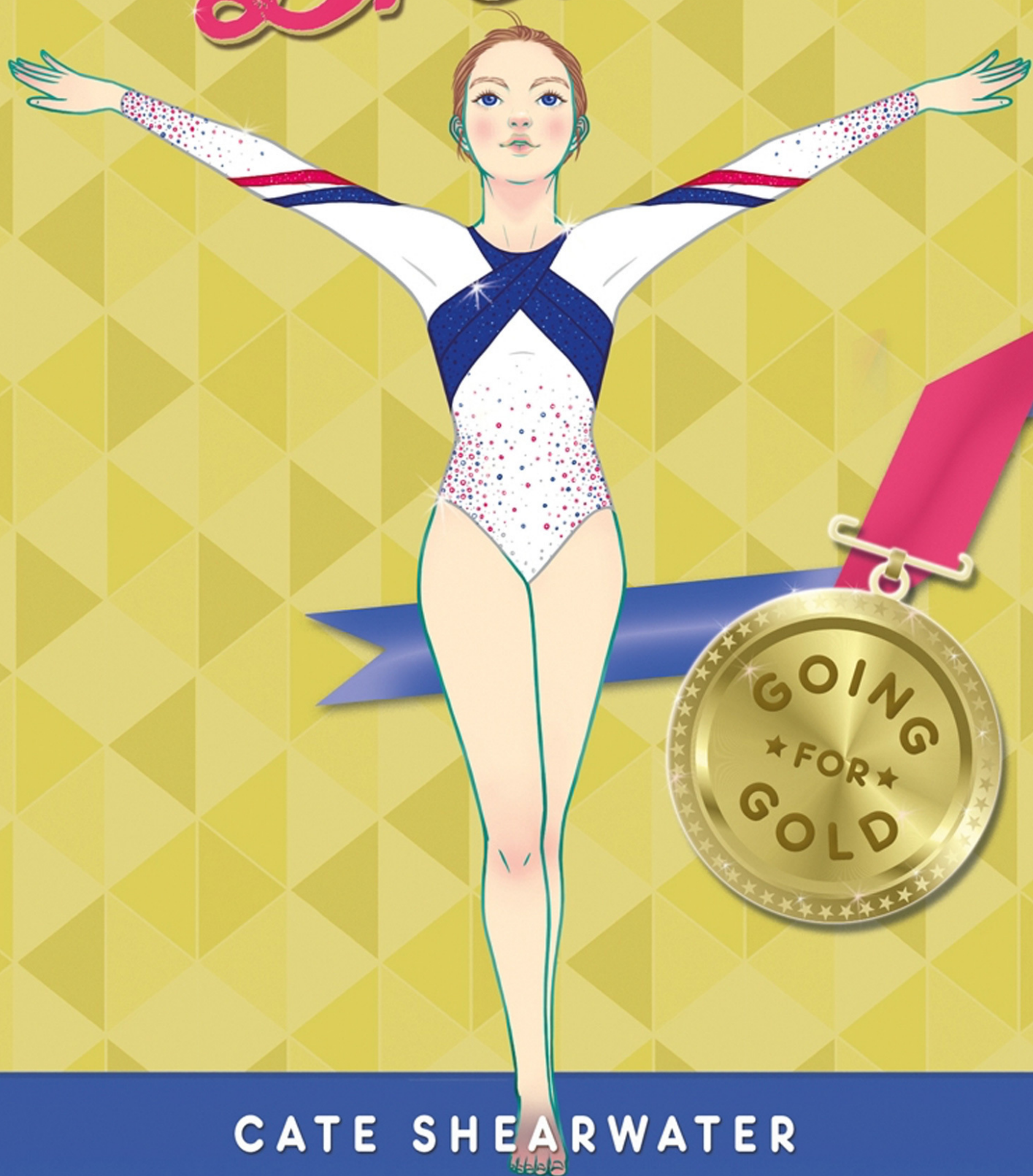


Somersaults — and — Dreams



CATE SHEARWATER

Somersaults and Dreams

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**Somersaults and
Dreams: Going for Gold**

«HarperCollins»

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For fans of Cathy Cassidy and Holly Willoughby's School for Stars – tumble into the world of competitive gymnastics – friendships, dreams, tears, and tumbles! Ellie has reached the national gymnastics squad training camp. Now it feels like she is just a somersault away from her dream of competing in the Euros! But with training harder than ever, rivalries even fiercer and a new coach who seems determined to make sure she fails, Ellie feels as though she has to do whatever it takes ... including hiding a potentially-career ruining injury. How far is Ellie really willing to go for gold?

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Somersaults — and — Dreams

GOING
★FOR★
GOLD



CATE SHEARWATER

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Somersaults and Dreams: Going for Gold

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For all the West Country League A squad girlies, past and present: Eva, Georgia, Gaia, Nancy, Camille, Esme, Niamh, Phoebe, Livvy, Isobel, Abby. And Elsie, of course!

And for Lynne Hutchison whose remarkable return from injury inspired this story and who continues to inspire young gymnasts across the country.

Thanks.

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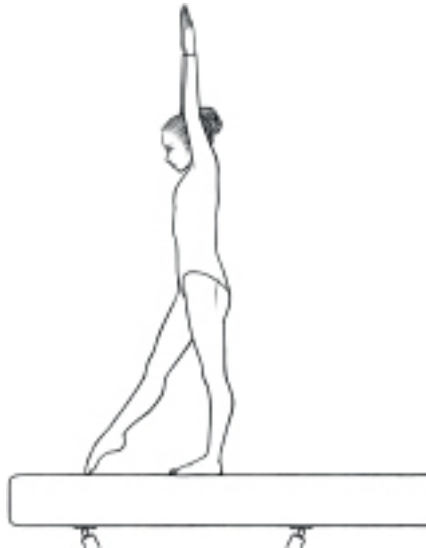
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CHAPTER
One

Ellie Trengilly stood in the middle of the biggest gym she'd ever seen in her life. A vast white space with a sea of blue mats spreading out in all directions, white brick walls stretching up to viewing balconies and vaulted ceilings, and an arch leading to a pitted area. The National Sports Training Centre was all so shiny-new and high-tech that if Ellie's heart hadn't been bursting with excitement, she would almost have felt homesick for the familiar tatty surroundings of her old Academy. Almost.

Ellie still couldn't believe she'd been offered a place in the Junior GB gymnastics squad! Only twelve girls qualified for that honour each year. It meant they were invited to attend National squad camps like this one: a week of intensive training with top coaches at the National Sports Training Centre. It meant they were entitled to wear the coveted GB leotard, and it might – just might – mean a chance to compete for their country.

Of course, that was still a distant dream – for now, just being invited to National squad camp was enough for Ellie, as well as the fact that she was there with some of her best friends from the London Gymnastics Academy! Sweet, sensible Bella and Kashvi the tomboy were there, and even

crazy little circus girl Katya had been offered a place – incredible, since she'd only started formal gymnastics training less than a year ago. And then there was Scarlett, Queen of the Beam – although Ellie didn't really consider her a friend!

Not all of her old Pre-Elite squad mates had made it into National squad, though. Camille had missed out due to injury, and Nancy . . . Ellie sighed at the thought of her best friend, who had given up gymnastics last year. Nancy's twin brother, Tam, was here with the boys' squad, but it wasn't quite the same as having Nancy herself here to share everything with.

'Welcome to National squad camp.' Ellie's thoughts were dragged sharply back to the present by the small, elegant, grey-haired figure of Barbara Steele, head national coach. She was addressing the twelve Junior girls who were lined up on the practice floor in their GB leotards, the Union Jack running across the shiny red fabric. Ellie had dreamed of wearing a GB leotard for her whole life and she still couldn't believe she'd finally earned the right to do so.

'I'll be overseeing all of the training camps taking place this week,' Barbara went on, looking them up and down critically, 'from the Seniors down to the babies who'll be arriving in a day or two.'

Ellie glanced over to where the Senior National squad were already warming up on the other side of the gym. She recognised Sian Edwards and Sophia Mitford, the two most senior gymnasts at the Academy, as well as a few other well-known faces. Just watching them made a shiver go down her spine. They had represented GB at the last Olympics, and Ellie dreamed of following in their footsteps one day. She could hardly believe she was training side by side with them now.

But Barbara's reference to the babies also made Ellie remember that most of the girls lined up alongside her had been coming to National squad camps since they were eight or nine years old. She was a late joiner – she had only arrived at the Academy last year – and so she had to prove she was as good as her squad mates.

'Your focus in this camp will be on new skills,' Barbara went on. 'You'll be working on new combination tumblers on the floor, more advanced vaults and acrobatics series on the beam, as well as new flight element combinations on the bars.'

Ellie felt a flicker of excitement. The last few months had been all about perfecting old skills. The opportunity to work on new manoeuvres was terrifying and thrilling at the same time.

'I want to see each of you stretching yourselves to the max,' said Barbara. 'I'll be looking for potential in this camp – I'm already thinking ahead to selections for European Championships later in the year.'

Ellie's heart started pounding again. Only five of the girls standing here today would be selected to go to Berlin for Euros. And looking at the others, she couldn't imagine she would be one of them. Apart from her old Academy squad mates – all of whom were stunning gymnasts – they were also up against Eva Reddle, the Junior British Champion, and her friend Willow Hall, both from the famous Liverpool gym. Then there were two incredibly talented Welsh gymnasts – Phoebe and Rosa – and a sweet little Irish girl called Niamh. And then there was Memory Danster.

Memory was the same age as Ellie but she looked much older. She was mid height with a tight, compact frame, broad shoulders and limbs so muscly they made Ellie's look like twigs that might snap at any minute. Even the expression on Memory's face was fierce. Her dark hair was tightly plaited to her scalp in cornrows which ran away from her furrowed brow, beneath which were a set of intense black eyes and a firmly-set mouth that looked as if it had forgotten how to smile.

Ellie had tried to say hello as they'd put their stuff in the lockers earlier, but Memory had completely blanked her.

'Perhaps she is just shy,' said serious, dark-haired Bella, who always tried to see the best in everyone.

'Or maybe she is getting out of bed on wrong side this morning,' said Katya. The tiny blonde-haired girl had grown up performing in a circus in Moscow, and she still spoke with a pronounced Russian accent. 'She will be friendly tomorrow.'

‘Let’s hope so,’ said Ellie. From Memory’s fierce expression, though, Ellie got the feeling that she wasn’t here to make friends.

‘I’ll mainly be working with the Senior squad girls in the lead-up to Euros,’ Barbara Steele was saying. Ellie tore her eyes away from Memory to focus on the head coach. ‘But I am thrilled to announce that a brand-new coach will be overseeing the Junior GB squad.’

A shiver of excitement and anticipation rippled through the line of gymnasts. Katya turned to Ellie and mouthed, ‘*Lizzie*?’

Ellie’s stomach did a flip. No, it couldn’t be. Could it?

Lizzie Trengilly – Ellie’s aunt – had been the greatest GB gymnast of all time, until her career had come to a tragic end when she was just eighteen, after a terrible fall at the Olympics.

‘She is a name so familiar that she hardly needs an introduction,’ Barbara went on. ‘And she knows better than almost anyone what it takes to get to the top.’

Ellie’s heart was racing. Could it be . . . could it be?

The thought of Lizzie being here – now – seemed both impossible and impossibly exciting! Ellie hadn’t seen her for years. After her accident Lizzie had gone travelling round the world, barely sending more than the occasional postcard home. Ellie had always believed that Lizzie wasn’t interested in her own gym career until the discovery a few months ago that her aunt had been watching all along. After that, Ellie’s longing to see Lizzie – talk to her – get to know her – had deepened to a desperate ache.

‘Ah, here she is . . .’ said Barbara. ‘Right on cue!’

Ellie heard the door to the gym swing open and the sound of footsteps crossing the mats. Her heart was pounding as she tried to catch a glimpse in the mirror, but she was standing at the wrong angle to see.

Could it be? Recently rumours had been circulating about Lizzie leaving her coaching job in California, about her returning to the the UK.

‘Let me introduce . . . Vivian Ponting.’

Ellie turned round. There, striding across the blue floor in flip flops, was not Aunt Lizzie, but a taller gymnast, with broad shoulders, bleached blonde hair and a face so tanned her smile glowed whitely out of it.

‘Hi guys!’ the woman said, in a strong Australian drawl. ‘It’s grand to meet you all.’

Ellie’s heart did a bellyflop. She felt a bitter pang of disappointment.

‘Vivian is a vault expert,’ Barbara was saying. ‘She has an Olympic gold medal on vault, and she won all-around silver at World Champs as both a Junior and Senior gymnast, by performing some of the most difficult vaults ever seen in competition.’

As Ellie tried to push her disappointment to one side, she stared at the coach. Vivian’s face looked familiar, although she couldn’t quite place why.

‘Vivian has been coaching in Australia,’ Barbara went on, ‘but she’s kindly agreed to give up the sun and surf to help prepare you girls for Junior Europeans.’

Ellie knew she should be excited. They were lucky to be working with someone so experienced. She could teach them so much, and Ellie had come to National squad camp to learn. But all she could think was that Vivian wasn’t Aunt Lizzie.

Vivian looked the line of gymnasts up and down critically. ‘You’ll hear a lot of people talking about the qualities that make great gymnasts,’ she said in her lazy Australian drawl. ‘Precision, technical skill, grace, artistry. These are all important.’ Vivian’s eyes narrowed as if she was weighing up each girl’s potential in a single glance.

‘But times are changing,’ she went on. ‘Nowadays great gymnastics, the kind of gymnastics you need to get to the top, requires power.’ Her eyes came to rest on Memory for a second. ‘I’ve no doubt you girls are bendy and graceful.’ Vivian spoke dismissively as if none of that mattered. ‘But to tackle new skills some of you are going to need to seriously build up your strength.’

Ellie glanced at herself in the mirror. She knew she was still short for her age, and compared to some of the others she was delicate. So were Bella and Katya. But she also knew all three of them possessed strength that might not be obvious.

‘Strength protects you from injury,’ Vivian went on. ‘Torn muscles, ripped ligaments – all these are common in gymnastics because it’s a high impact sport. The stronger you are, the less likely you are to sustain injuries.’

Ellie couldn’t help thinking of Camille, out for a year with an ACL tear, and of Aunt Lizzie after her terrible fall at the Olympics; laid up in bed, her leg in plaster and all her hopes and dreams lying in tatters around her.

‘So I’m going to build up your strength,’ Vivian said. ‘It’s not going to be pretty – you’re going to go to hell and back. But power comes from pain, that’s what I say.’

Ellie knew that Nancy would have had something to say about Vivian’s ‘pain is power’ mantra! She’d probably also have done a funny impression of the coach’s Aussie accent which would have had them all in stitches. But maybe it was a good thing that Nancy wasn’t there: Vivian didn’t look like the type who would approve of giggling. She looked as though she didn’t approve of much, in fact. Ellie had thought the Academy coaches were strict, but she had a feeling that Vivian would be ten times worse.

‘Right, let’s get to it!’ said Vivian. ‘The pain starts here, ladies!’



CHAPTER

Two

Ellie was right. She was used to gruelling conditioning sessions at the Academy, but this was worse than anything even the pre-Elite coach Oleg Petrescu could come up with. Back and forth across the floor they went – wheelbarrow walks, handstand walks, forward rolls, pikes to handstands, then forward rolls into back tucks. Over and over with no let-up whilst Vivian called out things like, ‘No wiggling . . . you think you’re a worm now? Keep those hips up, or do you need a hip replacement? Tuck your butt under . . . you ain’t twerking now, ladies!’

‘She’s not big on compliments, is she?’ asked Bella breathlessly at the end of one set, looking at Ellie with a concerned expression on her face.

‘She is a bossy-shoes, I think!’ Katya managed to whisper.

‘Bossy-boots!’ giggled Ellie.

‘Hey, Trengilly, stop gassing and let’s step it up a gear!’ Vivian yelled.

Ellie blushed and launched into a new series of continuous split leaps, pushing up off the ground to get as much height as possible.

‘Open . . . open, Trengilly,’ Vivian yelled. ‘Come on, you’re not even trying. You can get higher than that, can’t you?’

Ellie gritted her teeth and dug even deeper. She'd always been incredibly good on flight work and she knew her split leaps had elevation and line that the other gymnasts envied, but all Vivian said at the end was, 'Shame you didn't point your toes.'

Ellie felt herself flush even brighter red. She was sure she had been pointing her toes the whole way through. She bit her lip and carried on with the next sequence, a forward roll into a back tuck.

Only Vivian wasn't finished with her.

'C'mon! You're not in the boxing ring, Ellie! . . . Point those toes! Tighter legs, tighter body, longer neck . . . higher, higher, higher!'

'Wow, she's got it in for you,' said Scarlett as the warm-up came to an end and the girls congregated round the lockers, glugging down water and pulling off their leggings ready for apparatus work.

Blonde and glamorous Scarlett had never been Ellie's greatest fan. Nancy called her 'Queen of Mean' and reckoned that Scarlett hated anyone with talent – which was probably why Ellie was top of her hit list! She certainly seemed to be enjoying watching Ellie squirm under Vivian's constant criticism now.

'What did you do to bug our new coach, I wonder?' said Kashvi, glancing at Ellie in concern. Kashvi stood with her hands on her hips, face creased into a frown.

'I guess not everyone is a fan of the name Trengilly,' said Scarlett, still smirking as she took a swig of water out of a pink jewel-encrusted bottle which bore the motto 'Star Gymnast'.

'What?' Ellie wanted Scarlett to explain what she had meant, but she'd already turned away. Vivian clapped her hands to hurry them all along.

'Come on, Trengilly,' she said. 'Less chit-chat and a bit more commitment to training.'

Ellie glanced around. Niamh and Rosa were still putting their water bottles away. Phoebe was looking for her guard bag and Bella and Kashvi were talking. Why was Vivian singling her out?

As they started apparatus work, things got worse. Ellie was put in a team with Eva, Memory, Scarlett and Katya. They were up on the vault first, which meant they were working with Vivian. She took them down to the pitted area, a side gym with high brick walls and a window looking out over the woods. It was filled with every kind of apparatus imaginable, sunk in large pits filled with foam logs.

'Like big soft cushions,' Katya sighed when she saw them. 'So we are not crackling any bones!'

'When you're working on new skills you want to work on soft surfaces,' Vivian told them. 'So, we'll start out in the pit and safety mats now, then as we get closer to Euros we'll go back to competition surfaces.'

Ellie felt a flutter of excitement. If she could master a new vault with a higher difficulty value it could really raise her all-around score. Barbara Steele wanted to see potential – this could be Ellie's chance to show she had it.

'Will you teach us the Produnova?' asked Memory quietly. A slight American twang was mixed with her low Scottish burr. It was the first thing Ellie had heard her say all morning.

'Yes, that would be amazing!' said Eva, the tall, smiley-faced British Junior Champion. 'Only four people in the world can perform a Produnova.'

'Because it is super-doooper difficult,' said Katya.

'It carries a seven difficulty value,' muttered Memory, staring at the floor as she spoke.

'Nobody is learning the Produnova,' said Vivian sharply. 'It's a dangerous vault that should be banned.'

'But didn't you do it?' asked Scarlett. 'At World Champs – *and* the Olympics.'

'And then I *stopped* performing it,' snapped Vivian, her tone of voice making it clear that this conversation was over.

'Can we at least work on Amanars?' asked Scarlett, a hint of a whine in her voice.

'Some of you don't yet have the power for the more complex vaults,' said Vivian, looking each of them up and down. 'Memory – you can try for an Amanar. Eva and Scarlett – I want to see you

working towards two and a half Yurchenkos. Katya, I believe you are still a vault novice, so you and Ellie should stick to the single twist.'

'But . . .' Ellie started to say.

'You're lacking in the upper body strength for the more difficult vaults, Trengilly,' said Vivian firmly.

Ellie wanted to protest, to tell Vivian she was close to perfecting a *double* Yurchenko, but Vivian had already started walking away. 'Go measure up then we'll get started.'

'Wow, she doesn't leave much room for discussion, does she?' said Eva, seeing how disappointed Ellie looked. 'Don't worry – when she sees how well you vault, she'll soon change her mind.'

Ellie smiled, hoping Eva was right.

Before they could begin, the girls had to measure their run ups and mark the start point with chalk. Then the springboard had to be carefully adjusted for each gymnast. The whole thing took a while.

Whilst they waited, Vivian made them do gruelling strength exercises. She had them hanging from the wooden bars set against the wall, pulling their feet to horizontal and down again. Vivian watched them all with eagle eyes, and Ellie was determined to prove she was just as strong as the others.

She held her own against the taller gymnasts in the workout, refusing to give in even when her muscles screamed in pain, but when they started vaulting it was hard not to be impressed by the strength of girls like Memory and Eva. Eva was famous for her beautiful vaulting that made her seem almost as if she was flying, and Memory was so powerful that she seemed to explode into the air like a rocket.

'Wow, she has got vaulting va-va-voom!' said Katya, her face so serious as she pronounced this that Ellie struggled not to burst into giggles. But Katya was right. Eva Reddle had won vault gold at the British this year, but Memory, who'd been training in the US for the past three years, was in a class above even her. When it came to Ellie's turn she was already feeling seriously under pressure. She wanted to prove to Vivian that they'd got off on the wrong foot.

'Show me a single Yurchenko, Trengilly,' snapped Vivian as Ellie stepped up to the runway.

But Ellie had already decided what she was going to do. She took the vault run up at full speed, hit the springboard with as much force as she could muster and flung herself up, pushing off the vault and twisting, once . . . one and a half times . . . twice in the air. She'd under-rotated slightly so she had to pull herself sharply back on landing, forcing her foot down so hard to prevent herself toppling that she felt a jolt of pain shoot up her ankle. She took a step back but somehow remained upright. Then, determined not to show weakness in front of her new coach, she took a deep breath and turned to Vivian with a smile.

The coach did not smile back. 'Did I tell you to chuck a double, Trengilly?'

'I . . . I just thought . . .' Ellie stammered, trying to ignore the throbbing pain in her ankle. 'I had the speed so I . . . I thought I'd try for the double twist.'

'Yeah, well, your take-off isn't high enough yet,' said Vivian, 'and you're not aggressive enough in your push to land a double safely.'

'But I thought that . . .'

'You're also pulling your shoulder back too early,' Vivian went on, her face unyielding. 'You shouldn't allow your feet to go over your hands till your body is starting to bend . . .'

'Right, I . . .'

'*Right.*' Vivian glared at her. 'So until you can get all that correct, I want you to stick to singles – nothing more than a one and half till I say so. Get it?'

Ellie was struggling with a mixture of emotions – disappointment, embarrassment, anger – and the horrible shooting pain in her ankle. She struggled to keep her voice even as she said, 'But I thought we were working up new skills . . .'

Vivian stuck her hands on her hips and narrowed her eyes. ‘Trenigilly, you wanna remember who the coach is here?’

Ellie bit her lip hard.

‘Come back to me when you’ve got a bit more muscle in those scrawny arms and then we’ll talk about upgrades!’

Ellie turned away, her eyes blurry with tears, her face burning with humiliation and her ankle throbbing. It had been just about the worst start to her week at National squad camp possible.

Luckily, the rest of the session went a bit better. Bar, beam and floor with the other coaches was hard work but Ellie found working on new skills exhilarating. She received as much encouragement as critique, even if her ankle did continue to bother her throughout the session. She was by far the strongest on bars – where not even Memory could match her difficulty value – and on floor and beam her artistry was scored as highly as her power tumblers and acro sequences.

The other coaches seemed keen to help her upgrade, and it was a relief to find that not everyone thought she was a completely hopeless gymnast. But Ellie knew that if she was to get a look-in for the Euros squad – or even get a call-back for the selection weekend in six weeks’ time – she was going to have to impress Vivian – or be left out in the cold.



CHAPTER

Three

‘Vivian’s totally got it in for me,’ Ellie told Tam when they sat down for supper that night. At the heart of the National Sports Training Centre was a beautiful old honey-coloured mansion, which housed the dining hall and the dorms where the gymnasts slept during their week at camp. Surrounding this were a collection of state-of-the-art sports facilities, medical centres, and physio and rehab units. Beyond them were formal gardens and then sports pitches and training grounds for every sport under the sun.

Athletes and sportspeople from every discipline came here to train ahead of international events, but right now the centre was pretty empty; the only people there were the gymnasts who would be training there intensively for the next seven days – eating, sleeping and breathing gymnastics!

The food in the canteen was delicious, although Ellie found she had lost her appetite.

‘Maybe it’s not you she’s annoyed at,’ suggested Tam, who had definitely not lost his. He was tucking into a giant bowl of sticky toffee pudding as if he hadn’t eaten for days.

Tam had detached himself from the other Junior boys to come and join the girls from the Academy, who were all sitting together. Even the Senior squad girls Sian Edwards and Sophia Mitford had come to keep the younger girls company. Tam was the only boy from the Academy who’d qualified for GB squad this year. Olympic medallist Matt Simmons was out with an injury and Tam’s Academy squad mate Robbie had performed poorly at the British so missed out on selection. But

this didn't seem to bother Tam. He'd been coming to squad camps since he was a kid – this was his fifth time here, so he knew lots of the boys from other clubs. Ellie was glad he made time to see them during mealtimes.

'I feel like I've done something to annoy Vivian,' she said. 'But I have no idea what!'

'That's not hard to work out,' Tam went on, wiping toffee sauce off his chin with a shrug. 'Everyone knows she and Lizzie were deadly rivals.'

'Were they?' said Ellie.

'Ellie, sometimes I think you know nothing about gymnastic history at all!' said Bella, shaking her head in disbelief.

'You really don't!' Sian laughed. 'It's one of the most famous rivalries in gym history!'

'Lizzie and Vivian were rivals?' Ellie repeated. How did everyone else know this and not her?

'Even I know this!' said Katya, shaking her head as if reading her thoughts.

'Oh,' said Ellie. 'Right.'

'What *do* you actually know about Vivian Ponting?' asked Sian gently. She might be an Olympic gold medallist, but kind Sian always had time for the younger gymnasts.

'Not much,' Ellie admitted.

'OK, let's start from the beginning,' said Tam, grinning at Ellie. Things had been a bit weird between them earlier in the year. Robbie had teased Tam about being Ellie's boyfriend and for a while they hadn't really spoken. But now they were back to normal again, and Ellie was glad – she'd missed him and his sense of humour. 'So, Vivian was known for her bubbly personality, OK?'

'She was always chatting to the TV cameras mid-competition,' agreed Kashvi. 'High-fiving judges, disco dancing after a great score.'

'Writing messages on her palm and holding them up on the podium,' added Tam. 'She was cool!' Ellie tried to imagine it. Strict Vivian being funny and cool, and messing around? Wow!

'But she was deadly serious as a competitor,' said Sian. 'Incredibly ambitious. She always said she wanted to get to the top, no matter what it took.'

'There was only one thing standing in her way,' said Kashvi. 'And that was . . .'

'Lizzie Trengilly!' said Katya and Tam at exactly the same time.

'I see,' said Ellie. It was all starting to make sense now.

'The reason Vivian Ponting has so many *silver* medals is because Lizzie beat her into second place in everything,' explained Sian.

'But she won Olympic gold,' said Ellie.

'The year Lizzie injured herself and had to pull out,' Bella finished for her.

Ellie was silent for a moment, taking it all in. She'd spent hours, poring over pictures of Aunt Lizzie, but she'd never paid much attention to her competitors. But of course that's why Vivian had looked familiar – she'd seen her dozens of times, standing on podiums next to Lizzie. Always on her left, the silver medal spot.

'Vivian was a huge talent. In any other era she'd have been the greatest gymnast in the world,' said Sian. 'But because of Lizzie she was always the runner-up.'

Ellie glanced over to where Vivian was sitting with Barbara Steele and the boys' coaches. She wondered how that had felt – always finding herself in second place. Never quite good enough to win the gold. Was she still mad about it? Was that why she disliked Ellie?

'After Lizzie retired, Vivian kept competing for a bit, but she was never as good,' said Sian, ruefully. 'It was almost like . . . like she lost her edge when she stopped chasing Lizzie.'

'I don't think she ever won a major gold medal after that, did she?' said Tam.

Sian shook her head. 'She's quite a lot older than your aunt,' she said. 'Lizzie was only eighteen when she retired, but Vivian was at least twenty-five by then. Other younger gymnasts came along and Vivian dropped down the ranks.'

'She retired a couple of years after Lizzie's injury,' Bella added.

‘Vivian doesn’t like me because of my aunt!’ Ellie said with despair. What could she do to change that?

‘At least it makes a change from you getting the star treatment all the time,’ said Scarlett who was walking past arm in arm with the sweet, fluffy-haired Welsh girl, Phoebe. ‘If you live by the sword you die by the sword, I say!’

‘Which means what, exactly?’ demanded Tam.

‘Just that Ellie gets all the perks of the Trengilly name,’ said Scarlett. ‘So it’s only fair she should cope with the downsides too!’

‘Scarlett, Ellie’s got this far on her own talent,’ said Sian firmly. ‘Nothing to do with Lizzie. We all know that.’

‘Do we?’ said Scarlett sulkily. She looked as if she wanted to say more, but even she didn’t dare when Sian was there.

‘Yes, we do,’ said Sian firmly. ‘And I’m also sure that Vivian is far too professional to punish Ellie for her family connection.’

Kashvi looked doubtful. ‘She is being super mean to Ellie though.’

‘I expect she just wants to push you,’ said Sian, although even she didn’t sound completely convinced. ‘She does it to everyone.’

‘Well, I’m just saying I wouldn’t want to be training a relative of my deadly enemy,’ said Scarlett.

‘Lucky that most human beings are lot nicer than you then, isn’t it!’ muttered Tam as Scarlett turned away with a flick of her blonde mane, dragging a rather reluctant Phoebe along with her.

‘There’s nothing I can do about it,’ said Ellie. ‘It’s not like I can stop being Lizzie’s niece, can I?’

‘Just keep working on your own programme,’ said Sian. ‘She’ll see how great you are.’

Ellie sighed. At least now she knew the reason why Vivian seemed to have it in for her. She just didn’t know how to fix it!



CHAPTER

Four

Ellie sat on the edge of the bath with an ice pack pressed against her ankle, her eyes squeezed shut. The pain in her ankle seemed to have got worse as the day went on and as she glanced down at it she saw it was red and swollen. She hadn’t told anyone it was bothering her. There was no point, she told herself. It would be better by tomorrow.

‘Ellie, come on!’ she heard Tam call. ‘Nancy and Lucy want to talk to you.’

‘Coming!’ said Ellie, hastily stuffing the ice pack in her wash bag and strapping up her foot to hide the bruising. She didn’t want the others to make a fuss.

‘Seriously, how long do you girls take in the bathroom?’ said Tam when she emerged a few minutes later. He was lounging in a chair in the neat little double room that Katya and Ellie were sharing for the week.

‘How did you even get in here?’ she asked, trying to change the subject. ‘I thought boys weren’t allowed in the girls’ dorms.’

‘Oh, I just told the coaches you were Skyping my sister and they said it was cool.’ Tam grinned. ‘And now I’ve discovered that you girls have a secret stash of cake I’ll be over every day to help you eat it!’ He waved a slice of home-made flapjack in the air.

‘Um, what happened to the food Mandy packed for you?’ asked Ellie. Mandy was the housemother who looked after the Academy gymnasts back in Head-Over-Heels House, their boarding house in London. She was also Tam and Nancy’s mum – and an amazing cook.

‘Oh, I got peckish on the journey up!’ said Tam, his mouth full of syrup and oats. ‘What took you so long in there anyway?’

‘I was just – doing a . . . face pack,’ Ellie lied, unconvincingly. Tam raised his eyebrow, but fortunately just then Katya yelped and pointed at the laptop propped up on her bed. Nancy and Lucy were waving at them on the screen from the bedroom they shared in Trengilly Cottage.

Since Nancy had given up gym for good less than a year ago, she lived in Cornwall with Ellie’s family and shared a bedroom with Ellie’s gym-mad little sister, Lucy. Nancy was crazy about anything to do with boats and now that she had swapped somersaults for rowing, she seemed happier than she’d ever been.

‘Vivian Ponting – you’re kidding. She was a real laugh as a competitor, wasn’t she?’ asked Nancy, when Tam had filled her in on the day’s events.

‘Not these days she isn’t,’ said Ellie, curling up on the bed next to Katya, tucking her strapped ankle out of sight. ‘The only jokes she cracks are about how bad everything I do is! Trust me, you’re missing nothing.’

‘Oh – I’m not missing gymnastics at all,’ said Nancy cheerfully. ‘I’m so totally over all that. It’s all about the pilot gig championships. That’s where it’s happening. Trust me!’

‘Pilot gig?’ asked Tam, pulling a face.

‘Bro, you never listen to anything I tell you!’ said Nancy. ‘Pilot gigs are six-man rowing boats. They were originally designed to ferry pilots out to sailing ships to help them navigate around the Cornish coastline.’

‘Sometimes they were used as lifeboats too,’ added Lucy, helpfully. Ellie’s little sister was like a smaller, red-haired version of Ellie herself. Ellie had missed her like mad when she first went to the Academy – she still did, although she was happier leaving Lucy now that Nancy was there, like a second big sister.

‘Yup, but now they just race for fun,’ Nancy went on. ‘There are loads of events coming up.’

‘I wonder if we’ll get to come and watch you,’ said Ellie. She hadn’t been back to Cornwall since Christmas and she was more homesick than she could admit.

‘Ooh, yes – this will be good!’ said Katya. She had struck up a firm friendship with Lucy last time they’d all been to stay, over Christmas. Her own family were far away in the Russian circus, so she’d been half-adopted by Ellie’s family too.

‘Ok, so after you guys win your golds at Euros you can chill by the seaside and watch me do the same,’ said Nancy.

‘Sounds perfect!’ said Ellie, with a sigh. ‘Only I’m not sure I’ll be making it to Euros if Vivian has any say in the matter.’



CHAPTER

Five

The next morning's warm-up went a lot like the previous one, with Vivian finding fault with almost everything Ellie did.

'Your arms are too wide, Trengilly . . . tuck your bum under – you look like a duck there . . . lift your feet up – are you wearing a pair of welly boots, Trengilly?'

Ellie found it hard to concentrate. She was constantly being reminded what she was getting wrong. It didn't help that her foot was in more pain than ever this morning. Even walking on it made her wince, but she still hadn't mentioned it to anyone.

Luckily, the others were all too immersed in their own training to notice. Only Scarlett picked up on the strained look on Ellie's face. 'Can't take the pace?' she enquired nastily.

'No, I'm fine,' said Ellie. 'Never been better!'

'A week at National squad camp is a test of endurance,' said Scarlett with a silky smile. 'Only the fittest survive!'

'Bring it on!' said Ellie. She tried to sound brave, but Scarlett had a curious expression on her face as she turned away.

After warm-up, Ellie was on tumble track, working on new tumble combinations. Even the *thought* of landing hard on her ankle made her feel sick, but when Barbara Steele wandered over to where the Juniors were working, Ellie pushed the pain to the back of her mind, determined to impress the head national coach.

She delivered a round-off double back straight, landing easily on the safety mat, ignoring the screaming pain that shot through her ankle on impact.

'What else are you working on?'

Ellie turned and saw that Barbara Steele was talking to her.

'Oh – um – I'm trying to master a double back straight into front punch,' said Ellie, hoping her eyes did not betray the pain that was still making it hard to think straight. 'I'm nearly there.'

'Let's see it, then.'

Ellie took a deep breath and tried not to hobble as she made her way back to the far end of the tumble track. Vivian had come to join Barbara and was saying something to the head coach. She waited for the signal to go, rotating her ankle to try and shake off the throbbing pain.

'Is that foot bothering you, Trengilly?' asked Vivian, looking up sharply.

'No . . . it's just . . . I bashed it earlier. On the bars.'

'You need it checked out in the medical centre?'

‘It’s fine. I just need an ice pack.’

‘After you finish here you get it looked at, OK?’ said Vivian curtly. ‘Now, show us what you’ve got.’

Ellie powered into the tumble – more self-conscious now that Vivian was watching. She rotated neatly through the air and landed it with only a slight stumble, feeling her ankle jar agonisingly but planting it firmly and refusing to wobble.

‘Good effort,’ said Barbara with a nod.

‘Your arms are still too wide on take-off,’ said Vivian. ‘And I’d still like to see more directional change. Here.’

She walked over to Ellie, who was still reeling slightly from the pain, stood behind her and lifted her arms up in the air. ‘Like this.’ Vivian slowly rotated Ellie’s body, mimicking the position she needed to achieve in the air. ‘Pull your shoulders right back and lift your chest up – it’ll help you power through.’

Ellie nodded. What Vivian said made sense, but she was feeling slightly dizzy, and she was unable to relax in Vivian’s presence after all she’d learned about her past the previous day.

‘Try again,’ said Vivian sharply, glancing at Ellie’s bound foot as she walked back to the start of the track, doing her very best not to limp.

This time Ellie took the tumble recalling all that Vivian had said, and she landed it tightly, ignoring the shot of pain on landing.

‘Not bad, I suppose,’ was all Vivian had to say. ‘Now go see the doc about that ankle, Trengilly.’ Then she turned and walked away.

Ellie made her way over to the medical centre, feeling weirdly tearful. Vivian’s eye for detail was incredible. Ellie knew she could learn so much from her – if only Vivian was willing to teach her!

The doctor, Sam, was a tall guy with dreadlocks and a Cockney accent.

‘So, what’s bothering you, missus?’ he asked, with a white toothy grin.

‘Nothing much,’ said Ellie. The pain had receded a little and the lie came easily. ‘I just bashed my ankle this morning on the bar. I guess I need a bag of ice to hold against it or something.’

‘Can I take a look?’

Ellie reluctantly hopped up on the table and allowed Sam to examine her ankle. He rotated it this way and that and asked her to point and stretch her toes several times.

‘You sure you just bashed it?’ he asked, looking up at her with a serious expression in his eyes. ‘Nothing more than that?’

‘Nope,’ Ellie shook her head, although she could feel herself blushing.

‘It’s important that you’re completely honest,’ said Sam. ‘Something that starts out as a niggle can turn into a progressive injury if left untreated.’

‘I know,’ said Ellie, forcing herself to meet his eye. ‘But it’s nothing. I just caught it – that’s all.’

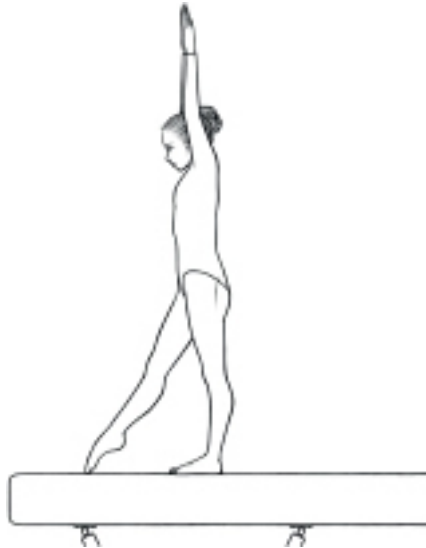
Sam finally gave a shrug. ‘OK – I can’t feel anything wrong. I’m going to give you an ice pack, and I want to keep an eye on it so I’ll need you back here tomorrow, OK?’

Ellie nodded.

‘If it doesn’t get better you need to rest it,’ Sam went on. ‘Give it time to recover. Your body is like a machine, you have to look after it or it will malfunction.’

‘I know,’ said Ellie, her face flushing again. The knot of anxiety in her stomach suddenly hurt as much as her foot. Keeping the pain secret was agony too, and part of her wanted to blurt out the whole story to someone. But she had no choice. If she told Sam how much it hurt, he’d say she had to stop training, and that just wasn’t an option right now.

‘There’s really nothing wrong with me,’ she insisted, biting her lip hard to keep back the tears. ‘I promise.’



CHAPTER

Six

‘We figured it out,’ said Lucy when Ellie Skyped them again that evening. Lucy, who was crazy about gymnastics, had made Ellie and Katya promise to give her daily National squad camp updates. Ellie didn’t mind – she always loved hearing what was going on back home in Cornwall in exchange.

‘Yup, we know why Vivian’s being so mean to you!’ said Nancy. Her freckled face was looking brown as a nut and she was grinning happily out of the screen, like she’d just solved a big mystery.

‘We know!’ said Ellie. ‘She didn’t like Aunt Lizzie!’

‘No, it’s more than that,’ said Lucy. ‘She’s stopping you trying the hard stuff, right?’

‘Yes,’ Ellie admitted. ‘I don’t even care about her being harsh but I just feel like she’s deliberately holding me back – especially on vault.’

‘And that completely makes sense,’ said Nancy, triumphantly.

‘Um – why?’ said Ellie. ‘Explain.’

‘So we’ve been reading all about her in this biography,’ Lucy held up a copy of a book. It was called *Silver Linings – an Unauthorised Biography of Vivian Ponting*, and it had a picture of a young Vivian on the front, her face screwed up in concentration as she sailed over the vault.

‘Wow!’ said Katya, who was sitting in the splits on the floor as if it was the most natural position in the world. ‘Lucy, you are doing detective work!’ she squeaked, grinning at her pal who smiled back happily.

‘Lizzie was beating Vivian in every competition,’ said Lucy. ‘So when it came to World Champs, Vivian decided she needed to do something drastic to beat her.’

‘What did she do?’ asked Katya, who had levered herself up into an elephant lift and was talking to the screen from her upside-down position.

‘That’s when she decided to attempt the Produnova vault,’ said Nancy.

‘Whoa!’ said Tam. He appeared in the doorway and flung himself down on the bed. He was now a regular feature in the girls’ dorms, which he had announced were far more comfortable – and less smelly – than the boys’. Some of the Junior squad boys had started calling him a ladies’ man, but Ellie figured his visits had more to do with their cake! ‘Sorry I’m late – what did I miss?’

‘Just shut up and listen!’ said Nancy, although Ellie saw her grin, and knew she was pleased to see him really.

‘Love you too, big sis!’ said Tam, blowing her a mock kiss.

‘Yuk,’ said Nancy, pretending to wipe it off her chin. ‘Now where was I?’

‘The Produnova.’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Nancy. She boomed out in a dramatic voice over. ‘Everyone knows that the Produnova is the most difficult vault there is!’

‘And fiendishly dangerous!’ Lucy chipped in, not quite getting her voice right and giggling. ‘But Vivian knew it would give her such a high difficulty value that Lizzie would struggle to beat it – *if* she could nail it.’

‘I think I remember reading something about this,’ said Tam, who was now munching on a stash of muffins he’d found in Ellie’s suitcase. The fact that they’d eaten a giant meal less than half an hour earlier didn’t seem to make any difference to him; as usual, he was already starving. ‘It was a massive controversy in the end – right?’

‘What happened?’ asked Ellie. She knew her aunt had won gold at World Champs.

‘Well, Vivian did the Produnova,’ said Lucy. ‘But she stumbled in her landing, so she lost execution points.’

‘Which meant that she and Lizzie ended up with exactly the same all-around score,’ said Nancy.

‘Exactly the same?’ said Ellie.

‘That is very unusual,’ said Katya, who was now the right way up again.

‘Completely!’ said Nancy. ‘It hardly ever happens, and it was a massive deal – it meant a tie for gold medal at World Champs.’

‘So they shared gold medal?’ asked Katya.

‘Nope!’ said Nancy. ‘Lizzie got it.’

‘Of course,’ said Tam. ‘Lizzie won, because execution score trumps difficulty value score, right?’

‘Right,’ said Nancy. ‘Even though their total was the same, the judges awarded the gold to Lizzie.’

‘So the difficulty of Vivian’s Produnova vault didn’t help?’ said Ellie, trying to figure out exactly what this meant. ‘She still came second.’

‘And that’s why she won’t let you try difficult vaults!’ said Lucy.

‘She’s punishing you for what Lizzie did to her all those years ago,’ added Nancy.

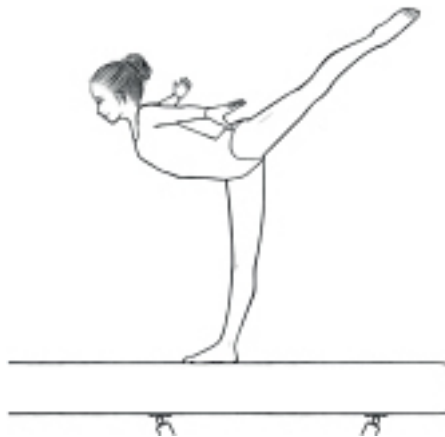
Ellie felt dismayed. She recalled Vivian’s refusal to let Ellie even try another vault, her constant nit-picking of Ellie’s technique.

‘You two are like Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, aren’t you?’ said Tam, who had just polished off his third muffin. ‘Super gym-sleuths in search of the truth!’

‘We had to work out what Vivian is doing. We can’t let her ruin Ellie’s chances cos of some ancient grudge against Lizzie!’ said Nancy.

‘So, what can I do?’ said Ellie.

‘I’ve got an idea,’ said Tam.



Seven

‘OK, this is top secret, right?’ said Tam, as he and Ellie made their way across the darkened lawns the following evening. ‘Cos we’re not the only ones who’ll get in trouble if we’re found out.’

‘I understand,’ Ellie whispered, glancing around nervously. She’d noticed the rehabilitation centre when she’d arrived at the National Sports Training Centre. It was a modern building on the other side of the campus which housed state-of-the-art physiotherapy facilities for injured soldiers.

‘I spoke to one of the squaddies and he promised to leave a window open,’ Tam went on. ‘But he’ll be in big trouble with his unit commander if we get caught.’

‘How come he’s even helping us?’ asked Ellie.

‘His sister’s a mad-keen gymnast,’ Tam explained, checking that the coast was clear before sidling round the back of the rehabilitation centre building. ‘And he used to be pretty good himself before . . . you know.’

Ellie nodded. Over the past few days she’d seen quite a few injured soldiers on the campus, on crutches or in wheelchairs. She found the idea of life after a war injury hard to even imagine. It made her ankle – which seemed to be getting worse rather than better – seem trivial in comparison. Not that she’d mentioned the getting-worse bit to Sam when she’d gone for her daily check up earlier, of course.

‘Here we are,’ said Tam, pushing himself through a bush to a low window that was half open. ‘He said he’d leave the window on the catch so we can climb in. Give me a leg up.’

Ellie glanced around nervously. Tam’s secret training session idea was brilliant, but it was also totally against the rules. If anyone saw them using equipment unsupervised – let alone breaking into a facility after lights-out – it would mean instant dismissal from camp, and probably from National squad, for both of them. Tam was making light of it, but Ellie knew he was risking a lot for her sake.

She remembered how she’d once thought she’d lost Tam’s friendship forever, when Robbie had been teasing him about being her boyfriend. She’d missed him like mad then, but she realised now that she never could have lost him. He was a true friend.

But this was no time to start getting soppy. Tam hoiked Ellie up after him and she peered inside the open window. ‘Wow – there’s a fully equipped gym in here.’ She wasn’t sure what she’d expected, but it wasn’t this.

‘Get a move on!’ whispered Tam.

Ellie managed to clamber in, then she grabbed Tam’s arm and dragged him over the sill, toppling him over so that he landed with a crash on top of her.

‘Ow . . . geroff ! Do you mind?’ he cried.

They both dissolved into giggles.

‘You have no idea how much grief I’d get if the other boys could see me now!’ laughed Tam. Ellie shoved him off and they both jumped to their feet. Ellie could feel herself flushing, and for a moment she couldn’t look him in the eye. It was pretty dark in the unlit gym. Only the light of the street lamps flooded in through the high windows, but in it she could make out ropes and parallel bars, a vault and a tumble track, plus lots of other unfamiliar equipment which Ellie supposed must be for the soldiers’ physio sessions.

‘I reckon we’ve got an hour before lights-out,’ said Tam. ‘So get vaulting, Trengilly. The gym is all yours.’

Ellie suddenly felt nervous. The vault here didn’t have a pit, so landing was going to be agony. ‘You can do a double Yurchenko, right?’ she asked Tam.

Tam nodded. ‘Actually, I can do an Amanar,’ he admitted modestly.

‘Wow!’ said Ellie, although she didn’t know why she was surprised. Tam had won gold at British Champs – he was a dead cert for the boys’ Euros squad. Of course he could nail the Amanar!

‘So – um – maybe you can give me some tips?’ Ellie asked. She couldn’t quite shake off the shyness that had suddenly come over her now that it was just her and Tam, alone in the dark.

But Tam was businesslike. ‘Love to!’ he grinned. ‘I’ve always fancied myself as a coach. Do I need to make you do a gruelling warm-up first?’

‘Don’t get carried away!’ laughed Ellie, pushing aside her awkwardness and focusing on what they’d come for.

‘Pain is power, Trengilly!’ Tam whispered in a fake Aussie accent that had them both doubled up.

It turned out Tam was a great coach with a fantastic eye for detail. ‘Nice and square . . . keep your kneecaps tight . . . make your take-off higher . . . better.’

Ellie was soon landing the double confidently. It hurt like mad and she was glad it was too dark in the gym for Tam to see the pained expression in her eyes. She was pretty sure he’d try to stop her if he knew how much she was hurting. ‘I want to try for an Amanar,’ she said.

Tam squinted at her through the gloom. ‘You realise that needs a more powerful take-off?’

‘You sound like Vivian again,’ said Ellie.

‘Fine,’ said Tam with a slight frown on his face. It made Ellie wonder if he had spotted that something wasn’t quite right. ‘You need to be aggressive, then – punch the vault really hard – then plant your feet in the landing like you’re trying to make a hole in the floor.’

Ellie swallowed. Her foot was throbbing again, but she couldn’t think about that right now. Ignoring the pain, she took a deep breath and started into the run up. But then she spooked, stopping just short of the vault and crashing into it with a thud.

‘You OK?’ asked Tam, running over to where Ellie stood, breathless and winded.

‘I’m fine,’ said Ellie, not looking him in the eye. ‘I just thought I heard something – someone coming.’ It was a lie – she’d spooked because her foot was aching – but at that moment they actually did hear footsteps and voices outside the window. They both stopped silent for a moment and listened breathlessly. After a moment the sounds retreated into the background.

‘We’d better not stay too much longer,’ whispered Tam, his eyes running over her face as if he was trying to figure something out. ‘Try it again. This time imagining you’re punching Vivian when you smack into that vault.’

Ellie managed a quiet laugh as she made her way back to the beginning of the runway. Determined not to spook again, she tried to push all thoughts of her ankle out of her brain as she ran up. She hit the vault hard and twisted, once, twice . . . but this time something made her pull back at the last moment and she landed on her bum.

They tried the vault over and over and a couple of times Ellie planted it, but mostly she ended up toppling on to her bottom, or falling flat on her face. She was really struggling to push aside the pain and focus on the vault. She knew that was making her hold back.

‘Perhaps we should stop for tonight?’ suggested Tam.

‘No,’ Ellie insisted. ‘I need to get it.’ The gym was too dark for him to see her flushed face, but she looked away anyway.

‘I’m just saying – sometimes you need to take a break and then come back to it fresh.’

‘I don’t have time to take a break!’ Ellie said, louder than she intended. ‘I need to nail this by the end of camp.’

‘OK, OK, don’t get your leotard in a twist!’ Then he stopped. ‘What was that?’

A light had come on just down the corridor and they could hear voices not far off – two female voices. ‘Training in secret . . .’ said someone Ellie didn’t know. There were some unintelligible words, then, ‘sneaking around . . . recovering from injury.’ Then they heard the other person speak, in a voice with a familiar Australian twang to it.

‘It’s Vivian,’ she whispered to Tam. They were both crouched down behind the vault in the dark. Ellie could hear Tam’s heart beating and was sure her own was just as loud. She suddenly felt like he was too close.

‘Perhaps someone told her we’re here?’ she whispered.

‘We need to get out quick!’ said Tam. ‘Come on.’

They raced to the window, the voices getting closer as they did so. Ellie caught a fragment of the first voice: ‘. . . going behind everyone’s backs . . .’ Vivian replied something about ‘punishment’ and then they both laughed.

Tam put out a hand to lift Ellie up, but she stepped back.

‘You go first,’ she told him. ‘I can’t risk you being caught for me.’

Everything felt weird. Being here alone with Tam. Lying to him about her ankle. Not being able to look him in the eye.

‘Nope – ladies first,’ Tam insisted. ‘No one can say I’m not a gentleman.’

Ellie hesitated, the pain making her feel dizzy and more confused than ever. A door slammed and the footsteps came closer.

‘Come on, Ellie,’ Tam urged. ‘Or we’ll both be caught.’

So Ellie allowed Tam to push her up over the sill. She landed in the bushes and fell awkwardly on her foot as she descended. She almost screamed out in pain but managed to muffle it. A moment later she was up and pulling Tam out too.

‘Come on!’ said Tam again, grabbing her hand as the light in the gym went on. They both legged it through the bushes back towards the dormitories. Glancing up at the clock tower, Ellie saw it was already past ten. They should have been in bed over an hour ago. The coaches didn’t come round checking; they trusted that none of the gymnasts would be stupid enough to blow their chance by breaking the rules. But they slept in rooms just along the corridor from the gymnasts, and if Ellie and Tam were caught . . .

Ellie’s ankle was in agony and she knew her body was covered in scratches from landing in the bush. And as they snuck back into the boarding house – red-faced and out of breath – they bumped into the tall, quiet figure of Memory Danster, making her way from the shared girls’ kitchen area with a mug of hot chocolate in her hands, wrapped in a giant dressing gown.

Ellie and Tam came to a breathless halt. ‘Hi,’ they both said at once.

Ellie knew they must look totally suspicious. Back past curfew, red-faced and covered in leaves.

But all Memory said was a gruff, ‘Hi.’ She didn’t ask where they’d been or what they’d been up to. She just shuffled past them and made her way back to her room.

‘Has anyone ever heard that girl say more than a single word?’ asked Tam.

‘Well, let’s hope she doesn’t say anything to Vivian,’ said Ellie, a thrill of fear pulsing through her stomach. ‘Or we’re both going home!’

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