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A Cup For
a Crown

How a Race Rider Turned
Out to Be Something More
Than a Jockey

By GIULIEMO CRISPI
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Before Rome had become the splendid city it is today, when it was still repressed by the disadvantages accruing from a disunited Italy, the people living there were more homogeneous, more social than now. In those days the carnival was a great event. Among the gala performances were races which took place on a street, or rather, at that time a road, leading from the foot of the Capitoline hill to one of the gates (the Popolo) of the city. That race course is now the principal street in Rome and retains its former name—the Corso. During the carnival, when the races were taking place, the elite of Rome lined the Corso on seats erected for the occasion. At one of these celebrations a young girl, Clotilde Cusani, with her parents, sat waiting to witness the races. When



HELD HER HANDS UP FOR THE KING TO DRINK.

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the king came galloping past, one of those superb figures of a centaur, this maiden, daughter of a wine merchant was on the Alban hills. Still rarely visited Rome, the young men and women worked in the wine presses. The warm Italian sun had shone down upon her for eighteen years, ripening her cheeks as well as her father's grapes. Thus she grew up under soft skies, a thing of beauty.

The sight of this handsome, well-formed man, his countenance lighted with the enthusiasm excited by the race, was the first awakening in her of an emotion akin to love. She had read the mythology of her ancestors, and it seemed to her that the beautiful god Apollo had come back from antiquity to show the followers of the new religion that he was not yet extinct.

Admiration for him was not confined to her. All were delighted with the rider whom no one present knew. He won the race and rode back slowly over the course amid the acclamations of the spectators, and as he bowed right and left they were reminded of the progress of a general who, some twenty centuries before, having been honored with a triumph passed over the Via Sacra on the other side of the Capitoline hill.

There was throwing of confetti upon the crowd passing below, laughing and joking, the amusements being kept up till midnight, when the throng separated and went to their homes to begin the next morning the Lenten fast.
A few days later when Clotilde Cusani was walking in her father's vineyard on the Alban hills several young men came galloping along a road on the other side of the wall that inclosed the farm, and the girl recognized in advance of the others the rider in the races a short time before.

Now, Clotilde was a very beautiful girl, so beautiful that the horseman reined in his horse to have a look at her. Then, for an excuse to prolong the meeting, he asked her where he might procure a drink of water. She replied in a musical voice that a pure stream ran in the vineyard that had once poured through the aqueducts that had supplied water to ancient Rome. If he would dismount and come over the wall she would show him where he could get a drink. He dismounted and, one of the party taking charge of his horse, he vaulted the wall.

"Shall we remain here, your majesty?" asked one of the attendants.
The man addressed frowned. "Be more careful how you address me," he said. "Yes, remain here."

Clotilde led "his majesty" down a declivity through the vines to the stream.

"But there is no cup," he said.
"I can only offer your majesty the cup that I often use myself."

With that the girl, putting her hands together, formed a cup, took up some of the water in it and held her hands up for the king to drink. He did so and asked for more. She gave it, and still his thirst was unquenched. He kept calling for more till the girl, seeing that her white hands, the fingers tipped with vermillion, was attracting him, blushed and clasped them behind her.

"Thanks," said the king. "I am still thirsty, but I will trouble you no more. Is there anything I can do to show my appreciation for your kindness?"
"Yes, your majesty. Tell me why you, a sovereign, rode in the races on the Corso during the carnival?"
"I will tell you, relying on you to keep my secret. I am traveling incognito that I may indulge my tastes. I am desperately fond of horses and would rather ride a race than partake of a banquet. I am not known here, and I shall rely upon you, who are the only person in Italy except a few attendants who know that I am a king. He who addressed me as 'your majesty' forgot himself."

The king, who had just come of age, full of life and spirits, fond of athletic sports, annoyed by the routine of a court, had with a couple of intimate associates and a single serving man come to Italy for the carnival and entered for one of the races. In those days there was not the travel there is today, and he did not incur the same risk of being recognized by one of his subjects. He remained in Rome for some time, and many were his rides across the Campagna to the villa of Senore Cusani. Clotilde kept the king's secret and her father supposed at first that his guest had taken a fancy to his wine rather than his daughter. But when he discovered the cause of these frequent visits he told Clotilde that she must dismiss the stranger, who gave no satisfactory account of himself, since he (her father) was negotiating a marriage for her with the son of a neighboring wine grower with a view to uniting the two vineyards.
After King Otho's departure mes-

sages came from time to time for Clotilde. No one but herself knew that she was in correspondence with a sovereign. But when one day an envoy came openly from King Otho, bearing a huge parchment creating Clotilde a countess, the people of Rome and its environs were astonished. The nobility especially were agog, wondering why a little country girl was so honored. But they did not learn that King Otho had visited them and had ridden before them at a breakneck speed down the Corso. Clotilde alone knew that, and she would not tell.

But the sensation had not died out before along came another envoy with another parchment bigger than the first creating Clotilde a duchess. Then the people began to open their eyes in earnest. Had they known of King Otho's visit and that he had met and courted the recipient of these honors they might have surmised that they were preparatory for something important. The last elevation included an estate, and Clotilde removed to it with her parents, who in the meantime had broken off negotiations for her union with a wine grower's son.

There was no scandal connected with the bestowal of these favors, firstly, because of Clotilde's native purity, and, secondly, because the donor never appeared and was not known to have ever seen her on whom he bestowed them. They came so thick and so fast that the scandal mongers were puzzled. A watch was set upon the countess, but before the watchers had time to learn the secret of her elevation she had been made a duchess, and before any return could be discovered to have been made for the ducal coronet a deputation of nobles arrived from King Otho proposing to make the duchess his queen.

And so the reason for these startling elevations was out, but not their cause. No one knew that in addition to the cup won by a stranger in a race on the Corso he had won a cup formed by the two hands of a young Italian girl, or rather, that by making a cup with her hands the girl had won a queenly crown.

Then it was announced that the royal groom was coming to claim his bride. Both were devout Catholics, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place in St. Peter's. For weeks before the nuptials workmen were employed decorating the interior, and all Rome was preparing for the ceremony.

When King Otho came to the city he refrained from appearing in public till the celebration of the marriage. The royal procession entered the church at a rear door and few saw the king's face, since he went directly to the altar. But after the ceremony, when he turned and walked with his bride down through the center of the church, many of those who crowded either side looked at one another and exclaimed breathlessly:

"The race rider of the carnival!"

The bridal couple drove away from the church, followed by the acclamations of the people, here and there, now and again, a voice rising above the tumult: "The race rider!" "A royal jockey!" "He won a prize!" and other like shouts. As the cavalcade crossed the Tiber the news that the king had visited Rome before, had won a prize in the Corso and his bride on the Alban hills grew like an expended wave circlet till every one knew.

But of all the most wondering were the nobles. Many a matron with marriageable daughter was wrathful that she had not known that this impressionable young king was in their midst incog. Many a girl among the hereditary princesses that abound in Italy grieved that she had missed a chance to become a queen.

They were all too late. The king took the vineyard lassie away with him, followed by the lamentations of every marriageable woman in Rome who might have hoped to win a crown had she known of the king's presence.

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