

Mylop the Dreamhorse – Esther, Year 6, NSW

Darkness. Silence. Mylop lies trapped under tables and chairs that are crumbling away. But Mylop is safe. Preserved. And Mylop is waiting. Waiting. Waiting for his Pippa to come back home.

The sky was blue and shining. The day was warm and fair. And Nora was moving away. Again. She'd said her goodbyes to the friends she'd only just made. She'd waved farewell to the room she had just begun to like. And as she drifted away yet again, she'd looked back at the small house wistfully, her eyes blurred with tears.

Now they were nearly at their new home. "It's going to be amazing, Nora!" her mother cried, her eyes shining with excitement. "And maybe..." Nora had failed to look enthused. She didn't *want* to move. Why couldn't her mother see that? "Nora, this time we'll stay. I promise."

Nora wanted to believe her. She really did. But her mother said this every time, and she knew it was an empty promise. Nora knew why they kept moving. It was because of her father. She remembered a bristly beard and a wide grin, warm eyes and scruffy brown hair. His job had carried him away. It paid well, but he was never allowed to tell his family where he was or what he was doing. All they got from him nowadays was piles of money and the occasional vague letter sending his love. And Nora knew he wasn't coming back. And she knew her mother wanted to find him, and that was why they kept moving.

Nora stared up at the old house. If you could even call it that. It was a wonky building made of wooden planks, old and shabby and perched precariously on a large rock.

"It's...interesting," she tried. Her mother's smile remained fixed.

"It has character," she said, and put her hand on Nora's shoulder. "It's our home."

Nora flopped down on her bed. The floorboards creaked and the whole house shook from the impact.

"Nora!" her mother cried from downstairs.

"Sorry!" Nora yelled back. She stood up and crept down the hallway that led from her room to the attic. She was curious to see what it was like. She'd never lived in a house with an attic before.

She put her hand on the wooden doorknob and twisted it. The little door creaked open, and Nora entered. The roof was so low she had to stoop over to be able to move about, and the room was filled with a musty smell. There was a pile of chairs and tables in the middle of the room, but otherwise it was empty.

Nora sorted through the clutter. Sawdust flew everywhere, getting caught in the many cobwebs that coated the room. Nora pulled away a chair. There was a small piece of paper lying underneath it, covered in dirt and grit. Nora picked it up and held it up to the small shaft

of light shining in through a gap in the roof. She could make out the name ‘Philippa Grahame’ written in pen. Nora turned the paper over.

A little girl smiled back at her, with rosy cheeks and two pigtails. Nora slipped the photograph into her pocket and continued to rummage through the furniture. In a gap between a stool and a table, Nora caught a glimpse of faded blue. She cleared a space and heaved out a small rocking horse. It was sky blue and covered in dust and cobwebs, with a mangy mane and deep soulful eyes.

Nora brushed away the dust and sat on the little horse. She closed her eyes and began to rock steadily back and forth. The rocking started to get sharper, almost like galloping. It was getting pleasantly warm in the attic; in fact she could feel the sunlight on her face. Nora opened her eyes. And she fell off the horse.

She landed not on the attic floor, but on fresh green grass. The blue horse was standing over her. It was almost as if... the realisation hit her like a speeding bus. This was the rocking horse. But not as she had seen him. He was alive.

“Pippa!” cried the little horse. “I knew you’d come back! I knew it!”

“What?” said Nora. “Who’s Pippa?” She scrambled to her feet.

The little horse looked crestfallen. “You’re not my Pippa,” he whispered.

“I don’t have the faintest idea who she is,” Nora said, then remembered the photo in her pocket. She drew it out and held it up for the little horse to see. “Is this her?”

His face lit up. “It’s her! That’s my Pippa!” He did a little leap of joy, then turned to Nora. “When she comes back, everything will be perfect. What’s your name? Mine’s Mylop.”

“I’m Nora,” Nora replied. “How did I get here?”

“My Pippa did that. She imagined that when she rocked on me, she came here, and she imagined so hard it came true.”

“How do I get back?” asked Nora.

“That’s easy,” said Mylop. “Just close your eyes and count to three.”

Nora did. And then she was home.

Nora kept visiting Mylop. So, he didn’t get lonely, she told herself. But the truth was she had grown fond of the sweet little horse and his gentle energy, and she looked forward to her visits. Sometimes they were the only thing that kept her going throughout the long school day. But one afternoon she ran through the door, the house rattling with her every step.

Her mother greeted her, cheeks flushed and a happy smile on her face.

“Guess where I’m going tomorrow,” she sang. Nora’s heart began to sink. She already knew what her mother would say. Then the dreaded words were uttered.

“I’m going to an auction for a beautiful house by the sea. It’s so much better than this old thing. You’ll love it, Nora!”

But Nora was already shaking her head, a lump growing in her throat. She liked this house! She didn’t want to leave! Tears stinging in her eyes, she turned and fled to her room.

Nora sat on her bed and brushed away her tears. She pulled the photo of Mylop’s Pippa out of her pocket and turned it over. She scratched away the dirt, and she saw the date. And she knew what she had to do.

Nora crouched down to look the little blue horse in the eye. “Mylop,” she whispered. “I don’t think your Pippa is coming back.”

Mylop tilted his head at her. “But my Pippa always comes back.”

“Look, Mylop, it’s been a long time.”

“No, it hasn’t,” Mylop said desperately. “It’s only been a few weeks.”

“It’s been years, Mylop. Thirty years, to be exact.”

Mylop bowed his head. A tear trickled down his cheek and plopped onto the soft green grass. “But my Pippa said she’d come back. She said she would.”

“I don’t think she had a choice. Kids don’t have much choice when grown-ups want to move. But Mylop, I think you should move on.”

There was silence, then Mylop looked up. “Nora, will you be my Pippa? Will you stay with me?” Nora nodded, tears in her eyes.

“Yes, Mylop. I’ll be your Pippa.”

Nora walked out of the attic and down the stairs. Her mother was waiting for her. “Nora-“she began.

“Mum,” Nora interrupted. “I don’t want to leave. And I know why we keep moving.”

“Because-“her mum started.

“It’s because of Dad.” Nora cut her off again. “You want to find him. But Mum, you can’t. So I think it’s time to move on.”

“He didn’t have a choice,” her mother whispered.

“I know,” said Nora, tears in her eyes. “But you do. And I think you should choose to listen to me, because even though Dad’s gone, I’m still here.”

There was silence, then Nora’s mother looked up. “You’re right, Nora. You’re right.”

Philippa Grahame stood and watched her daughter's face break into a smile as she saw the pretty pink rocking horse. The little girl leapt onto her new toy and began to rack back and forth. Philippa had bought the toy for her child because of the rocking horse she remembered. Mylop. But he had been different. This horse, with its glossy pink mane and shallow eyes was nothing like the horse she had known and loved. Mylop had been the funniest little horse, she wondered where he was now.

Mylop was spread out on the grass, his head resting on Nora's lap. "Isn't grass just wonderful?" he exclaimed suddenly, lifting his head.

"It is," said Nora agreeably.

"It's so green and soft and lovely and *delicious*."

"I can't say I agree about the last part, but yes."

Mylop sighed happily. "Isn't everything perfect?"

"It is, Mylop. It is."

And it was. The sky was blue and shining. The day was warm and fair. Nora had a home. And she was going to stay there forever and ever and ever.