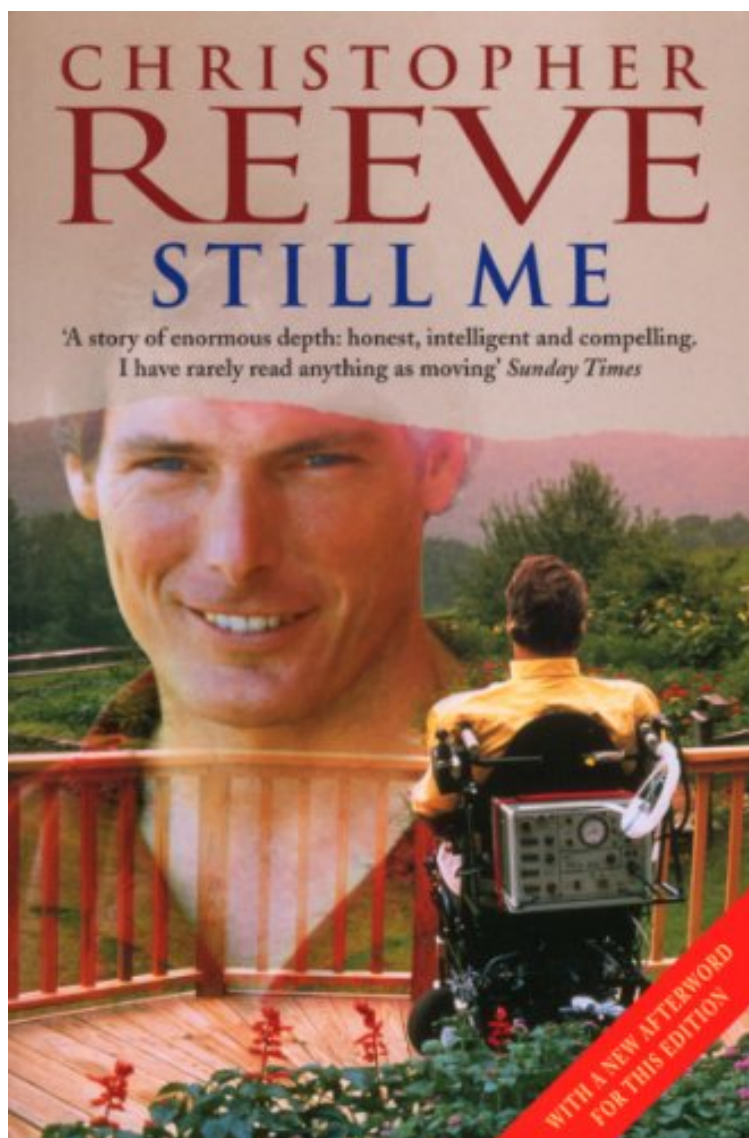


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# Still Me



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThrough his leading role in the three Superman films, Christopher Reeve became so closely identified with the superhero that he wasn't just seen as the actor who played Superman, he was Superman. Which is why the tragic riding accident which left him paralysed from the neck down shocked the world. Superman was not superhuman. It is also why he is now the world's most recognisable person in a wheelchair. In true superhero style, Christopher Reeve refuses to resign himself to the life of a quadriplegic, and is actively campaigning to raise the profile of spinal-cord injury victims and research. Although he was initially told that he would only ever be able to move his head, he can now shrug his shoulders and breathe alone for increasing periods of time, and is determined that he will walk again. It is this extraordinary courage and determination that has made Christopher Reeve the internationally admired figure that he is, and

it is this bravery which makes this autobiography about his paralysis and his journey to recovery such a powerful and moving story. Extrait Chapter 1A few months after the accident I had an idea for a short film about a quadriplegic who lives in a dream. During the day, lying in his hospital bed, he can't move, of course. But at night he dreams that he's whole again, and is able to do anything and go everywhere. This is someone who had been a lifelong sailor, and who had always loved the water, and he had a beautiful gaff-rigged sloop. Not like my boat, the Sea Angel, which was modern and made of fiberglass. In the story the boat is a great old wooden beauty, whose varnish gleams in the moonlight. In his dream he sails down the path of a full moon, and there's a gentle breeze, perfect conditions-the kind of romantic night sailing that anyone can imagine. But by seven in the morning, he's back in his bed in the rehab hospital and everything is frozen again. The dream is very vivid. And as time passes it becomes even more vivid. At first it's just a dream, and he recognizes it as such. But suddenly one night he finds himself actually getting out of bed and leaving the hospital, fully aware of walking down the corridor and out the door, then into the boat, which, magically, is anchored not far away. And he gets on board and goes sailing, long into the night and the moonlight. Soon these voyages become so real to him that when he wakes up in his bed at seven in the morning, his hair is soaked. And the nurse comes in and says, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't dry your hair enough last night when I gave you a shampoo. You slept with wet hair." He says nothing, but he's thinking that his hair is wet from the spray when he was out on the water. One time he comes back still wearing his foul weather gear, and he has to hide it in the hospital room closet because the nurses are going to wonder where it came from. Now his wife and family, his wife and children, have been very distressed all along because, since he became paralyzed, he has not been able to pull out of a serious depression. He has shut them out of his life. His children are afraid of him because he is not himself and they don't know how to be with him, and his wife has been talking to the doctors and the psychologists at the hospital about what to do because he is apparently unable to cope or to come out of his shell. But as he continues to go sailing in his dreams and as these dreams become more and more real, his mood begins to improve and he seems less withdrawn. In the mornings he is more content and much more communicative. His wife notices the change, but she can't understand it, and he won't explain it. It's not something that he can talk about. He's not sure if he's going crazy. He thinks that he may be losing his mind. But since the family is feeling the benefit of his improvement, his dreams are making their life together happier. He sails in Tenants Harbor, or a similarly idyllic spot in Maine, and there's a fellow there, an older man, who always turns on the light in his cabin down by the water when our man is sailing. He doesn't sleep very well, and he always gets up to watch the younger man go out in the wooden boat. Sometimes he comes down to his dock, and we can tell from the yearning in his eyes that the sailboat is something he loves and admires. Not that he's jealous, but he never misses a chance to see the boat sailing so beautifully in the moonlight. Well, there comes a time when our protagonist realizes that these voyages offer a way of escaping from his paralyzed condition, that he could just sail and sail on happily-it's what he loves most in the world-until one night he would go out into the middle of the ocean, and he wouldn't take supplies or anything. He would just sail until he dropped. And he would die happy. He would just go sailing down the path of the moon, as far as he possibly could go, and leave everything and everyone behind him. And one night he starts to do that. He just decides he's going to go, with no idea where; he is going to sail away forever. But then, as he is heading out to sea, he starts to think about what he has in his life, how grateful he is for his wife and his children. Because, during the days, you see, he's changed. His kids are less afraid of him, and they're playing with him, and his wife . . . they're clearly in love. He is coming out of his depression. So here he is doing the thing that he loves most for himself, thinking that he could sail on and forget the world. But along the way he begins to realize what he is leaving behind. He turns the boat around and comes back. And he goes straight to the dock of the older man who has always loved this boat. He ties up right at the dock, and when the old man comes down to greet him, our man says, "Here, this is for you." He gives up the boat. He no longer needs it. And he goes back to the hospital, and he wakes up, and he's frozen and he's a quadriplegic again. But he has an entirely new basis for the future with his family and toward recovery. That's the gist of it. Of course the story comes from my experience, but it's not my story. I'm different from this man because my family saved me at the very beginning. When a catastrophe happens it's easy to feel so sorry for yourself that you can't even see anybody around you. But the way out is through your relationships. The way out of that misery or obsession is to focus more on what your little boy needs or what your teenagers need or what other people around you need. It's very hard to do, and often you have to force yourself. But that is the answer to the dilemma of being frozen-at least it's the answer I found. Yet these dreams of being able to move and to live again in your

former life can be very real, very powerful. When I was in denial about my condition, they were even stronger. And it's always a shock in the morning when you wake up and realize where you are. You think: This can't be my life. There's been a mistake. It took a lot of adjustment. It still does. Less so now than it did. I wake up in the morning. I sleep with my mouth open, so my throat is excruciatingly dry because of the drugs I'm on and the lack of humidity in the room. I may have spasmed to a very uncomfortable place, and my neck is often twisted into a painful position. And I'm lying in this narrow bed, alone, because it's not big enough for Dana to share, though she always sleeps in the same room with me. She has a single bed next to me so we can be near each other and talk and wake up and know we're together. On Memorial Day 1995 I was headed down to Culpeper, Virginia, with my horse, Buck, to compete in a combined training event. I was getting to be a pretty good rider; I had taken up the sport about ten years earlier, when I was cast as Vronsky, a captain in the cavalry in a film version of Anna Karenina and wanted to do some of my own riding. I had been allergic to horses since childhood, but to prepare for the part I loaded up with antihistamines and took daily lessons at a barn on Martha's Vineyard, where I usually spent part of the summer. By the end of a month of intensive training, I could walk, trot, canter, and gallop fairly respectably. The horse was a huge Trakehner stallion named Good Boy; but when Charlotte, my instructor, would say "good boy" in a praising tone, she wasn't talking to me. I went off to Budapest in the fall of 1984 to begin filming and quickly discovered that the other riders in the movie were members of the Hungarian national equestrian team. One of the highlights of the story is a steeplechase in which Captain Vronsky's horse is injured and he has to shoot him on the spot. I didn't feel quite ready (to say the least) to jump four-foot hedges at twenty-five miles an hour, but I did feel prepared to gallop on the flat along with the team rather than use a double. In the nineteenth century races had no starting gates; the riders walked their horses around in a circle, and when the starter dropped the flag everyone turned from the position he was in and started down the track. I asked the team coach how I would know when to start if I was facing away from the flag, and he replied, in his thick, broken English, "When your horse sees others are going, he is going too." This proved to be a major understatement. The cameras rolled; the flag dropped; the professional riders spurred their horses; and suddenly I was flying down the course in the middle of the group, going so fast we outran the camera truck that was supposed to keep pace alongside us. After a couple of takes the director gave the truck more of a head start. The whole experience was absolutely exhilarating; I was bitten by the riding bug. I realized I had been in over my head in Hungary, so when I came home I decided to take up the sport properly. I began to train at a small barn in Bedford, New York (where we have our home today), and to build up time in the saddle with good friends in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where I often appeared at the theater festival. In the fall we would usually go up to Woodstock, Vermont, for three days of trail riding in the Green Mountains. I learned a lot from riding many different horses, especially from Hope, a mare I rode briefly who was one of the meanest and most unpredictable four-legged creatures I've ever come across. Whenever I came into her stall to feed her or put on the saddle, she would turn around, stick her rear end in my face, and pin her ears back—a sure sign that she was about to kick me in the teeth. Once in Vermont I sat quietly on a hilltop waiting for the others to catch up. As I loosened my legs and dropped my feet out of the stirrups, Hope spun around for no good reason and dumped me off her side. I began to think her name was particularly apt, because you could only hope to catch her in a good mood and have a decent ride. By 1989 I had progressed to the point where I could consider competing in combined training events. This aspect of the sport appealed to me because it has three phases: dressage, stadium jumping, and cross-country jumping. The challenge is to develop such a strong bond between horse and rider that you can succeed in the precise maneuvers and tight control of the dressage ring, then take sizable jumps at a gallop out in the woods a few hours later, which requires speed, accuracy, and confidence. I had various horses over the years, and whenever I went on a film location I found the best trainer in the area and surreptitiously took lessons, hoping that the producers or their insurance company wouldn't catch me at it. In this way I had the benefit of working with some of the best riders and teachers in the country—Mark Weissbecker, Brian Sabo, Mike Huber, Stephen Bradley, and Yves Sauvignon, to name a few. Each trainer had a slightly different approach. Mark Weissbecker emphasized the quality of the canter in approaching every jump: the hindquarters, the "engine" of the horse, must be fully engaged in order to jump successfully. Brian Sabo gave me a mental image that helped build my confidence when approaching challenging fences at speed. He asked his students to imagine that there was a steel spear strapped to the breastplate of the horse, and that the rider's intention was to go at the jump and make splinters out of it with that weapon. In other words, you think of going through the jump rather than over it. This usually results in finding the perfect distance for

takeoff; the horse, naturally preferring to go over the fence instead of through it, will jump nicely. My allergies disappeared. I was smitten with riding and wanted to do it as often and as well as I could. But as I learned I always kept in mind the advice of my first flying instructor, Robert Hall, just after I received my license: "The successful outcome of any maneuver must never be seriously in doubt." As an avid sports enthusiast, particularly attracted to activities that some would consider risky or even dangerous, I took this almost as a mantra. In the fall of 1994 I was filming *Village of the Damned* in Northern California, but I was desperate to compete in one more combined training event before the season was over. So I caught a plane back east and went up to Mark Weissbecker's barn in the Berkshires, where he had been training my Irish Thoroughbred, Denver, while I was away. On Saturday I took Denver to the meet at Stonleigh-Burnham. This was a competition in which all three phases are done on the same day: dressage and stadium jumping in the morning, cross-country in the afternoon. I hadn't been on Denver for more than three months, but Mark had kept him going well, and we were high in the standings before the afternoon. As we started the cross-country phase, however, I realized that Denver was reverting to one of his old bad habits: he was running with his head down as we approached the jumps instead of with his head up, which is the safe and proper way to approach an obstacle. I was not happy with the way he took the first four jumps. We got over them, but I felt that the two of us weren't connecting. I pulled him up and retired from the course rather than risk injury in the quest for a prize. I was a good sailor, having raced or cruised in all kinds of sailboats from the age of seven. I had flown various airplanes for over twenty years and made two solo trips across the Atlantic; I had raced sailplanes, and once climbed to 32,000 feet in the powerful rising air currents over Pikes Peak in Colorado. I enjoyed scuba diving, played tennis, and was a skier as well. I never felt that I was courting danger, because I always stayed within my self-imposed limits. In all aspects of my life I enjoyed being in control, which is why my accident was a devastating shock not only to me but to everyone who knew me. The fact that I went to Culpeper at all was a fluke. I had originally signed up to compete that weekend at an event in Vermont. I'd had success in Vermont the year before. I'd finished first in one event at Tamarack, and placed third in the Area I Championships in the fall of 1994. I'd met a lot of nice people. I also preferred the cool weather. I figured that on Memorial Day weekend, it would be more pleasant in Vermont than down in Virginia. I also knew that this event would be the last one I could do for the season, because I was about to go to Ireland for a film. I was scheduled to leave five days later to act in *Kidnapped*, produced by Francis Ford Coppola and directed by Ivan Passer. I had been over to Ireland the week before to rent a house, and I'd found a perfect one about twenty miles south of Dublin, which just happened to be right next to a stable. I'd made arrangements to train with one of the top event riders in Ireland, who was based there. I was very excited about that. I was going to be riding in the movie, too. So my plan was to do one more event on my new horse, Eastern Express, nicknamed Buck, whom I'd bought in California during the shoot of *Village of the Damned*. He was a twelve-year-old American Thoroughbred with a lot of experience in combined training—in fact, he and his previous owner had been coached by Brian Sabo. Brian recommended the horse to me, describing him as a fearless jumper in both cross-country and stadium, big enough to carry me, though not a star in dressage. He was a light chestnut gelding with a sweet disposition, easily won over with plenty of carrots and TLC. I tried him out in all three phases at Yves Sauvignon's place, not far from the film location, and we agreed it was a good match. I felt that Denver's tendency to run on the cross-country course and occasionally knock down rails in the show-jumping phase meant I would probably not be able to move him up to the higher levels of competition. But Buck had the experience, a keen attitude, and a lot of mileage left in him. I brought him back east after I finished the film and worked with Lendon Gray, one of the top dressage coaches in the country, whose barn is near our home in Bedford. (Dana and I left the city in 1992, ostensibly because we didn't want to bring up our new son, Will, in the Flatiron district of New York; but I was especially happy with our decision because it gave me a chance to ride six days a week.) I trained with Lendon during the winter of 1994-95 and did well. Buck's dressage was coming along nicely. I alternated work in the ring with conditioning, walking him up and down hills to strengthen his hind end; he needed a stronger canter. By January I was taking blue ribbons at local dressage shows and getting higher scores than I ever had before. I was very happy with the way the horse was going and the kind of partnership Buck and I were building. My plan was to spend the '95 season with Buck doing Training Level events and then move up to Preliminary in '96. In Training Level the jumps are never more than three feet six and the combinations are not too difficult, but the Preliminary Level is much more demanding, and you really need a brave and capable horse as well as full-time dedication to the sport. I wanted to be careful, to do everything steadily and safely, but to make progress. Novice Level was no challenge anymore, and

Training Level was getting to be pretty easy. But I wanted to make sure I was prepared for Preliminary. At an event in Massachusetts just a couple of weeks before the accident, Buck was stunning going cross-country. He just ate the course up; he had a ball, and so did I. This was very encouraging to me, because we'd missed some practice and a couple of events in April; once he had a sore back, another time he had an abscess in his foot, which kept me off him for more than ten days just at the time I would ordinarily have been shifting into high gear in preparation for the season. Perhaps I should have seen these as warning signs. But Buck was so talented and seemed to enjoy going cross-country so much and our partnership seemed so solid that I thought we were well enough prepared. Our performance at that event the weekend of May 14 seemed to confirm that all was going well. In April I had moved to another barn in the Bedford area called Peace and Carrots (a very nice facility even though I couldn't stand the name) and was reunited with my first coach, Bill McGuinness. Most of the barns in the area concentrate on dressage or hunters or jumpers, but Bill ran the only combined training barn and had a group of half a dozen loyal clients, all of whom were as motivated as I was. They had decided to go to Culpeper for the Memorial Day weekend, and Bill invited me to come along to help keep expenses down. I knew from experience it's more fun to compete as a group, so I agreed to go and got an entry in at the last minute. I've since learned that this sort of impulsive decision is typical of many accidents. At the last minute someone decides to get in another car or take an earlier flight. I would have preferred to go to Vermont; our summer house is nearby in Williamstown, and we could have stayed there. I've often thought that if I'd stuck to the original plan nothing bad would have happened. But Dana pointed out that if we'd gone sailing that weekend instead, I could just as easily have been hit in the head by the boom, knocked overboard, and drowned. An accident can happen at any time, even to someone who is cautious and in control. In the spring of 1995 I remember that Dana and I were very busy doing our own things. Dana, a wonderful singer and actress, had several auditions that she needed to prepare for. I was riding a lot, getting ready for the season, and also involved in helping to rewrite the script for *Kidnapped*. And there were other things—my work for The Creative Coalition (TCC), a public service organization for which I served as copresident, social obligations, personal appearances, and speeches. This weekend was intended to be a family minivacation before going back to work. The plan was that I would drive down, Buck would go in the big trailer with the other horses, and Dana would take our son, Will, to Washington by train, then rent a car, because we thought he would enjoy the adventure. We stayed at the Holiday Inn not far from the fairgrounds, which had a pool and a sloping grassy area where the three of us could kick around a soccer ball. I arrived ahead of them on Friday in time to practice that afternoon. Dressage and cross-country were going to be on Saturday, and show jumping on Sunday. Buck and I rehearsed the dressage test on Friday afternoon, and it went well. That night we all had an early dinner at the Holiday Inn. Staying in a motel was a big deal for Will, who was nearly three. He had his own bed and his own room, and he felt very grown-up about it. When he unpacked, he put everything—clothes, shoes, toys—into one dresser drawer. We piled pillows around his bed and kept the door to his room open for safety. Of course, this meant very little privacy for us. Often we were apart on Memorial Day weekends because of our schedules. I think Dana was less than thrilled to spend this holiday watching me compete. She said to me, half-jokingly, "Next Memorial Day, I get to choose what we do." She was thinking: We really need to spend some time alone together.

We'll just get through this weekend and we'll be able to reconnect again. I got up early on that Saturday morning. My dressage time was 9:08. We did very nicely, though Buck was a little tense. I felt he knew that the cross-country was coming up next, and that's what he loves best, what he was born to do. He could see the other horses warming up to go cross-country. So there was a slightly distracted quality about his dressage, as if he'd been thinking: I've got to go through this and then we get to do the fun stuff. In spite of that we had a pretty good ride, and at the end of the dressage I was in fourth place out of twenty-seven. That gave me a good chance to move up. Somebody would probably drop a rail in show jumping; each rail means a subtraction of four points. So if you're in the top six after dressage, you're in a good position to win the event. I was happy. I cooled Buck down, put him in his stall, and went back to the Holiday Inn to spend time with Dana and Will, to chill out. At around one I changed into my cross-country equipment and headed back to the fairgrounds. I went out and walked the course again. I had already done it twice the day before. But I walked it one more time. The first six jumps seemed very easy. Then they became more difficult until the two jumps that worried me, sixteen and seventeen. Sixteen was a water complex, where you had to jump in, change direction, and jump out of the water over a log. Then there would be a long gallop across a field to seventeen, a wide bench between two trees. By the time you got to it you'd be clipping along at a really good pace. Those were the two jumps I was concentrating on. You walk a cross-country course to decide how

you're going to take every jump. You literally write your plan down on a map of the course. You decide: Okay, when I pass that tree I'm going to slow him down. When I pass that second tree there, I'm going to sit up. When I get over that jump, I'm going to look left because I've got a sharp turn to make. You decide where you're going to gallop, where you're going to slow down and show-jump it. You decide how you're going to do every jump, and you write the plan down and study it overnight. The cross-country course opens at 3:00 on Friday, and the ride is on Saturday or Sunday, so you always have time to think things through. Still, I walked the course again to be on the safe side. When I was plotting my strategy earlier in the day, I certainly wasn't worried about the third fence on the course, which was a zigzag. It was only about three feet three, in the shape of a large W. I was mainly concerned about sixteen, the water jump, because I hadn't taken Buck through much water. And in order to take the big bench at seventeen, we'd really have to have a good rhythm going. But Buck had been so brilliant two weeks earlier that I was feeling quite confident. Plus, I'd recently had a private clinic with Stephen Bradley, one of the top event riders in the country, and that, too, had gone well. He was impressed by my horse and very complimentary about our partnership. Buck and I were really settling into a groove. When I arrived back at the stables, I ran into John Williams, an Advanced Level rider and trainer and a good friend. He had taken care of Denver when the horse was recovering from a tendon injury in 1993. He had just come over to say hello since he lived nearby. I told him that I liked the course and was glad I'd come to Virginia, that I had a great new horse and was looking forward to a good ride. He wished me luck. From that moment until I regained consciousness several days later in the intensive care unit at the University of Virginia, I have no memory of what occurred. Later, as I tried to reconstruct the sequence of events, I was told that I finished suiting up, put on my chest protector and helmet, got Buck out of the stall, and headed out for the warm-up area. There were three practice jumps: first a crossrail, then a vertical, then an oxer-two rails with a separation between them. You have to take them all in the same direction, and you always warm up at a hand gallop; you don't trot because you want to let the horse know that now it's time to be aggressive. For vertical jumps you slow down and sit up, but because you're competing against the clock you have to move right along to make the time. Many of the jumps are wide but not very high; they're called fly fences. Those are the ones you take right in stride at a full gallop, staying well off the horse's back so that he can move freely underneath you. I was particularly careful of Buck's back, which was still somewhat tender, probably because I had been working him a little too hard to make up for lost practice time. This high position is easier on the horse but more precarious for the rider, especially a tall one, in case of a sudden stop. The warm-up went fine. I left the starting box at exactly 3:01. The times are always that precise; another rider goes every two minutes. We made a nice strong start. Witnesses said that Buck was absolutely willing and ready. First jump, no problem. The second jump was a medium-size log pile. No problem. Then we came to the zigzag. The fence judge's report says I was going fast, not excessively fast but moving right along. Apparently Buck started to jump the fence, but all of a sudden he just put on the brakes. No warning, no hesitation, no sense of anything wrong. The judge reported that there was nothing to suggest Buck was worried about the fence. He just stopped. It was what riders call a dirty stop; it occurs without warning. Someone said that a rabbit ran out and spooked Buck. Someone said it could have been shadows. When I went over I took the bridle, the bit, the reins, everything off Buck's face. I landed right on my head because my hands were entangled in the bridle and I couldn't get an arm free to break my fall. I flipped over landing on the other side of the fence. My helmet prevented any brain damage, but the impact of the landing broke my first and second vertebrae. This is called a hangman's injury because it's the kind of break that happens when the trapdoor opens and the noose snaps tight. It was as if I'd been hanged, cut down, and then sent to a hospital. I was heard to say, "I can't breathe," and that was it. Buck probably ducked his head right after he stopped. This often happens; the horse puts his head down because the rider is coming forward and he wants to get away from the weight. As you go over a jump you're supposed to stay in the center of the horse—in fact you should always be in the center of your horse—but if you're both committed to the jump and he suddenly refuses, it's very hard to stop your forward momentum, especially if you're well off his back the way you're supposed to be when you go cross-country. And in order to protect Buck's back, I was actually riding with my stirrups a little higher than usual. My hands probably got caught in the bridle because I was making every effort to stay on. If you fall off during your cross-country ride, you lose sixty points and have no chance of placing in the competition. If my hands had been free, my guess is that I would have broken a wrist. Or I would have just rolled over, gotten up, cursed quietly to myself, and hopped back on. Instead I came straight down on the top rail of the jump, hyperextended my neck, and slumped down in a heap. Head first, six feet, four inches and 215 pounds of me straight down on

the rail. Within seconds I was paralyzed and not breathing. In many other sports it's essential to be light on your feet. In tennis you can't be flat-footed and move effectively around the court. In skiing your weight is forward, reaching down the fall line. I remember when I was first learning to ski someone told me to try to curl my toes upward inside my boots because that forces your knees and weight forward. If you try to pull away from the mountain, if you raise your shoulders or take your weight off your downhill ski, you're going to slide and fall. The important thing is to stay forward. Yet in riding, if you get too far forward before the horse leaves the ground you're likely to get into trouble. And that may have been what happened to me over that fence. As you go over a jump, your heels have to be thrust down and your butt should be reaching backwards to keep you in the center of the horse. This position is the opposite of what comes naturally. You have to train yourself to keep your heels down and stay in the middle. "On your toes" in riding invites disaster. For more than a year I wondered if my injury was purely an accident, a freakish event, or if I was responsible for what happened to me. Buck had never stopped on a cross-country course before, so what caused him to refuse this easy fence that he could probably have walked over? Rabbit or no rabbit, shadows or no shadows, I think I may have done something to cause the accident, and I have to take responsibility for it. I often think of my friend Tim Murray, who went sailing one day in November 1994 and drowned. Why? He took the Styrofoam flotation out of his boat because he was working on it. He went out on a windy day with no life preserver, and he and his friend—both expert sailors—raised the spinnaker. Normally this wouldn't present a problem, but two miles offshore waves were building up, it was blowing twenty-five knots, and the boat swamped. The water was forty-eight degrees, and there was no way they could make it to shore. They both drowned, for all those reasons. My friend Robbie Robertson, an exceptional pilot, won the national championship in soaring. Right after he came home he went gliding at a different airport than usual. It was a very gusty day, and he forgot to tell the tow pilot that he needed to be towed at eighty miles an hour because he was carrying a full load of water ballast in his wings. So he was towed at sixty-five, the normal speed for low-performance canvas gliders, and they ran out of runway. As the tow plane released and climbed away, Robbie tried to pull up. He went up about one hundred feet and stalled. The glider went straight into the ground. He was killed instantly. So I come back to my own situation, approaching that third jump on May 27. I may have moved forward before I should have, which is an easy mistake to make. On the other hand, that shouldn't have been enough to cause Buck to stop. But I've learned that to speculate endlessly about what happened serves no purpose other than to torment myself. Regardless of exactly what happened, I know now that I can't relive the event forever. If I made a mistake, I've got to forgive myself for being human. I'm in the process of doing that now. I only fell a few feet, but I shattered my first cervical vertebra as I landed on the top rail of the jump. The second vertebra was also broken, but not so badly. Then I was fighting for air like a drowning person. It's possible that as I twisted my head and fought for air the shards of my first vertebra and the broken part of the second vertebra were cutting and damaging nerves in the spinal cord. I was probably my own worst enemy at that point. By the time the paramedics arrived at the scene, I hadn't breathed for three minutes. They stabilized my head and managed to keep me alive by squeezing air into my body with an ambu bag. Apparently I was still conscious; later they described me as "combative." I'm very lucky they reached me so quickly, because after four minutes of not breathing, brain damage begins. They managed to hold my head still enough to put on a collar that immobilized my neck. After I was loaded into the ambulance, they drove off the field extremely slowly, so that the rough terrain wouldn't cause further damage. Several months later I called these paramedics and told them how grateful I was that they had saved my life. They were very matter of fact, saying that it was just part of their job. I was deeply moved by their quiet, understated response. In keeping with EMT policy, they never even told me their names. Dana was always there when I competed, usually stationed at the more difficult jumps. Often she would videotape as much of the ride as possible, and I would spend countless evenings running the film backwards and forwards, looking for ways to improve. But this time she was still back at the Holiday Inn, where Will was having a difficult time waking up from his nap. Suddenly the phone rang. It was Peter Lazar, one of our group, and the first thing he said was, "Now, don't panic." Dana asked, "What happened?" She's a doctor's daughter; in emergencies she is pretty steady. She immediately assumed that I had fallen. There would be no other reason for Peter to call and say, "Don't panic." When he said, "Chris had a spill," it occurred to Dana that this is the kind of language people use to minimize situations. (Dana's sister once crashed into a tree in a skiing accident, broke her nose, and lacerated her face: her other sister called up and said she'd had a "skiing mishap.") Then Peter added, "I don't know why, but they had to take him off the field on a stretcher." Dana took Will, who of course did not know what was happening, drove to the Culpeper hospital, and found the

emergency room. A nurse came in. Dana said, "Hi, I'm Dana Reeve. My husband is here." And the nurse said, "Oh, okay." Dana asked, "Is my husband all right? Is he okay?" The nurse would only say, "The doctor will be out in a minute." Dana was beginning to sense that something terrible had happened. She was still very conscious of Will, who went on talking and wanting to play. There was only one other person in the waiting room. It was all quiet and sleepy; the Culpeper facility is a really small place. Then the nurse came back and said, "The doctor will be right out." There were the three of them sitting in silence—Dana, Will, and a woman reading a magazine. Then she saw a helicopter landing in the courtyard, with the name Pegasus painted on the side. She thought: That's not for a broken arm. Two nurses came out and told Dana the doctor wanted to see her in his office. One took one elbow and one took the other, and they walked down the hallway. Dana was carrying Will and thinking: They're holding me up. This is really serious, this is something awful. Dr. Maloney, the admitting physician at the ER, came into the office and said he was very worried about me. But he didn't tell her I had broken my neck. Will was sitting in Dana's lap, and as Dr. Maloney was giving her the details of my injury, she felt like she was being knocked backwards with each new thing he said: I'd broken the top two cervical vertebrae (C1 and C2), I was having trouble breathing, I was on a respirator. After each new piece of information, Dana took a breath and said, "Okay, okay, okay." She felt as if she were being punched repeatedly and had to prepare herself each time for the next blow. Will was sitting there squeezing Dana's nose with his fingers so that she would say "beep." It was one of his favorite games. He did that as Dana was hearing about my injury. She listened, and she kept saying "beep"—trying to remain the parent in control while receiving the most devastating news of her life. She was very confused. If I was on a respirator, that meant I was practically dead but they were just keeping me breathing. She knew nothing about broken necks. She didn't understand how it all fit together. She said, "I have to call my father." She needed a translation. Amazingly, Chuck Morosini was at home that holiday weekend. Dana told him, "Chris has had a serious riding accident. It's a neck injury." Her father said, "Oh God." That was enough. She knew immediately that my life was hanging in the balance. The people at Culpeper said that Dana should see me before the helicopter took off, because it might be for the last time. Dana had to collect Will, try not to frighten him with what was happening, and check out of the motel. How she got through that afternoon, I have no idea. She also had to cope with the public. She knew the media would be all over the story, but she didn't want to deal with anybody outside the family. She knew she had to protect Will and to protect me. Her reaction was, "Everybody out, this is a crisis." The only way to deal with it was to form a tight circle. As Dana packed up my belongings, she was acutely conscious that I might never need them again. She collected my shaving things, my socks, and the rest of my clothes. She came across my map of the cross-country course, which I had been studying just a couple of hours before. But she remained composed, putting everything in the suitcase, looking under the bed, in the drawers, finding keys, going through all the ordinary motions of checking out of a motel. Will wanted to play soccer. He was clearly searching for some normality now that everything had gone haywire. Dana actually went out and kicked the ball with him a couple of times, then came back in and continued packing. "Mommy has to finish packing. We have to go. They're taking Daddy in the helicopter. We have to go." Then they went to the front desk to check out. Earlier that day someone had come by and said, "The manager would like to have dinner with you and your husband tonight, and we have baby-sitters." As she turned in our keys, Dana said, "Could you please tell the manager that we won't be able to have dinner tonight, and thank him very much?" The woman asked, "Where's your husband?" And Dana said, "He had to leave." "Oh," said the woman, "I really wanted a picture. Can I have a picture of you?" So Dana posed. She sat there with Will and posed for a picture because she just didn't want to explain. Then she and Will drove to the University of Virginia, as I was being flown there in a helicopter named for a flying horse. From the Hardcover edition.

Revue de presse "A story of enormous depth: honest, intelligent and compelling. I have rarely read anything as moving" (Sunday Times) "Brave, funny and deeply moving" (Sunday Telegraph) "Fascinating and utterly lacking in self-pity" (Guardian) "Through his honesty, dignity, and clarity of purpose, Reeve has created an involving book and a meaningful life" (New York Times Book) "Still he redefines the idea of hero . . . In this detailed and well-written autobiography, Reeve proves that, in many ways, he has transcended previous accomplishments through his courage and character" (Boston Globe)