

**Deleted Chapter from**  
***Wednesday Riders***  
**by Tudor Robins**

As I walk up to work the next day, Betsy's humming drifts out through the open window. She breaks into a grin when I step in the door.

“Meg! You are going to have *the* best day!”

“I am?” The scenario that would make this day *The Best* scrolls through my mind:

Jessie being one hundred per cent sound, and Craig appearing to coach us through a big, tough, cross-country course. With Slate. Who's miraculously back from the UK, and is riding again, and has a truly awesome eventing horse to ride. And, then, swimming with the horses in the river. And then, after that, everybody disappearing, and Jared showing up to grab me in a breathless hug and say, ‘Silly, Meg. That never happened; that thing with the other girl. I would never do that. It was just a bad dream.’ And then me wrapping my arms around his shoulders, and my legs around his waist, and him lifting me up, and ...

“... the eleven o'clock ferry, so you'd better ...”

“What?”

“What, what?”

“What's that about the ferry?”

Betsy puts her hands on her hips. “Did you hear anything I said?”

“Possibly not.”

She sighs. “I hope those daydreams of yours are good.”

I flash back to where I left my daydream, and a tiny shiver runs through me. “Pretty good. Hard to beat.”

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Sitting on the ferry wasn't part of my daydream, but on a day like today, I'm willing to insert it. I can't remember the last time I sat up top, in the tourist seats. The breeze off the water keeps the sun from being too hot, the harbour's full of sails; stark white, and multi-coloured, belonging to tiny dinghies, and massive yachts.

My mom's waiting for me on the Kingston side, and while she also wasn't the first person who came to mind, I'm glad to see her.

"Let's have lunch! You choose. I pay."

We sit on a patio in sleek metal chairs with woven seats. Flowers overflow out of boxes on the railing. The food is perfectly presented; my salad is crisp, green, and delicious. The sidewalk on the other side of the patio railing is polka dotted with gum, cigarette butts fill the cracks in the concrete, and there's a dried dark stain which I'd like to think is spilt coffee, but is probably regurgitated Guinness.

That's Kingston; pretty and gritty in equal measures. I don't spend much time here, but when I do, I like it.

My mom reaches across the table and squeezes my hand. "I'm so excited for you; coming to school here. Getting to know the city. Are you ready for your tour?"

Because that's my big surprise – my great day – my mom's pulled some strings, called in some favours at the university – her alma mater – and we're going for a campus tour this afternoon.

Again, not what sprang to mind, but interesting, I guess. And it's making my mom happy. My mom's fun when she's happy.

I put down my fork. "Absolutely. Let's go."

The guy who meets us at the alumni office is drop dead gorgeous. Presumably smart,

since he's a business student which, last I checked, required an admission average around ninety per cent, and a quick glance at the brands he's wearing would suggest rich, as well. And I am *so* not looking at him. The last thing I need is a third guy to give me butterflies – good or bad ones.

My happy mom also tends to be a bit flirty. It's a side of her I don't see often, but Luke, our guide, runs with it. They chat, back and forth, while I look. Eyes wide open. At all the variations of rough grey stone the buildings are built of. At ivy clinging to many of them. At the grassy vista of the rugby pitch, and the narrow rat-runs between buildings. There's something I love about the tall wooden doors on all the buildings. I want to pull them open, then let them close, and open them again. And the crests painted on the sidewalk stir something in me. Pride? I don't know; maybe this tug is what they mean by school spirit.

“So, what are you studying?” It takes me a minute to get that Luke's asking me.

“Um, just Arts. I wasn't sure what to do, so it seemed like a safe bet. But ...”

“Here, come this way. We'll go to the residences now.” Luke directs us through another shortcut. “But, what?”

I glance at my mom. Bite my lip. “Oh, I'm not sure. It's just something I've been thinking about lately. I'm wondering about teaching.”

It sounds weird to me. *Teaching*. The only time my parents mention teachers is when their union is threatening job action, and my dad says something like, “They already have the summer off; what more do they want?”

My mom lifts her eyebrows, but Luke's already nodding. “Sure. The program here is really good. You could apply to transfer in next year. Plus, your mom mentioned you horseback ride? You might like the Outdoor and Experiential program.”

“Really? There's a program like that?”

“Yup. I'll make sure to get you more info before you leave. Now, here's one of the

residences where you could be in the fall.”

It’s massive. From the outside the stone walls seem to go on, and on, and up, and up. There are more elevators inside than in my grandmother’s high rise in Ottawa.

And narrow hallways full of doors.

“It’s a bit like a prison.”

Luke laughs. “I know. But you get used to it. I lived here. You have a scholarship, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’ll have a single room, kind of like this.”

He pushes open another wooden door, but this one is made of seventies wood. Not quite the same effect as the other doors I’ve been admiring around campus.

Inside, it looks even more like a prison – or what I imagine one would look like. A super-narrow room, almost as tall as it is long. A huge desk runs along one wall, with a twin bed on the other. The walls are cinder-block. But, right in the middle, at the end of the strip of carpet between the desk and the bed, is a window. Big. Looking out on a playing field. With trees beyond it.

It’s a green, wide-open view, and it transforms the room.

For just a minute I have a flash; that I could sit beside that window and study to become, not just a teacher, but an Outdoor and Experiential teacher. And it would have nothing to do with Jared, or Adam, or even my mom. It would be all about me pursuing the goal I chose.

“I like it.”

Luke smiles. “Already? You’re way ahead of schedule. You’ll do fine.”

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“Good day?” My mom’s sitting on the bench at the ferry terminal with me. As soon as I get on the boat, she’s heading onto Toronto for a day of meetings tomorrow.

“Yes. Thanks. Nice. Different.”

“You don’t seem *excited*.”

I shift, pull my leg up under me. “To be honest, I haven’t been very excited about university, but I actually think I’m getting there.”

“The teaching idea?”

“I’m not positive about it, but you know this musical ride I’m working on with Lacey and the other girls – well I wasn’t sure at first, but I kind of like coaching them.”

My mom sits back, straight against the back of the bench. “Meg, I think it’s great.”

“You do?”

“I do. I just want you to be happy.” She turns to look me square in the eye. “Speaking of which, are you happy?”

“We’re not talking about university any more, are we?”

“Have you talked to Jared?”

A gull struts too close to my foot, and I kick it away. “Not since you left. It feels like not forever.”

“Do you think you can forgive him?”

“I’m not even sure if he wants me to. Like I say, I haven’t heard from him in ages.”

“Well, you did lose your phone. Maybe he doesn’t know how to contact you. Maybe it’s my fault – I told him not to come around the cottage. Do you need to get another phone? We could go now, and you could catch the next boat ...”

“No. It’s OK. I think I can find my phone again if I really want to.”

“If you say so.”

“Mom?” It’s tempting to tell her about Adam. To get it all out. But, really, what is there to tell? He kissed me. Twice. It was nice, but it’s not a declaration of undying love. It’s not a life-

time commitment. It's not any commitment. I decide to tell her the truth, without the details.

"I'm completely confused. I don't know what to do."

She takes the deepest breath I've ever heard. "I get that, Meg. I wish I could tell you what to do, but I can't. Nobody can. Even your brain can't. You'll just know, inside, if it feels right, and then you'll know what to do."

I look at my mom with her hair that's always shining, and her clothes that never wrinkle – even now, in the gathering humidity of a summer afternoon – and think of all those hours she spends in front of a keyboard, with a stack of documents, and a highlighter next to her. Picture the meticulous outlines she creates; all numbers and bullets, and quotes, and references. "Is that what you do, Mom? Go with your gut?"

She tucks her hair behind her ear. "Actually, yes. I let my heart tell me what I'm going to do, and then I use my head to do the best job I can."

*Oh.*

The ferry's nosing into the dock, sending ducks scudding out in all directions.

We both stand up, and I give my mom a final hug. "It was a nice day. Thanks for organizing it. And thanks for the advice; I'll think about it."

"Don't think too hard," she says. "That's the whole point."

*Thank you for reading!*

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, originally contained in the second book of my Island Trilogy – *Wednesday Riders*.

To begin reading the Island Trilogy series, please visit <http://tudorrobins.ca/books-by-tudor-robins/> for links to purchase *Appaloosa Summer* (Book One) and *Wednesday Riders* (Book Two).

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