

THOROUGHBREDS



BY W.S. FRASER.

CHAPTER XXIV (Continued).

Suddenly the unimpassioned face lighted up; the narrow-lidded eyes gleamed with brightened interest. As eagerly as a boy their owner, Crane, came forward and saluted Allis. At that instant the man of many words on her left rose from his seat to chase through the interminable crowd on the lawn a new victim.

Allis had sought to be alone in this short time of trial; she was hardly sure of herself. If Lucretia failed she might break down; for what would come to her father should the message home be one of disaster? Even if the little mare won her joy might lead her to commit strange pranks; she felt that her heart would burst out of sheer joy if she did not shout in exultation, or, worse madly, as she had seen others do in the hour of victory. She was sorry that Crane had come.

"I was looking for you," he said; "I want to see you win this race, that is, if I mean, like every other man here, I have harked back to my natural instinct of covetous acquisition and had a bet on."

"Not Lucretia."

"No—I've bet on Diablo. Langdon thinks he'll win. Do you remember the agreement about his purchase?"

"What was that? I've half forgotten it."

"Just a little bet on your account, you know."

"Oh, I remember; but that was only in fun, wasn't it?"

"It was part of the bargain, and it's on. You'll take it, won't you, if he wins?"

"They're off!" Some one had shouted the magic words from the head of the steps. In a second every voice of the thousands was stilled, and there was only the noise of shuffling feet, as eager watchers stood up to see the horses.

"It's a false start," said Crane, quietly, turning toward the start. "The horses have been well for you, Miss Allis, had the starter let them go. Lucretia was well out in the lead; it was Diablo's fault, too, that they had to go back—he was left standing."

Crane's voice was Fate's voice. Would there never be anything but Lucretia and Diablo, seven and thirteen, thirteen and seven?

"Diablo's a bad horse at the post, sure," ejaculated Crane, letting his field glass rest for an instant on his knee; "he just backs up and shakes his head viciously; evidently he doesn't like the idea of so much company."

"How is Lucretia acting, Mr. Crane?"

"Perfectly. You must have instilled some of your own patience into her."

"Would the patience be rewarded? Or would thirteen—that was symbolical of evil, and its bearer, Diablo, who was an agent of evil, together snatch from her this prize that meant so much? It is strange that she should not think coup had been made by that trick manipulator, Langdon. How carefully he had kept the good thing bottled up. If the mob could have put into execution its half-muttered thoughts, every stall about the Gravesend track would have been decorated with a fragment of Langdon's anatomy.

Even the bookmakers were less jubilant than usual over this winning of an outsider, for Crane, and Langdon, and that, and two or three others who had either received a hint or stumbled upon the good thing, had taken out of the ring a tidy amount of lawful currency.

"The starter is having a bad time of it; that makes six false breaks," said Allis's companion; "it will end by his losing patience with the boys, I fear, and let them go with something off in a long lead. But they say this Fitzgibbon is a cool horse, and give you man the best of it. He'll probably find Diablo's rider a hundred dollars; I believe it's customary to do that when a Jockey persistently refuses to come up with his horses. Just look at this—the black fend has lashed out and nearly crippled something."

"Not Lucretia, Mr. Crane!" gasped Allis.

"No, it's a chestnut—there they go! Good boy, Westley. I mean Diablo's Jockey has done a fendish clever thing. He came through his horses on the jump, carried them off their feet, they all broke—yes, the flag's down, and he's out with a clean lead."

Down in front a bell was clanging viciously; people were rushing with frenzied haste from the betting ring, and clambering up the steps of the stand; in the stand itself the whole vast mob had risen to its feet, and even now the rolling beat of sage hoofs was in the air, hushed of the mob's clamor.

Yes, Crane had spoken truly; a great striding black, along whose neck hung close a tiny figure in yellow and red, was leading the on-coming horses. Allis strained her eyes trying to discover the little mare, but she was swallowed up in the struggling mob that hung at Diablo's heels. As they opened a little, sitting around the first turn, she caught sight of the white-striped blue jacket. This was quite fifth or sixth.

"Lucretia is doing well," said Crane; "she's holding her own; she's lapped on White Moth."

It seemed strange to Allis that any other thought should come into her mind at that time other than just concern for Lucretia, but she caught her breath when she saw the white-striped blue jacket. This was quite fifth or sixth.

"I couldn't just see from where I was what happened," he called, avidly; "and I haven't asked the boy yet, she may have got shut in. Ah, here he comes now." As the Jockey returned from the weighing scales.

Redpath seemed to think that some explanation was necessary, as he came up to Allis and the trainer, so he said: "The little mare seemed to have a chance when I turned into the stretch, and I thought once she was going to win; but that big black just kept galloping,

I were given to sentiment, I should say her gallop was the poetry of motion. She deserves to win. But honestly, Miss Allis, I think she'll never catch the black; he's running like a good horse."

Allis could not answer; the strain was too great for words. It would be all over in a minute or so; then she would talk.

"Your mare is creeping up, Miss Allis; she's second to the black now, and they're still a good three furlongs to go. You may win yet. It takes a good horse to make all his own running for a mile and a quarter and then win. His light weight may land him first past the post. There are only four in it now, the rest are beaten off, sure. Diablo is still in the lead; White Moth and Lucretia are a length back; and The King is next, running strong. It's the same into the stretch. Now the black is drawing away from White Moth—she's pressing Diablo. You'll win yet!"

His voice was drowned by the clamor that went up from every side. "Diablo! White Moth! Lucretia!" What a babel of yell, the best of them! Come out, it was deafening. All the conjecture of months, all the hopes and fears of thousands, compressed into a few brief seconds of struggling endeavor.

Allis had said down. There was less frenzied excitement there.

"God of Justice!" it was Crane's voice, close to her ear; his hot breath was on her cheek; he had leaned down, and she might hear him. "Your Jockey has sold you, or else Lucretia's. I thought I saw him pull her off. I'm sorry, Miss Allis, God knows I am, though I've won—for Diablo is winning easily. Then he straightened up for an instant, only to bend down again, and say, "Yes, Diablo has won, and Lucretia is beaten off. Perhaps it wasn't the boy, after all, for it's a long journey for a three-year-old mare. Can I do anything for you?" Let me see you down to the paddock."

"Thank you," the girl answered, struggling with her voice. "Yes, I must go, for Dixon will be terribly disappointed. I must go and put a brave face on it, suppose. It's all over, and can't be helped. But you've won, and I congratulate you."

"Poor old dad!" she muttered to herself. "To have fairly given away Diablo just when he was ready to win a big race, with a thing of bitterness to the girl thought how much her mother's opposition was to blame for this narrow missing of a great victory. She was glad to get away from the cataract of tears that smothered her like great falling waters. There was little excitement, if it had been any solace to her, she had much companionship in her dashed hopes; for Diablo, the winner, had not been backed by the general public; the favorite, White Moth, had been beaten."

After the first outburst a sullen anger took possession of the race-goers. They had been wronged, deceived; another coup had been made by that trick manipulator, Langdon. How carefully he had kept the good thing bottled up. If the mob could have put into execution its half-muttered thoughts, every stall about the Gravesend track would have been decorated with a fragment of Langdon's anatomy.

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galloping, and I never could get to his head; I'd a been in the money, though, if someone hadn't banged me, and then my mount just died away—she just seemed to die away." He repeated this in a falling cadence, as though it had expressed his reason for finishing in the rack.

"Well, we're beat, an' that's all there is to it," declared Dixon, half savagely; then he added, "an' by a cast-off out of your father's stable, too, Miss Allis. There's any more bad luck owing to John Porter, hanged if I wouldn't like to shoulder it myself, an' give him a breather." Then, with ponderous gentleness for a big, rough-thrown-together man, he continued: "Don't you fret, Miss—the better part 'o' it, right; she'll pull your father through all this; just cheer up. I've got to go now an' look after her."

When the trainer had gone the Jockey turned to Allis, hesitatingly, and "Dixon's correct about an' little mare; she's all right. I wouldn't speak even afore him, though he's all right too, but—" and he looked carefully to see that nobody was within ear-shot. Two men were talking a little farther out in the paddock, and Redpath, motioning to Allis, stepped close to the stall that was next to the one Lucretia had occupied. "I could a-been in the money."

The girl started. Crane had said that the Jockey had stopped talking. "Yes, Miss; you mustn't blame me, for I took chances of bein' had up afore the stewards."

"You did wrong if you didn't try to win," exclaimed Allis, angrily.

"I tried to win, but I couldn't. I saw that I'd never catch the big black; he was going too strong; his long stride was just breaking the little mare's heart. She's the games piece of horseflesh—say, Miss Porter, believe me, I just want to take it out of her, keepin' up with that long-legged devil. If I could a-headed him once, just got to him once—I tried it when we turned into the straight—he'd have got all his losses back in the race, but he couldn't do it. With him out of the race I'd have won; I could a-been second or third as it was, but it might have done the little mare up so she wouldn't have been no use—the mare was a half-don't take it out of her, keepin' up with that long-legged devil. If I could a-headed him once, just got to him once—I tried it when we turned into the straight—he'd have got all his losses back in the race, but he couldn't do it. 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