

Nutty looked at Hoomey. 'Now, there's an idea,' she said softly. 'Nails . . . He could be in the team! He's going to be a good rider, and he's an excellent swimmer – he can teach the rest of us! And I'll be in the team too. Never mind that rubbish about not having girls. I can ride better than anyone at Greycoats.' She turned to Hoomey, her eyes bright with excitement. 'Will you go on with the competition, if that will save Bones?' she asked.

Hoomey thought about it. 'Yes,' he said slowly. 'Yes, I will.'

Nutty went to find Nails and explained her idea to him. You had to be careful with Nails. He could get very angry for no reason. It was hard to like him.

Nails looked at Nutty coldly. 'They won't want me in their team,' he said.

'It's not *their* team any more. It's us, our team. If we want to do the competition, they can't stop us. And we can beat Greycoats – I know we can.'

She waited hopefully, but Nails said nothing.

'Your brother Gary and Bean aren't interested,' Nutty said, 'but Jazz will go on, I think. And Hoomey. And it's the only way to save the horses.'

'OK,' Nails said at last. 'I'll do it.' He did not look at Nutty, and walked away, his hands in his pockets.

Jazz agreed to the plan as well, but said the riding was too difficult for him. Nutty began to worry, and decided to go and see what Uncle Bean thought.

'Well, I think that riding teacher was a bit hard on your

horses,' he said. 'After all, you only want to ride across country for a mile or two. You need that niece of hers – Biddy Bedwelty. She'd teach you all in a week!'

'But she's a famous competition rider! She wouldn't teach us!' replied Nutty. 'And her lessons would cost an awful lot.'

'Well, offer her Whizzo instead of money,' said Uncle Bean. 'You can ride Midnight, so you don't need a fourth horse.'

To their surprise, Biddy agreed to help them. Not for Whizzo, but because she liked doing things that seemed impossible.

'You needn't pay me if you win,' Biddy said.

'And if we lose?' asked Nutty.

'Then you have to pay me for six months' work,' Biddy replied, and she agreed to come three times a week for two hours each time.

Nutty knew that Biddy's lessons cost ten pounds an hour – but there was no other way.

Uncle Bean agreed to pay for the horses' shoes and food. 'But I want my money back if you lose, like Biddy,' he said to Nutty.

'Add it to the bill,' Nutty said crossly. 'It's only one thousand four hundred and forty pounds. Who's worrying about a few hundred more?'

Uncle Bean shouted with laughter. 'With a bill like that, I guess the four of you will work harder than you've ever done in your lives!'

And they did. They began to work at their running. They