore. I ripped the pictures down off my walls, when I got to the final one I looked down at it in my hands. It was a picture of me looking up at my beautiful horse, laughing, and him looking down at me, nuzzling my hair. My beautiful horse. What had I done to you. I fell to my knees and for the first time since the accident I cried. I cried for myself, for my family and friends, for the riding school ponies, but mostly I cried for Topper. I was all my fault him not being here. If I hadn’t of rushed him. If I had trusted him, he would still be here. I would never forgive myself for that. Ever. I had to stay strong, for Topper’s memory. I hoped he was watching me, I hoped he could give me the strength I needed to carry on with my life. This new life that feels so strange. Topper had 100% been my life, and without him here I felt lost. “Please Topper,” I cried, “Help me.” I hugged the picture to my chest and continued crying.

I woke up and jumped into the shower. 2 more weeks had passed and although I never stopped thinking about Topper, I had found the strength to get up and go. I had spend time with my friends and my family, I now had the Saturday family breakfast and I had begun working back at the stabled 3days ago. Although I stayed away from Toppers stable. and the jumping arena. But I was coping. Sam and Jenna were being brilliant, keeping me busy and trying not talk about Fantasia and Sennie in front of me. Sam had had a showjumping competition last weekend and hadn’t mentioned it to me, this had hurt me at first but I knew that he didn’t want to make me feel obliged to go somewhere I wouldn’t feel comfortable. It was the first time I hadn’t watched him jump though, and he had placed 1st so I was very pleased for him, but I couldn’t shake off the ache I felt knowing I should have been there. I got ready for work, sneaked out of the house before anyone noticed and drove

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