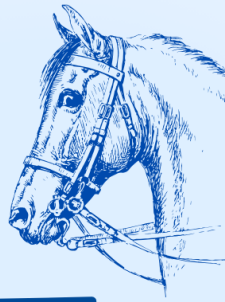
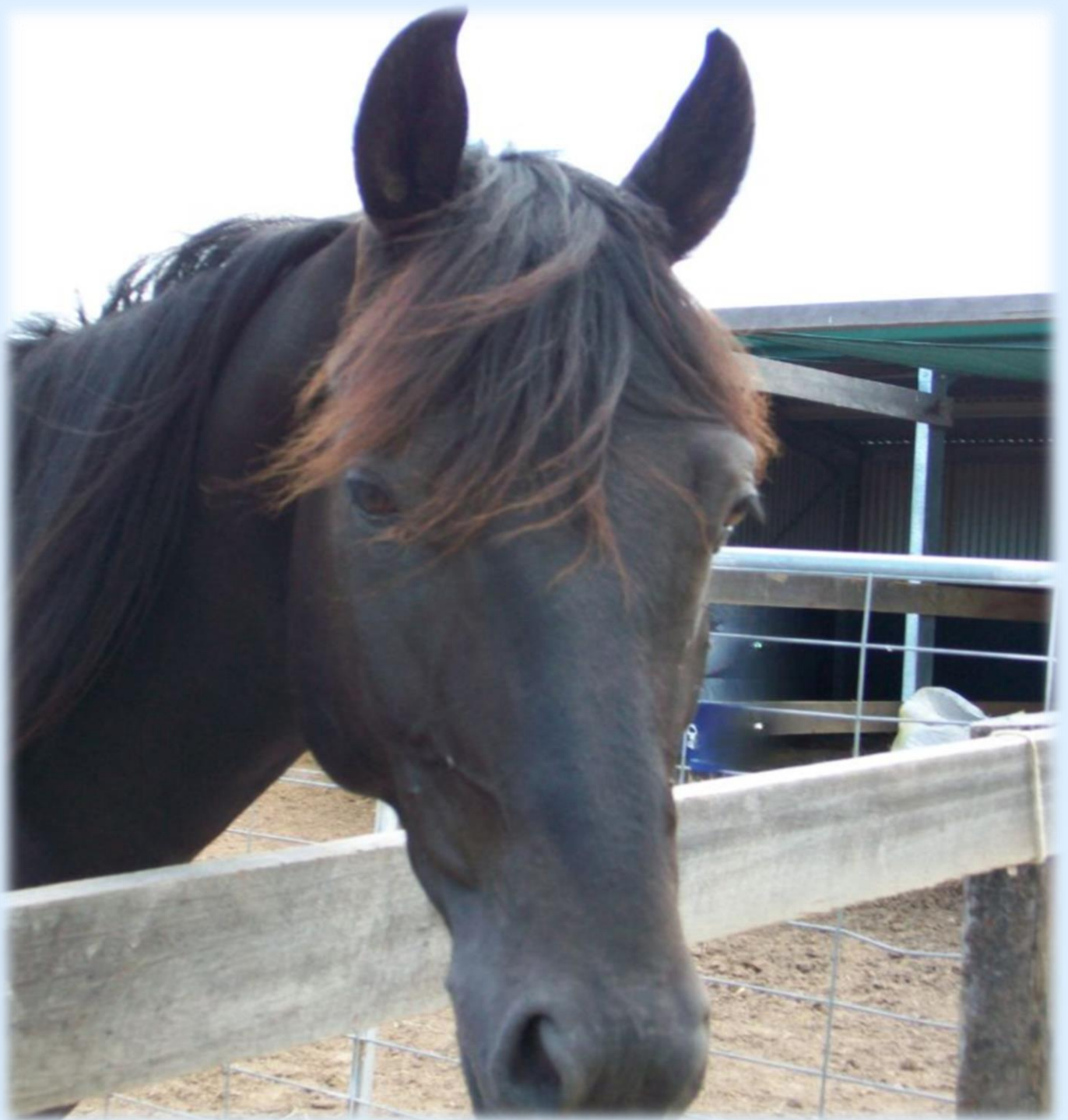




SUMMER &



THE BLACK COLT



Hills and Hollows Horse Riding School Series



BOOK 5. SUMMER AND THE BLACK COLT

The air was thick with excitement as the kids arrived at Hills and Hollows, knowing the summer holidays were slipping away and determined to hold on to every last moment of farm fun. The morning sun was already warm, casting a golden glow over the paddocks and the familiar buildings of the riding school. A dressage lesson with Leanne was scheduled for later and they were all hoping to squeeze in a little extra time to watch Luke work his new black colt.



"Come on, let's hurry!" Perri urged, leading the way toward the top arena. The others scrambled after her, kicking up small clouds of dust from the hot dry summer as they jogged along the path. They knew Leanne would be calling them in soon, but the chance to watch Luke at work was too tempting.

When they reached the arena, they leaned on the outer rail of the fence, trying to be quiet and respectful, but their whispers and giggles carried through the warm summer air. The young stallion was already being guided through some groundwork exercises. He moved with a powerful, graceful stride that captured every eye.

Ali sighed, resting her chin on the fence. "He is a big, black dream of a horse," she said, and Hayley murmured in agreement, lost in admiration. Perri whispered, "He is like something out of a story," the others nodded in agreement.

Wilton Park Rhyme was not always the dream horse. He had exploded in a frenzied bucking routine and injured his previous owner, Leanne's sister Lynda. Now Luke was determined to start his training from the beginning.

Luke began the groundwork, showing Rhyme how to follow his lead and respond to gentle cues. The colt was sharp and attentive, his dark eyes flicking between Luke and the kids. Luke encouraged Rhyme's attention away from the onlookers with a kissing sound, then asked him with a hand gesture



to move around the arena. The colt tossing his head offered resistance, kicking up his legs in defiance.

The Hills and Hollows helpers sat perched on a bench behind the fence, watching intently as Luke guided the colt through a series of exercises to bring him back under control and soften to Lukes commands. His movements were measured, calm but firm, as he used a training stick to encourage focus.



Perri glanced around the group, their eyes fixed on Luke working the black colt. There was tension in the group’s glances and Perri knew why. She had to say something before their cover was blown. Clearing her throat softly, she caught their attention, “Remember not a word to Luke yet,” she said, her gaze sweeping across the group. “Let’s make sure we are certain of deliberate vandalism.” The others nodded but unease lingered in their expressions.



The sound of gravel crunching under tyres drew everyone's attention as a car pulled up in the parking area. Luke glanced toward the approaching vehicle, and the hint of disconnect was enough to see the colt rebel and send a head high kick in Lukes' direction, narrowly missing Luke's chest.

A moment later, a figure stepped out—a young woman, dressed in fitted jodhpurs and a riding shirt, her mouse brown hair tied back neatly. She moved confidently up the hill toward the group, her stride purposeful.

Luke's attention flickered toward her again, this time Luke seemed distracted, Rhyme thought so too and he seized the opportunity to test the limits. With a spirited buck, the colt darted to the corner of the yard, stamping and tossing his head. Luke sighed, tapping the training stick sharply against the ground to reclaim the colt's attention. The sound echoed through the yard, and Rhyme reluctantly moved back into a working trot, shaking his head as if put out by the shift in attention.

By the time the young woman reached the round yard, she had a curious smile on her face. She leaned casually against the fence, folding her arms. The kids, sensing the new energy in the air, exchanged glances and tried not to giggle. Perry nudged Elizabeth, a knowing smirk creeping onto her face.

“Hi! This is Hills and Hollows, right?” The woman greeted the group, her voice carrying a melodic French accent. “The colt is cheeky, no? Testing at every chance,” she said, folding her arms and leaning back.



“I like to try lowering the stick —sometimes less is more, no?” she offered constructive criticism within easy earshot of Luke.

Luke’s face flushed faintly as he paused mid-step, glancing over at her with a mix of surprise and irritation. “I’ve got it under control,” he replied, his tone polite but firm. He guided Rhyme through another circle, his shoulders stiff under the newcomer’s watchful gaze and the strength displayed by the colt.

The woman didn’t seem fazed by his reaction. She watched a moment longer before introducing herself. “I’m Celeste. I’m here to see the manager,” she said.

Her smile widened slightly, teasing but kind. “Though maybe I should’ve waited until after your session.”

The kids couldn’t contain their curiosity. Perri leaned over to Liz, whispering loud enough for Hayley and Zain to hear, “Think Luke’s blushing?”

Liz stifled a laugh, her eyes darting between Luke and Celeste. “Maybe she’s better at this than he is?”

Perri’s grin widened. “Maybe she is. Although Luke would never admit it.”



Luke heard the whispers and shot the group a warning glance, which only made them try harder to stifle their laughter. Ignoring the distraction, he turned back to Celeste. “If you’re looking for work, you’ll want Leanne,” he said evenly. “She’s in the office. I can point you there once I’m done here.”

Celeste gave a slight nod but didn’t move. Instead, she stayed where she was, continuing to watch the session. “Of course. But I don’t mind waiting—I’d like to see how you finish this exercise.”

Luke gave a resigned sigh and focused back on Rhyme, doing his best to ignore the woman’s presence. The kids, however, couldn’t look away, their imaginations running wild as they exchanged amused glances. To them, the newcomer was more than just a trainer looking for work—she was a mystery, a spark of excitement in their routine, and possibly the start of something more intriguing.

The colt's head lowered and his ear flickered towards him, showing the first vital sign of a willingness to connect. Luke released the pressure off the young stallion who finally bounded to a stop and approached Luke, pressing his nose to his chest. The children cheered softly, touched by the quiet moment of trust. Celeste joined the applause and added, “He has much respect for you. It's a beautiful thing”.

Rhyme’s training was a vital foundation for the horse he would one day become. With it, commenced a special connection between him and the



riding school community. And just as Rhyme's foundation stones were being laid down, so too were the characters of the kids, shaped by their efforts, challenges and journeys.

Luke led the young stallion over to the group while he summarised the session. "Did everyone see the signs of submission: lowering of his head; his ear movement; and his licking and chewing?" he prompted the group. Then as if to steal the show, Rhyme decided the lesson needed a touch of humour, so while everyone was standing calmly, he began to nibble Zain's hat.

The kids laughed together as Luke showed them how to gently redirect Rhyme's curious mouth away.

As if encouraged by this, Rhyme came back for another nibble and as Luke's hand came to guide his muzzle for a second time, Rhyme snatched the hat clean off Zain's head! Zain yelped, his hands going to his bare head as the others burst into laughter. Luke sighed, barely hiding a grin. "Looks like Rhyme's got a sense of humour." He glanced again at Celeste who was enjoying the light-hearted Entertainment.

"You have a real character there!" she said as Rhyme began waving the hat steadily up and down at the kids, neck outstretched, head bobbing.

Zain, still chuckling, shouted, "Hey! If you're gonna take it, at least try it on!" Rhyme gave an amused snort, as if he was considering it, and with a playful toss of his head, flung the cap down landing shy of the fence, in the sand.



While at the arena the kids began eyeing the dressage setup with mixed expressions. Zain sighed, and even Perri seemed slightly less enthusiastic than usual. Dressage had always sounded a bit too "proper" and controlled for their adventurous spirits. Liz jumped up and offered to walk Celeste down to the office. Luke insisted he was headed in that direction anyway.



As they walked down the path, The kids glanced at one another, smiles painted across their faces. After watching Rhyme's lesson, the thought of their own lesson felt daunting. But Zain took a step forward, gathering his courage. "Guess it's our chance to work on our own 'join-up,' just in a different way," he said, his voice steady.

With renewed purpose, they headed to their ponies, leaving the memory of Rhyme's athleticism behind, ready to see what they could learn for themselves.

