

WILLOW BROOKE



Sadie's Willow Brooke Ride

Sadie



I remember the crisp autumn air as Mom's car pulled up to Willow Brooke, my heart thumping with excitement. The grand stables, with their shining cupolas, looked even more magnificent than in the brochures. Charlotte, Olive, Gunnar, Dixie, and Blair were already laughing by the entrance, their riding helmets gleaming, and I knew this year was going to be an incredible adventure with my best friends.



My horse, Comet, felt powerful and graceful as we soared over a cross-country jump, the wind rushing past my ears. The Advanced team, including my friends, navigated the challenging course with ease, our synchronized movements a testament to our hard work. Across the field, I could see Everly, a year younger and on the beginner team, struggling a bit with her pony over a smaller jump, but she was trying so hard.



Later, while grooming Comet, I overheard snide remarks from Tiffany, Brittany, and Brooke, the three girls who always seemed to find fault. They were making fun of Everly's earlier fall, their laughter echoing cruelly through the stable aisle. My stomach clenched, wishing they would just leave Everly alone.



After a long day of classes and riding, I was lugging my heavy textbooks back to the dorm when Leo, one of the boys from the advanced riding team, jogged up beside me. "Need a hand with those, Sadie?" he asked, his smile warm and genuine as he effortlessly took half my load. My cheeks flushed, a small flutter in my chest.



Even with all the riding, Willow Brooke was no joke academically. I stared at my open textbook, filled with complex diagrams of horse anatomy, feeling a wave of exhaustion wash over me. The clock on my desk seemed to mock me, ticking away precious study time, and I wished I could just be back in the saddle.



One afternoon, I found Everly looking downcast after a tough lesson. "Don't worry," I told her, my arm around her shoulder, "we all started somewhere." Later, Charlotte and I spent extra time with her in the arena, patiently guiding her through a tricky bending exercise, her smile growing brighter with each successful attempt. It felt good to help.



During lunch, the bullies started whispering and giggling about Everly again from their table. This time, instead of ignoring it, Charlotte caught my eye, and together we moved our whole table closer to Everly's, inviting her to join us with warm smiles. Their snickers quickly faded into silence, and Everly looked so relieved.



That evening, after a long day, the girls and I piled into our dorm common room for a movie night, blankets and pillows scattered everywhere. We munched on popcorn, sharing stories and laughing until our sides hurt, our bond stronger than ever. These moments of simple joy with my friends were what truly made Willow Brooke feel like home.



The atmosphere at the weekend competition was electric, filled with nervous energy and hopeful anticipation. Comet and I soared over the final jump in the hunter course, landing with perfect precision. My teammates cheered wildly, and even Everly, who had completed her beginner course with a clear round, was beaming, a true testament to her perseverance.



As the school year drew to a close, I stood by Comet's stall, gently stroking his mane, reflecting on everything. I'd grown so much, both in and out of the saddle, surrounded by amazing friends. And when Leo walked by, offering a shy wave and a smile that made my heart do a little flip, I knew Willow Brooke had given me more than just riding skills – it had given me a whole new world.