

# Plum Comes Home





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Alan M. Hofmeister

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Alan Hofmeister, author

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# Chapter 1:

## A Birthday for Two

The morning sky was still dark when Diana Rush woke up with a feeling of excitement. She jumped out of her bed and ran to the mirror to look at herself.

She saw the same round face she always saw. She saw the same light brown hair. She saw the same small, green eyes. The corners of her mouth turned up into a small smile. Diana had expected to see something different today.

"Yesterday, I was nine years old," thought Diana to herself. "Today, I'm ten. Isn't it funny? Today, I'm a year older, but I look just the same."

A chill ran down Diana's back, and she realized that she felt very cold. Spring was cold in Cornwall, England. Diana dressed in warm clothes. Then she ran down the wooden stairs and into the kitchen. A comfortable fire was burning in the fireplace.

"Good morning birthday girl," smiled Mrs. Rush.

"How does it feel to be ten years old?" asked Mr. Rush, giving his daughter a loving pat on the head.

"It feels cold," answered Diana.

"Here, have some of this hot cider," said Mrs. Rush.

Diana sat down by the fire and tasted the cider. She could feel the hot drink moving from her mouth all the way down to her stomach. It spread its lovely warmth out to her fingertips. It tasted good.

"Your mother and I have a birthday present for you," said Mr. Rush. He handed Diana a small box. It was wrapped in blue birthday paper.

Diana took the box and carefully unwrapped the paper. She opened the lid of her birthday present. It was a red leather book, and there was a tiny gold lock on the front cover.

"It's a diary," said Mrs. Rush. "We thought you'd enjoy keeping a diary of all the things that happen to you each day."

"A diary!" repeated Diana. "It's beautiful. Thank you, Mum and Dad. I'll write in it every day."

Suddenly, the kitchen door flew open. Art Johnson, the farmhand on the Rushes' farm, came running in.

"Art!" exclaimed Diana. "Look what I got for my birthday. It's a diary."

"That's great," smiled Art. "You be sure you write something nice about me in that

little book." Art took hold of Diana, picked her up off the floor, and gave her a spin around the kitchen. Diana screamed with joy. Art Johnson had been a farmhand on the Rushes' farm for longer than Diana could remember. He was her very best friend.

"You know what?" said Art, as he set Diana down. "I think we're going to have a birthday for two today."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Rush.

"I've just been out to the stable to see Ruby," said Art. "It looks like that mare is about ready to give birth. We're going to have a new foal."

"Ruby's going to be a mother!" shouted Diana. "And the foal will have its birthday on the same day as mine. Will Ruby have it soon, Art?"

"Nothing is going to happen right at this moment," said Art. "These things take time. By the time you get home from school, Ruby should be just about ready to give birth."

Diana ran upstairs and put her new diary on the bed. She grabbed her books and dashed back downstairs.

"Goodby," she called as she went out the door. "Tell Ruby I want to be with her when she has the foal."

Diana left the farmhouse. She walked across the fields of potatoes in Cornwall until she got to a dirt road. She skipped along the road to Land's End, passing field after field of some of the best farmland in all of England. Before long she arrived at the small, white schoolhouse.

The day passed slowly for Diana. She couldn't keep her mind in the schoolhouse. She just kept thinking of the mare in the stable. She thought of the new colt awaiting its birth. When the last school bell rang, Diana picked up her books and dashed out of the room. She ran all the way home.

When she arrived at her farmhouse, Diana ran to the kitchen door and pushed it open. Inside, her mother, father, and Art were sitting around the table. They looked very sad.

"What happened?" asked Diana, setting down her books.

"Ruby had her foal while you were at school," said Art. "It happened sooner than I expected."

"Well, why does everyone look so sad?" asked Diana. "Is something wrong?"

"The foal is a runt," said Mr. Rush. "There's not much we can do about it."

"A runt," said Diana. "What does that mean?"



“The foal is very small and sickly,” said Mr. Rush. “It’s so sickly that Ruby doesn’t even want to take care of it. We’ll have to give it away. A runt like that will never grow up to be a good workhorse. Even if it lives, that little horse will always be weak and sickly.”

Diana’s eyes filled with tears. “Give it away!” she cried. “Dad, you can’t give the colt away. It’s Ruby’s baby!”

“I would have to spend all my time taking care of it,” said Mr. Rush. “And even then, I don’t think the foal has much chance to live. It’s just too weak.”

“I’ll take care of it,” cried Diana. “I’ll make the colt live! Please don’t give it away, Dad!”

“We’ll have to wait and see,” said Mr. Rush.

Diana turned and ran upstairs to her room. She thought of Ruby’s poor, sickly colt. She threw herself on her bed and cried and cried, her hot tears falling on the red leather cover of her new diary.

# Chapter 2:

## Plum

Diana was lying on her bed reading when the door to her room opened. Art Johnson came in and sat down beside her.

"How's my girl?" he said, a little smile curling around the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, Art," said Diana. "I'm so sad. I keep thinking of that poor little colt. Do we have to give him away?"

"It's a her, not a him," said Art. "The little foal is a filly, Diana."

"Then I really wish we didn't have to give her away," said Diana.

"How would you like to go out to the stable and have a look at her?" asked Art.

Diana jumped up. She ran with Art out into the cold night air. She pushed the wooden door of the stable open. It was growing dark, but she could see Ruby standing in her stall, chewing on some hay. A few feet away in the stall, the sickly little filly was lying down. Diana stared at the new foal for a long time.

"She's so awfully thin and small," Diana whispered. "But she does have a lovely face."

"She's a bay," said Art. "Look at her. A bay has a reddish-brown color and a black tail and mane."

"What's wrong with Ruby?" asked Diana. "Why isn't she taking care of her baby?"

"Sometimes when a runt is born, the mother rejects it," explained Art. "She won't feed it. She won't take care of it. Ruby is just doing what nature tells her to do."

"Then it's up to us," said Diana. "If Ruby won't do her job, we'll do it for her. Maybe we can make her well."

"She is a pretty little horse," said Art. "It just might be worth a try. Run inside and get some milk and sugar, Diana. We've got work to do."

Diana returned to the stable a few minutes later, carrying the milk and sugar. Art mixed the milk with the sugar. He put the formula into a glass baby bottle.

"Here, Diana," he said. "Take this bottle over to the filly. See if she'll drink. If anything will make her strong, milk and sugar will. Move very slowly so that you don't frighten her."

Diana slowly edged her way over to the pile of straw where the little filly was lying down. Ever so carefully, she reached out. She touched the foal on the head. The foal opened its big brown eyes. It looked up at Diana and let out a soft whinny. Diana gently put the bottle next to the filly's mouth.

"Look, Art," whispered Diana. "She's drinking."

"Yes, she is," smiled Art. "She certainly is."

The filly drank all the milk and sugar in the bottle. Then, to Diana's surprise, she drank a second and a third bottle. It was after she had finished the third bottle that the little filly picked up her head. Finally she looked around.

Diana backed away. She could hardly believe what she saw. First, the filly sat up in the pile of straw. Then, with what seemed to be a tremendous effort, the filly pulled herself to her feet. Her long legs were a little shaky and unsure. But she stood up and let out a weak neigh.

"She's standing, Art," said Diana. "She's standing up now!"

"That little filly is determined to live," whispered a voice from behind them.



Diana wheeled around. It was her father, standing by the door of the stable.

"Oh, Dad!" said Diana. "She is determined to live, isn't she? Please, can we keep her? Please? I promise to take very good care of her."

Mr. Rush looked at the foal. "Anything that wants to live that much deserves a chance," he said to his daughter. "Yes, Diana, we'll keep the foal."

A huge smile spread across Diana's round face. She felt happy, very happy.

The next morning Diana woke up at dawn. She threw on her clothes and ran downstairs. She got some milk and poured it in the baby bottle. Then she grabbed a plum for herself and headed out to the stable.

Diana found the little filly standing up in a pile of straw near Ruby. Carefully, she moved closer to the foal. She put the bottle next to the filly's mouth. Slowly, the filly began to drink. Diana held the bottle and ate her plum at the same time. The filly drank and drank. Finally, the last drop of milk was gone.

"You were hungry, weren't you?" Diana said, patting the foal on the head. "Did that milk taste good?"

The filly shook her head and let out a soft whinny. Suddenly she reached out and licked the half-eaten plum Diana held in her hand. It must have tasted good for she took a second lick. Then she took a third.

"So you like plums, do you?" laughed Diana. "You're a funny little horse. I've never heard of a foal eating plums for breakfast!"

Diana laughed loud and hard. The filly neighed right along with her.

After a while Diana left the stable and walked back upstairs to her room. She took out the leather diary her mother and father had given her for her birthday. She opened the first page and began to write.

Dear Diary,

April 7

This morning the new filly had a plum for breakfast. I've decided to name her Plum. Plum, isn't that a wonderful name for a horse? Dad says she's a runt and Ruby rejected her. But to me, Plum is without a doubt, the prettiest horse that was ever born. She likes me.





# Chapter 3:

## Strong and Well at Last

For days and days, Diana spent almost all of her time with the little filly. At first, the foal just drank the milk and sugar from the bottle. In a week she began to eat. She ate oats and a little hay. Diana just knew that the filly was getting stronger. She stood up most of the time. She even went for little walks inside the stable. Five weeks passed quickly for Plum. No one would have believed that the little filly had once been weak and sickly. Thanks to Diana's loving care, the foal had made a remarkable recovery.

Mr. Rush, Mrs. Rush, and Art Johnson all thought that Plum was a fine name for the little filly. So, "Plum" she was named. And "Plum" she became.

One day after school, Diana was out in the stable feeding Plum some milk and oats for dinner. Art had just come in from a hard day's work in the potato fields. He watched Diana feed the filly.

"You know," said Art, "I think it's time our little Plum saw a bit of the world. How would you like to take her out for a short walk?"

"Do you think she's strong enough to go outside?" asked Diana.

"I think she is," answered Art. "It will be good for her. She can see what life is like outside these stable walls."

Art got a rope and put it gently around Plum's neck. Plum seemed frightened by the feel of the rope. She looked at Diana. Her big brown eyes were wide with fear and excitement.

"Don't be scared, Plum," said Diana softly, rubbing the foal on the head. "We're not going to hurt you. We're just going to take you outside for little walk. You'll like it, really you will."

The sound of Diana's soft voice seemed to make Plum less frightened. The filly reached out and nuzzled Diana's hand, neighing softly.

Art handed the rope to Diana. "Here," he said. "I think you should take her. She knows you best."

Diana walked outside of the stable door, holding the rope. Plum followed behind. The sun was just setting on the Cornwall countryside. The village of Bodmin had a purple and pink color to it. Plum stopped and looked around. She looked at the farmhouse and at the fences. She looked at the green pasture and the church spire in the distant village. Her ears moved all around. They picked up the distant sounds of a

car on the road, a dog barking, and a bird overhead. The little filly was feeling the world outside for the first time. It was clear that she liked what she felt.

Diana walked toward the pasture. Plum followed her through the gate.

The wind was blowing off the Irish Sea. The filly's pink nostrils twitched at the smell of something good. She bent down and nuzzled the grass. Her nostrils twitched again. She took a bite of the thick green grass. Then she took another bite.

"Look, Art," smiled Diana. "She's eating the grass."

"I thought Plum might enjoy grazing here," laughed Art. "After all, our other animals think it's the best grass in all of Cornwall."

Every day after that, Diana took Plum out to the pasture to graze. The little filly loved being outside. She loved chewing on the grass. Soon Plum learned to wear a halter. Diana led her out into the meadow by the leather halter.

These were happy days for Diana. She loved the little filly. She loved watching



Plum grow strong and get well. She loved bringing her oats and grooming her pretty red-brown coat. The time passed quickly for Diana, as it always does for someone who is happy. Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. Winter came and went. Soon spring was upon the Cornwall countryside.

"Well, Diana," said Mr. Rush one night as they were eating dinner. "Next month, you and Plum are each going to have a birthday."

"It's hard to believe," said Art, swallowing a bite of lemon cake. "When she was born, Plum was the sickest little foal I've ever seen. Now she's grown into a good, strong animal. You've done wonders with that filly, Diana."

Diana smiled. Nothing made her happier than thinking about the past year with Plum.

"Have you thought about what you might want for your birthday?" Mrs. Rush asked Diana.

"Yes," said Diana, almost too quickly. "I'd love a saddle and bridle."

"A saddle and bridle!" said Mr. Rush. "What for?"

"Diana's been thinking of riding Plum," said Art, winking at Diana. "It seems like a good idea to me. Plum would make a fine riding horse."

"A saddle and bridle!" said Mr. Rush for the second time. "We'll see, Diana. We'll have to see about that."

After dinner, Diana went upstairs to her room. She took out her red leather diary, as she did every night before she went to sleep. She stretched out on her bed and began to write. Still holding the pen in her hand, Diana fell asleep. The entire night she dreamed wonderful dreams about Diana Rush and her beautiful horse, Plum.

Dear Diary,

March 9

I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Mom and Dad may give me a saddle and bridle for my birthday, Then I could ride Plum all over the fields and pastures. We would be the best horse and rider in all of Cornwall, England. Everyone would talk about Diana Rush and her beautiful, remarkable horse, Plum.



## Chapter 4:

# A Born Jumper!

Mr. and Mrs. Rush and Art Johnson looked on as Diana pulled open the lid to the big box.

"It's the saddle and bridle!" Diana screamed, when she saw what was inside the box. "Mum! Dad! You're simply wonderful. Thank you both so much!"



"You'd better thank Art too," said Mr. Rush. "He's been saving for weeks to help buy your present."

Diana looked over at Art. He smiled a sweet smile. "Well," he said, "I did it for both of you. I thought Plum might like a present for her birthday too."

Diana ran around the table. She gave each person a big hug. "You three are just about the most wonderful people in the world," she said. "I couldn't wish for a nicer family and friend."

“Okay,” said Art, getting up from the table. “That’s enough of that. Are we going to try out this saddle, or aren’t we?”

“I’m with you, Art,” laughed Diana. “Let’s go outside and see what Plum thinks of her birthday present.”

Mr. and Mrs. Rush, Art, and Diana all left the kitchen and walked out to the pasture. Plum was grazing quietly. When she saw the four people heading towards her, she stopped chewing and trotted over to the fence.

“Hello, Plum,” said Diana, handing the little horse a lump of sugar. “I’ll bet you don’t even know that today is your birthday.”

Plum whinnied softly. She shook her head all around. Her black mane looked soft and shiny in the sunlight.

“I think the three of us should wait outside the fence,” said Art. “Diana, you go inside the pasture. Put the bridle on Plum. Slip this bit gently into her mouth. If she doesn’t mind that, then we’ll try the saddle.”

Diana took the bridle and went inside the pasture. She walked up to Plum. She talked to her softly all the time. Then she put the bridle on her. She gave Plum another lump of sugar. While Plum was still licking the sugar from her lips, Diana slipped the bit into Plum’s mouth. At first, the filly shook her head and neighed. After a few minutes, she became still and quiet.

“What a good horse you are,” Diana said to Plum, patting her soundly on the side. “You don’t seem to mind the bit at all.”

“Here,” said Art, handing Diana the saddle over the fence. “See how she likes this. Put the cloth on first. Then put the saddle on her back. Be sure to buckle that saddle good and tight.”

Diana threw the saddle cloth on Plum. Then she placed the small saddle carefully on Plum’s back. The little filly just looked around as Diana reached under her and buckled the saddle tightly.

“I’ve never seen a horse this calm,” said Mr. Rush. “She hardly notices that saddle.”

“It must be because she likes Diana so much,” said Mrs. Rush. “Plum knows Diana would never do anything to hurt her.”

“What do you think, Art?” yelled Diana from the pasture. “Should I get on her?”

“I’d give it a try,” said Art. “She doesn’t seem to mind the saddle. Just be sure you hang on tight in case she tries to throw you off.”

Diana put her foot in the stirrup and took hold of the reins. Then she pulled herself up onto the saddle on Plum’s strong back. Plum didn’t move a bit.

"Look at that horse," said Mr. Rush. "She acts like she was born to be saddled. I've never seen anything like it."

"That a girl, Plum," shouted Art at the top of his voice. "That's my little Plum!"

When Plum heard Art's voice, she suddenly turned around and neighed loudly. Then, quick as lightning, Plum took off in a wild gallop across the pasture. Away she went. Diana hung onto the reins with all her might. When Plum got to the pasture fence, she took a flying leap into the air. Over the fence she sailed. She cleared it by at least two feet. Plum galloped right up to Art. She came to stop at his feet, reached out, and gave him a soft nuzzle on the hand.



"Diana, are you all right?" asked Mrs. Rush.

"Yes, I'm fine," shouted Diana, who was sitting safely in the saddle. "Did you see Plum jump? Wasn't that amazing?"

"That was the most amazing jump I've ever seen!" yelled Mr. Rush. "That horse is a born jumper. She jumps like a steeplechase horse!"

Diana climbed down from Plum's back. "A steeplechase horse," she repeated. "Aren't those the race horses that jump over hedges and hurdles and all kinds of obstacles?"

"That's right," said Art, "Our little Plum jumps like a champion steeplechase horse, if ever I saw one!"

"Then why can't we enter her in a steeplechase?" asked Diana. Her eyes grew bright with excitement.

"What a great idea!" said Mrs. Rush. "I heard that the county fair is going to have its first steeplechase this summer. Maybe we can enter Plum in it."

"Wait a minute," said Art. "Running in a steeplechase is hard work. Those horses have to be carefully trained."

"You and I can train her," said Diana. "Look. Summer is coming. I'll have lots of time to spend with her. Can we, Dad? Can we enter Plum in the County Fair Steeplechase? You said she was a born jumper."

"We'll see, Diana," smiled Mr. Rush. "We'll have to see about that."

Diana knew what it meant when her father said he'd have to wait and see. She slipped her arm around Plum's neck. She gave the filly a big hug.

"Did you hear what Dad said, Plum?" said Diana. "You're going to run in the steeplechase. Hedges and hurdles and obstacles will be easy for you. We're going to make you a champion!"



# Chapter 5:

## Victory!

Diana and Art began to train Plum the very next day. The County Fair Steeplechase was to be held at the end of July. That gave them only a few months to get Plum in good racing shape.

Diana knew nothing about training a horse for racing. But to her surprise, Art knew a lot.

"I wasn't always a farmhand," Art explained to Diana. "I've never told anyone this, but I used to be the trainer of one of the best steeplechase horses that ever ran. 'Icecap' was his name, and a rare horse he was. He was a bay, like Plum, only he was much bigger."

"Why did you stop training him?" asked Diana.

"We were getting him ready for the big race," said Art, a faraway look coming into his eyes. "Icecap had never been in better shape. He could sail over those hedges as if he had wings. He could leap across a water pond that was ten feet across. What a natural jumper that bay was!"

Art stopped talking for a time. He stared off into the distance.

"It happened one day when we were on the racecourse warming him up," Art went on at last. "Icecap was just about to jump a tall fence. Something in the air caught his attention. He looked up in the middle of his jump. His back hoof caught on the fence, and he tripped. It was a bad fall he took. The doctor said he had broken his leg."

"How horrible," said Diana.

"They had no choice but to have Icecap destroyed," said Art sadly. "They said he was suffering too much, and that his broken leg would never get better. So I left. I came here to work for your father. I felt very sad about Icecap. I was so sad, in fact, that I decided never to have anything to do with steeplechasing again."

"That was, until you saw Plum jump yesterday," nodded Diana.

"That's right," said Art. "When I saw Plum make that great jump, I knew that she was a natural steeplechaser too. It's a rare gift she has."

Art taught Diana everything he knew about training a steeplechase horse. He made small hurdles out of branches. Plum practiced jumping over them. Plum got better and better. Art made the obstacles higher and higher. Diana always rode Plum. She was amazed at how easily and grandly the little horse jumped.

The time came when Plum could jump a fence three feet high. Then Art told Diana that the filly was ready to learn to jump across a wide distance. He explained that in the steeplechase race, the horses have to jump across wide ponds. Art took two logs. He set them about four feet apart. Plum jumped across the logs easily. Each day Art moved the logs. He moved them farther and farther apart. Plum practiced and practiced. Finally she could jump across logs that were ten feet apart.



Plum seemed to be enjoying the training. She worked hard at it, day after day. She was very happy to have Diana sitting in the saddle on her back.

The day of the county fair came. Diana helped Art put Plum into the back of their horse van. She and Art climbed into the front of the van. Then they went down the dirt road to the fair.

When they got to the fair, they drove right up to a small racecourse. It had been made especially for steeplechases. Most of the other horses were already standing



around the small track. Diana and Art led Plum off the van. They took her over to the official in charge of the race.

"What's the horse's name?" asked the official.

"Plum," answered Diana.

"Owner and rider?" asked the man making notes on a slip of paper.

"Diana Rush," answered Diana. "And she's trained by Art Johnson."

"Take her over to the starting place with the other horses," said the man. "The race starts in five minutes. If I were you, I'd be careful, Diana. Both you and that horse are pretty small for this kind of race."

Diana turned to Art. He smiled at her and gave her a little hug. Then he patted Plum on the head.

"You show them who's champion," said Art. "Good luck."

Diana jumped in the saddle and rode Plum over to the other horses. While she was waiting, she looked around the stands for her parents. She found them sitting in the front row near the finish line. Suddenly, Diana heard a voice on the loudspeaker.

"All horses, ready," said the voice. "Take your places, everyone."

A shot was fired and the horses took off. Plum ran, keeping up with the others. Near the end of the race she jumped a short hurdle easily and pulled to the front. Next came a small pond. Plum took a giant leap and cleared the water. Then came two more hurdles, each higher than the first one. Many of the other horses couldn't make it over

these hurdles. Plum had no trouble. She jumped lightly over the wooden fences. Diana just held on. She let Plum run the race. She was way ahead of all the other horses. The people were going wild in the stands. They were cheering and cheering the little filly on.

A voice came over the loudspeaker. "Coming down the stretch, it's Plum in the lead by ten lengths. It's Plum all the way. Look at that little filly jump! Crossing over the finish line now, it's Plum the winner by fifteen lengths. I repeat, it's a victory for Plum. She's the winner by fifteen lengths!"

# Chapter 6:

## No Other Choice

As soon as the race was over, Diana and Plum were surrounded by a crowd of cheering people.

"Congratulations!" they yelled. "That was a superb race!"

"You take good care of that little filly," shouted a nearby woman. "She's going to be a great horse someday."

Diana smiled at the people, but her eyes looked all around for her parents and Art. At last she saw them. They were trying to push their way through the surrounding crowd to her.

"What a race!" smiled Mr. Rush, when he finally made it over to Plum's side. "I'm proud of you, Diana, and I'm proud of this little filly too."

Diana grinned at her father. Then she saw Art coming through the crowd. He was smiling excitedly. His huge grin stretched from one ear clear across to the other one. He walked up to Plum and gave her a big pat on the head. Then he helped Diana down from the saddle. He didn't say a word. He just kept smiling that big, glowing smile. Diana was glad for him.

As Art and Diana were walking Plum around to cool her down after the race, a tall, thin man came up to them to talk.

"Hello," he said. "My name is Fred Clover. That was a spectacular race you and your filly just ran. Just spectacular! Congratulations."

"Thank you," said Diana.

"I'd like to make you an offer," said the man. "I'll give you four hundred pounds if you'll sell Plum to me. I train race horses. I'd surely like to have that little filly in my stable."

"Thank you very much, but we're not interested," said Art quickly.

"Are you sure?" said Mr. Clover. "Four hundred pounds is a lot of money."

"We're sure," said Diana. "You see, Plum is a very special horse to us."

"Well, if you change your mind, give me a call," said Fred Clover. "Here's my card."

Diana took the man's card and watched him as he walked away.

"He should have seen Plum a year ago. He wouldn't have given us anything for her," laughed Diana. "Now he's willing to pay four hundred pounds!"

"Let's not talk about it anymore," said Art.

Later that afternoon, Art put Plum into the back of their van and headed for home. When Plum was safely back in her stall in the stable, Diana fed her a good dinner of oats and hay.

"A big dinner for a little champion," said Diana softly. Plum gave her a warm nuzzle.

Diana left the stable and went up to her room. She proudly placed the Gold Cup, that Plum had won, on the shelf above her bed. It had been an exciting day. Diana was too tired to write in her diary. She fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

The next morning Diana came downstairs late. She heard her mother, father, and Art talking in soft voices in the kitchen. A man she had never seen before was talking with them. Diana stopped at the doorway and listened.

"You mean it's completely dry?" Mr Rush was saying. "There's nothing left?"

"That's right," said the man. "All you've got left in that well is a little mud at the bottom. You just used up all the water there. Sometimes they suddenly run dry, just like that."

"What can we do?" asked Mrs. Rush. "We need that water to live."

"We need that water for the crops too," said Art. "Without that well our potato plants will never make it through the summer."



"I think there's more water on your land," said the man. "I can drill another well for you. The only problem is that it's a big job. It will cost you close to five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds!" said Mr. Rush. "Where on earth would we get that much money? Isn't there some way to drill it for less?"

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid there isn't," said the man. "I've given you the lowest possible price."

The man got up from the table and left the house. Diana watched her father put his head in his hands. "What are we going to do now?" he said. "Without a well we can't water the crops. We can't feed the animals. We can't even have a cup of cider. Unless we can get that new well, we will be completely ruined."

Diana quietly walked back upstairs. She went into her room and took out a card. Then she went to the telephone. She took a deep breath and dialed a number.

"Hello," said a man's voice at the other end of the telephone line.

"Mr. Clover," said Diana. "This is Diana Rush. I've changed my mind. I've decided to sell Plum to you. But she'll cost you five hundred pounds."

"I only offered to pay four hundred," said Mr. Clover. "That's a good price."

"Five hundred," said Diana, "or there's no sale."

"Okay," said Mr. Clover. "A Gold Cup winner is worth it. I'll come by tomorrow morning and pick her up. I'll give you the money then. Goodbye."

Diana hung up the phone and walked into her room. She sat down on her bed and started to cry. She wept and wept until she had no tears left. Then she took out her red leather diary.

Dear Diary,

July 14

I've sold Plum. I'm going to give Dad the money so he can drill a new well. I had to do it so we could save the farm. I had no other choice, Maybe Mr. Clover will make Plum a famous race horse. I hope so. I'm sure he'll be good to her. It's just that I don't know what I'm going to do without her. I just don't know.

Diana stopped writing. She began to cry again. Her tears ran down her face and onto the diary. Her tears mixed with the words on the page. A blue stream of ink ran all the way down the little red book.



# Chapter 7:

## A Magnificent Horse

Later Diana told her parents and Art what she had done. No one knew what to say. They all knew how desperately they needed the five hundred pounds to drill the new well. They also knew that life around the farm just wouldn't be the same without Plum. The little filly had captured the hearts of everyone in the family.

"I wish there were some other way, really I do," said Mr. Rush. "I'd do almost anything to keep Plum."

"I know, Dad," said Diana softly. "We just have no choice, that's all."

Mr. Rush hugged his daughter and held her tightly. "You're a magnificent girl, do you know that?" he said to her.

Diana smiled a brave smile. Then she said good night to her mother and father and, last of all, to Art. She knew the next day was going to be hard for him. She gave his hand a special squeeze.

Diana woke up early the next morning. She got dressed quickly, and ran downstairs. She took one plum from the kitchen, then headed out to the stable. Plum was standing in her stall, chewing on some hay. Diana scooped up a big pile of oats and put them in front of Plum. She watched in sad silence as the horse ate her breakfast. When Plum was finished with her oats, Diana put the plum in front of the filly.

"I don't imagine Fred Clover is going to continue to give you very many plums," Diana said. "I know how much you love them. I thought you might enjoy this one. It looks nice and ripe."

The filly reached out and ate the plum from Diana's hand. When she had eaten the last bite, she looked up at Diana with her big brown eyes. She gave the girl's hand a gentle nuzzle. It was then that Diana heard the van pull up outside the stable door. Fred Clover had arrived.

Diana ran outside. Mr. Clover was talking to her father. He took some money out of his pocket and gave it to Mr. Rush. Then he turned and headed towards the stable door.

"Good morning, Diana," he smiled. "Is Plum all ready to go?"

"Yes," answered Diana. "She's just finished her breakfast."

"Good," said Mr. Clover. "Bring her outside. We'll put her in the back of the van."

Diana went into the stable. She returned a minute later, leading Plum by the halter.

She walked Plum up to the back of the van, where a little ramp had been lowered for the filly to walk on. Plum stopped at the ramp and looked at Fred Clover.

"Come on, Plum," said Diana. "Get on the truck."

Plum looked around desperately. She looked at Diana. Then she looked at Mr. Clover. Finally she looked at the ramp. She pulled away from Diana and neighed loudly.

"She doesn't want to go," Diana said.

Mr. Clover walked up next to Plum and gave her a little slap from behind. He took hold of her halter. Then he pulled her up the ramp and onto the van.



"She's just a little confused right now," said Mr. Clover, closing up the back of the van. "She won't be confused for long. She'll get used to me in no time."

With that, Mr. Clover hopped in the front seat and started the van. "So long," he yelled. "You'll be reading about Plum in the newspapers soon. I promise you. I'm going to make her famous!"

He waved as the van slowly pulled down the dirt road away from the farm. Diana watched the van go. She was very sad. She turned and ran into the house.

Art Johnson was sitting at the table, his head in his hands. He looked up at Diana as she ran through the door. "Is it all over?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," said Diana. "She's gone."

"You know, I was just thinking," said Art. "Once, a little over a year ago, you and I saved Plum's life. We nursed her when she was small and weak. Now, by helping us get the money to drill a new well, she is saving ours. She's a good horse, a mighty good horse."

Weeks went by. Life on the Rushes' farm continued. The new well was drilled. There was plenty of water. The animals were fed. The potato plants got watered. The farm was saved. Everything was fine, just as it always had been. Only one thing was missing, and that was Plum.

Diana stopped writing in her diary. Almost all the pages in it had been filled with stories about Plum. She had written about the day Plum was born and about the day Plum first went outside. She had written about Plum's first jump and about her triumph at the county fair. Somehow Diana couldn't write in her diary now that Plum was gone.

Several months later, Diana returned home after an uneventful day at school and found her parents and Art sitting in the kitchen. They were reading the newspaper.

Diana looked over Art's shoulder. She read the newspaper story to herself.

#### PLUM CAPTURES SILVER CUP AT LONDON RACECOURSE

**LONDON--Yesterday, a little filly named Plum won the Silver Cup at the Upson Downs Racecourse. In the two-mile race, the bay, owned by Fred Clover, outran all the other horses. She won by ten lengths. It was a tremendous triumph. Steeplechasing hasn't seen such a spectacular jumper since Icecap ran at Bay Meadows over fifteen years ago. Plum is a magnificent little horse.**

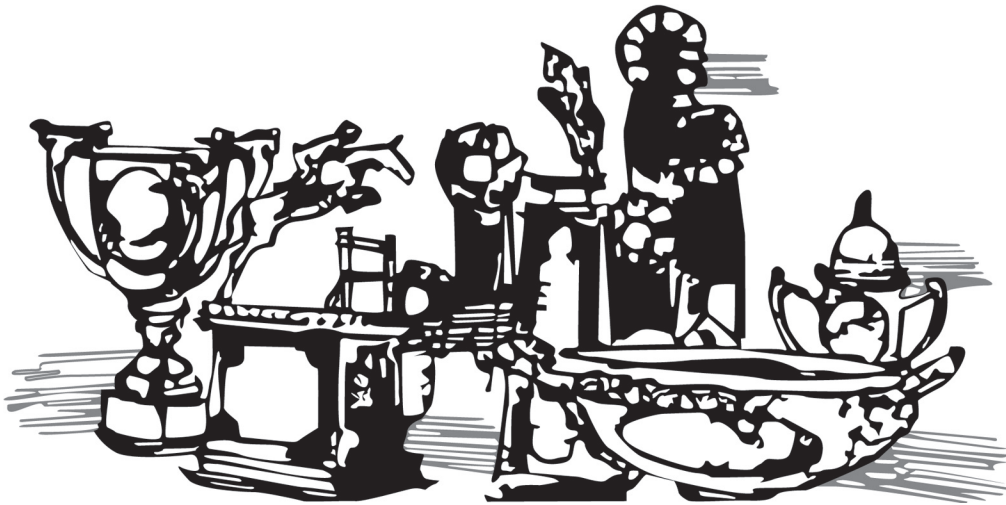
Diana smiled when she read the story. It made her feel good to hear such wonderful things about Plum. Fred Clover was doing just what he had promised. He was making Plum famous.

# Chapter 8:

## Never!

As the months went by, the newspaper stories about Plum continued to appear. Each report was more glowing than the last one. Plum won every race she entered. She won the Blue Ribbon at Cottage Field. She won the Grand Champion Trophy at Barnsworth Farm. She even won the Hunt Cup at Gladness. The newspapers called her one of the best steeplechasers that ever lived. She was young and she was little. One thing was for certain. Plum was a born jumper.

One day, Diana came running into the farmhouse. Art had just come in from the potato fields and was reading the paper.



"Do you know what tomorrow is?" asked Diana, a big smile on her face.

"Tomorrow is Saturday," said Art.

"Yes, it is," laughed Diana. "It's also something else. It's the day of the Grand National, the greatest steeplechase in all of England."

"Is it now?" asked Art. "It's funny that I didn't know that."

"You're teasing me, Art," said Diana. "Aren't you? You knew."

Art took hold of Diana. He picked her up off the ground and gave her a spin around the room. "Yes, Diana," he laughed. "Of course I'm teasing you. Of course I know tomorrow is the Grand National. I also know who's running in it. Your friend and mine, the one and only, Plum!"

"Do you think she has a chance to win?" asked Diana.

"A chance!" said Art. "Why, that little filly will outrun those other old horses by thirty lengths. She'll win easily! It will be another ribbon and trophy for Plum!"

"I hope so," said Diana. "I hope she shows everyone what a great champion she is."

The next day, Mr. and Mrs. Rush, Diana, and Art all gathered around the radio. They turned it on and listened to the announcer's voice.

"Everyone is waiting for the start of the Grand National," he said. "In all of England, this is the biggest steeplechasing day of the year. The stands are packed with people. Even the Queen has come to watch the race."

"Imagine that," said Diana, shaking with excitement. "Our little Plum is running in front of the Queen of England."

"Here come the horses now," said the announcer. "Most people have picked the bay filly, Plum, to be the winner of today's race. Plum may have pretty tough competition. Very tough competition, in fact. The gray horse, Run-of-Luck, looks awfully good. Then there's always the powerful Rough Knight. He's a fast finisher. It's going to be an exciting race, that's for certain. The race will be starting in just about two minutes."

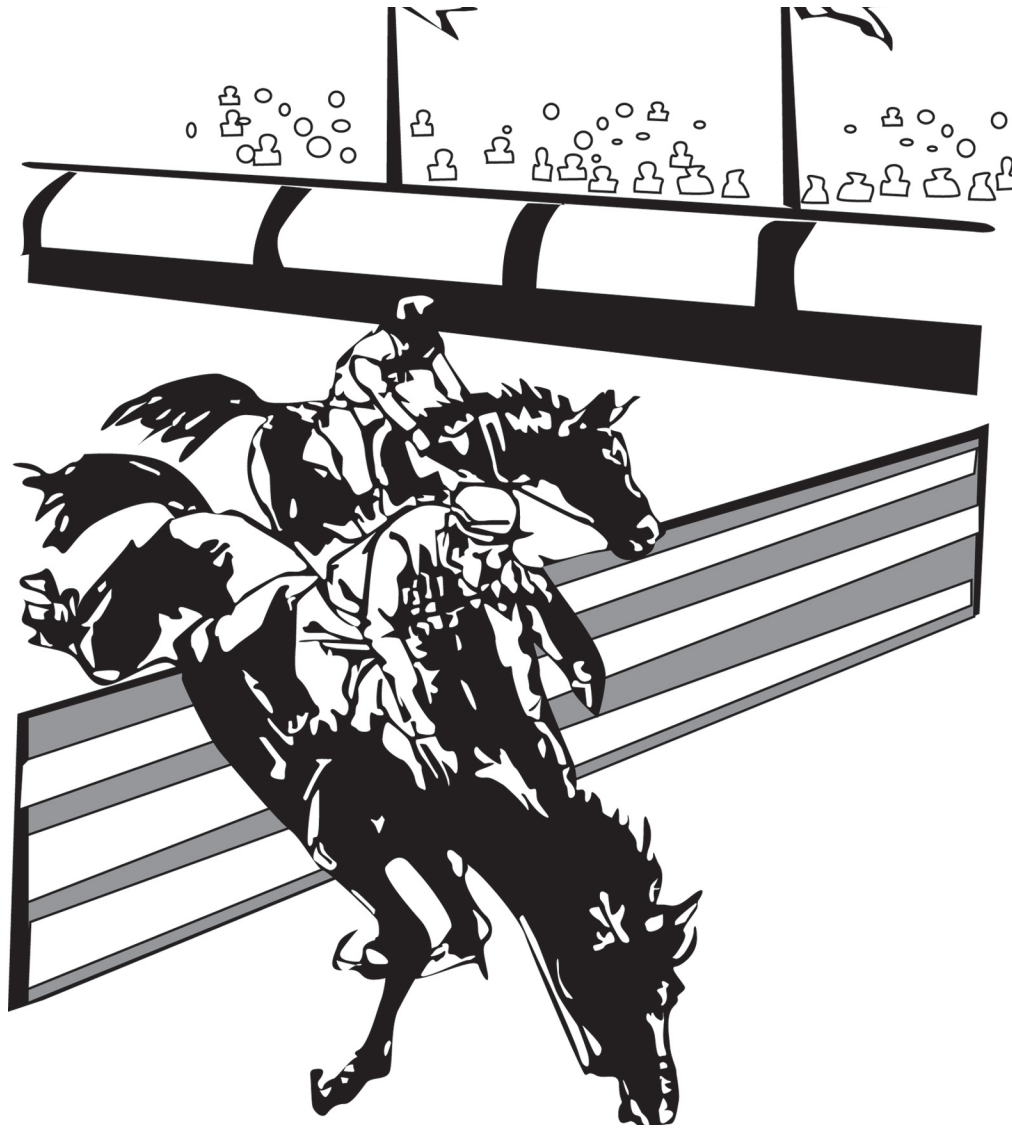
In two minutes the shot was fired. The race began! Diana could feel her heart pounding as she listened to the radio. As always, Plum cleared the first few hurdles easily. She pulled out in front and got a good lead on the other horses. Over water ponds and hedges, Plum gracefully jumped. The people cheered her on from the stands. About halfway through the race, Rough Knight started to make his move. By the time the horses turned into the stretch, Rough Knight was running "neck and neck" with Plum. "It's Plum, leading by a nose," called the announcer. "She looks like she's about to take off. Now it's Plum, pulling in front by a neck--no, by a half length. Rough Knight is gaining ground. It doesn't look like he's going to make it. Plum is pulling away. They're coming up to the last hurdle."

Suddenly the announcer stopped talking. A loud roar, almost a shriek, came from the people in the stands.

"Wait a minute!" shouted the announcer. "Something's happened! It looks like Plum has stumbled! Could it be? Yes. The great Plum has stumbled over the last hurdle. She's taken a bad fall. Rough Knight has pulled around her. He's across the finish line. It's Rough Knight, the winner of this year's Grand National."

Art ran to the radio. "What about Plum?" he yelled. "What happened to Plum?"

The announcer continued to talk about Rough Knight. He didn't mention Plum. At long last he spoke about the little filly.



“It looks like Plum is pretty badly hurt,” said the announcer. “The veterinarian has been called in. We’ll give you news about Plum as soon as we hear it.”

Diana and her family sat in silence. They waited to hear about Plum. Diana hoped the filly wasn’t badly hurt. She hoped the announcer had been wrong. Maybe it wasn’t Plum who fell. Maybe it was really another horse.

“We have some sad news to report,” the announcer said. Diana felt her stomach turn over. “The veterinarian reports that Plum has broken her leg. It’s a very bad fracture. Plum’s owner, Mr. Fred Clover, is sad to say that Plum may have to be destroyed. That leg fracture may be a death sentence for Plum,” the announcer said.

Diana jumped from her chair and screamed. “Death sentence!” she cried. “They can’t kill her. Oh, Art, I won’t let them kill Plum.”

“Neither will I,” said Art. “I learned that lesson with Icecap.” Art turned to Mr. Rush. “May I take the van for a while?” he asked.

“You certainly may,” said Mr. Rush. “Here are the keys to it.”

“Come on, Diana,” said Art, running from the house. “Come with me. We’re going to pay a little visit to Mr. Fred Clover.”



# Chapter 9:

## Home Again, Once and For All

It was about a two-hour trip from the Rushes' farm to Fred Clover's Stables. To Diana, the ride seemed endless. Neither she nor Art spoke a word the entire way. They were both thinking the same thing. They were wondering if Plum was still alive and were hoping that they weren't too late.

It was dark by the time the old van pulled up in front of the Clover Stables. Diana and Art jumped from the van and ran to the stable door. The huge barn was filled with stalls. Diana moved from one to the next. She couldn't find Plum anywhere. She was beginning to get frightened. Maybe they had arrived too late after all.

Finally, in the last stall, Diana found Plum. The little filly was lying on her side. Diana couldn't tell if she was dead or just asleep. Carefully, she walked up to the motionless horse.

"Plum," she whispered. "It's me, Diana."



At the sound of Diana's voice, Plum opened her eyes. She looked at Diana, and let out a weak whinny. Diana put her hand on Plum's head. The little filly gave it a soft nuzzle, as always. Soon, Art, who had been watching from outside the stall, came up to Plum. He put his hand lovingly on her head.

"Art, she remembers me," said Diana.

"I always said she was a smart horse," said Art. "She knows who her real friends are."

Suddenly, Art and Diana heard a voice behind them. "May I help you?" asked the voice sternly. It was Fred Clover.

"Yes, you may," answered Diana, just as sternly. "We want to take Plum home."

"I don't know why you want to take that horse anyplace," said Mr. Clover. "She's not worth anything. She'll never run again."

"Just because a horse breaks a leg doesn't mean it has to be killed," said Diana.

"Listen," said Mr. Clover, his voice becoming angry. "I'm in the racehorse business. I can't afford to take care of sick horses that are never going to race again."

"Fortunately, we can!" answered Diana. "Unlike you, we're not in the racehorse business. We just love Plum, that's all. If she needs help, we're more than happy to give it. So if you don't mind, Mr. Clover, we'll put her in the van and be off."

On the way home, Diana reached under the seat of the van. She took out her red leather diary. For the first time in a long time, she began to write about her filly--Plum.

Diana's father and mother were waiting for them when they got back to the farmhouse.

Dear Diary,

March 29

Tonight Plum is coming home. Once and for all,  
she's coming home! Welcome home, Plum!

"I just called the veterinarian," said Mr. Rush. "He's coming right over."

The veterinarian arrived quickly. He carefully examined Plum's leg.

"There's no doubt about it," he said. "This filly has a bad fracture. I don't know if her leg is going to heal right. She'll have to keep still for a few months, anyway."

The doctor and Art made a big sling for Plum in her stall. Then they helped the little horse into the sling.

"I don't want her moving from this sling until that leg is healed," said the vet.

For the next few months, Diana and Art took loving care of Plum. They brought

her food three times a day. They tried to make her comfortable in her sling. They talked to her, patted her, rubbed her. Plum was in some pain, but she was very patient with it. She seemed glad to be home.

Finally, the day came for Plum to be taken out of her sling. Plum neighed loudly as the veterinarian unwrapped the bandages and unfastened the sling. Then he examined the leg and backed away from her.

“Come here, Plum,” he called. “Let’s see if you can walk.”

Plum stood still. She didn’t move an inch.

“I don’t think she’s going to be able to use that leg,” said the veterinarian. “She won’t walk on it.”

Diana moved away from Plum. “Come here, Plum,” she called. “Come to me.”

Plum looked at Diana and whinnied softly. Then, with a tremendous effort, she took a few steps toward Diana. Diana backed up more and more, until she was out of the stable. Plum was determined to follow her. Mr. and Mrs. Rush, Art, and the veterinarian all smiled.

“Plum’s going to be all right,” said the veterinarian. “She won’t be a champion jumper again, but in a few weeks she’ll be walking just fine.”

Diana took Plum on walks every day. Her leg became strong again. By the following year, Diana was even able to ride Plum. Together, they rode across the fields and meadows and enjoyed the beautiful countryside. Both of them were happier than ever.

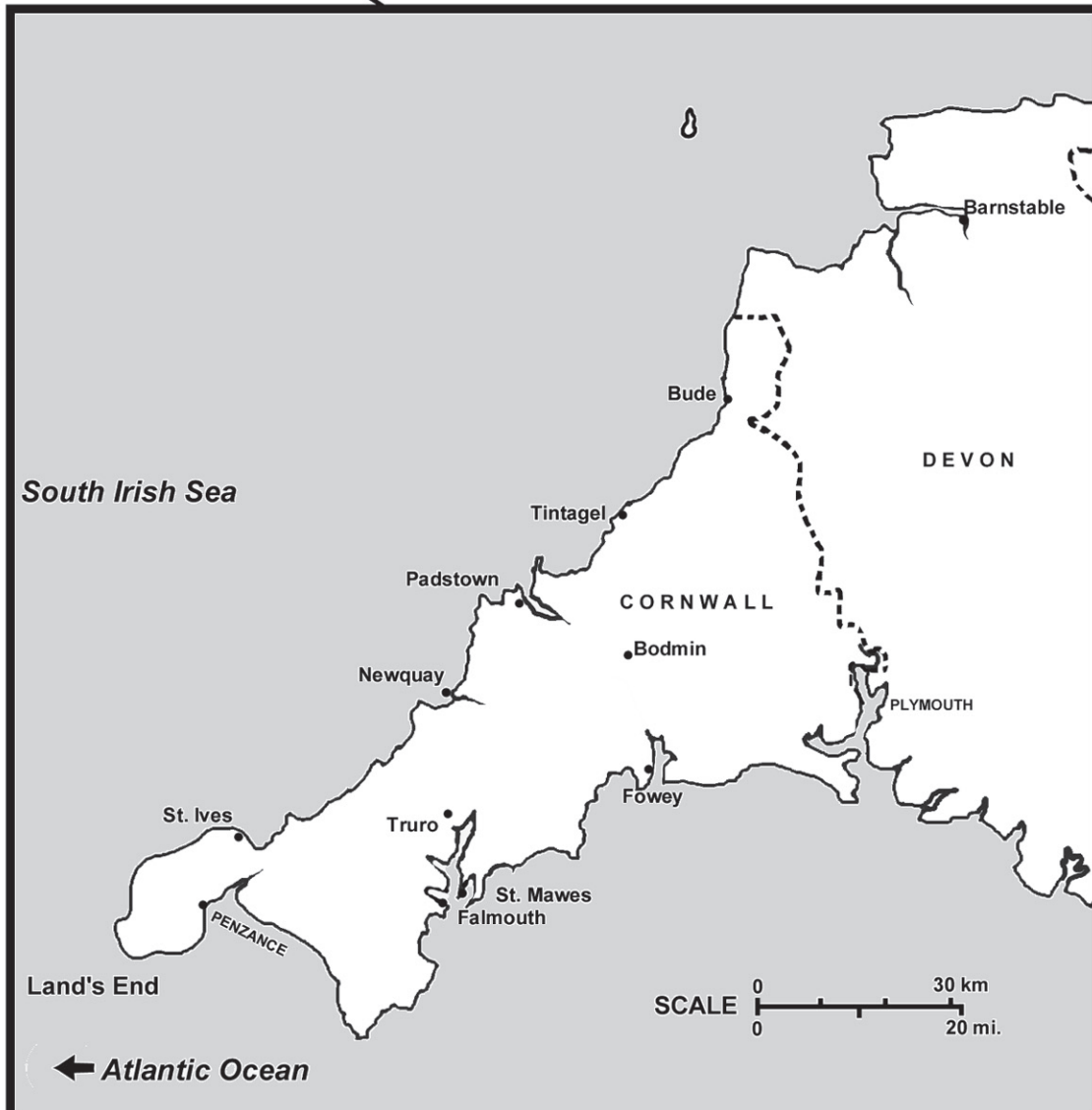
It was in the spring of her fourth year that Plum gave birth to a beautiful little filly. She had a shiny black mane, just like her mother.

Diana and Art watched Plum carefully taking care of her baby. They both sensed that this new foal would bring them much happiness and much joy, just as her lovely mother had always done.





# *Cornwall, England*







## **“Fluency Builders”**

### ***Model Lesson Plan Summary: Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension***

**Step 1. Review of Vocabulary from the Previous Chapter (approximately 2 minutes).** The instructor reviews the 10 most difficult words from the previous chapter. See Step 7 of this Lesson Plan for more information. Any very difficult words should be added to the Step 7 list for further review.

**Step 2. Overview and Vocabulary Check for the Chapter (approximately 5 minutes).** Students read the chapter and prepare their own written list of words they cannot pronounce, decode, or understand. The instructor discusses and explains these words. Students demonstrate their understanding of difficult words by using the word in a sentence in another context. Building on the discussion of the vocabulary, the teacher asks questions to elicit the main ideas of the chapter and generate a summary of the actions, major characters, or concepts. This discussion should serve as a brief, introductory overview of the chapter.

**Step 3. Fluency Practice in Speed and Accuracy (approximately 10 to 15 minutes).** The instructor should model the appropriate fluency skills by reading the first paragraph at an appropriate pace. That is, approximately 120 words per minute and with appropriate expression. The instructor should “randomly” select students to read a paragraph aloud. To ensure active participation by all students, the instructor should occasionally stop the student reading in mid-paragraph and ask another student to finish the paragraph.

**Step 4. Comprehension Instruction (approximately 5 minutes).** Assign each student to prepare a comprehension question for the group. Students should be assigned to prepare either a “how,” “what,” “why,” “when,” or “where” question. Each student should then pose a comprehension question to the group; the answer should be discussed by the group.

**Step 5. Oral Comprehension Check (approximately 5 minutes).** This is a discussion session that explicitly applies comprehension concepts to the chapter. The teacher should generate questions to elicit such issues as “What is the main idea?” “What was the motive?” “What was the sequence?” “What happened first? Last?” “Summarize the chapter.” The instructor should ensure that students have practice with literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension questions. The discussion for Step 5 should serve as a gentle, yet firm, reminder that students are accountable for reading with understanding.

**Step 6. Reading with Expression (approximately 5 minutes).** Students should practice reading individual paragraphs with expression. This should be a fun experience. Focus on expression, not on speed and accuracy. Students may practice using different voices for different characters, changing intonation to indicate a question, and reading with pauses to build interest and anticipation. Each student should be given an opportunity to read at least one paragraph to the group.

**Step 7. Prepare a Vocabulary Review List for the Chapter (approximately 3 minutes).** The teacher and group should prepare a list of the chapter’s most difficult words to decode and understand. This should be a 10-word list based on difficult words encountered in the lesson. Each student should be required to review this list of 10 words as a homework assignment and be prepared to read and use each word in a sentence to demonstrate understanding. This review will be done as Step 1 of the next lesson on the next chapter.

**Step 8. Individual Rate and Accuracy Assessment (approximately 5 minutes).** Using “Assessment Step Sample” for the chapter, assess students on rate and accuracy. Record data for each student for each chapter. Check to see that students continue to meet the assessment standards from chapter to chapter. Do the reteaching when needed for individuals or the group.

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