

# THOROUGHBRED



BY W.S. FRASER.

(CHAPTER VII.—Continued.)

"I congratulate you, Miss Porter," he said, raising his hat. Then he turned, and held out his hand to her father, saying, "I'm glad you've won, Porter—I thought you would. The Dutchman quit when he was pinched."

"It wasn't the colt's fault—he was short," said Porter. "I shouldn't like to have horses in the man's stable—there's too good a trainer for me."

There was a marked emphasis on Porter's words; he was trying to give Crane a friendly hint.

"You mean it's a case of strawberries?" questioned Crane. "I don't know it takes a lot of candies to find a lost quarter," remarked Porter, somewhat ambiguously. Then he added, "I must go down to thank Dixon; I guess this is his annual day for smiling."

"I'm coming, too, father," said Allis; "I want to thank Lucretia, and give her a kiss, brave little sweetheart."

After Allis and her father had left Crane, he sat for a minute or two watching the crowd from the balcony, blocked the passageway after each race to filter down on the lawn. The way seemed clearer presently, and Crane fell in behind a knot of loud-talking men. The two of large proportions who had been behind Allis, were like huge gate posts jammed there in the narrow way. As he moved along slowly he presently had knowledge of a presence at his side—a familiar presence. Raising his eyes from a contemplation of the heels in front of him, he saw Belle Langdon. She nodded with patronizing freedom.

"I lost you," she said. "I was sitting with some friends here," she explained.

"Yes, I saw her," she commented pointedly. "At that instant one of the stout men in front said, with a bear snarl, 'That's the worst ever.' I've seen some jobs in my time, but this puts it over anything yet."

"Didn't you back the little mare?" a thin voice squeaked. "It was the tout."

"Back nothing!" The last time she couldn't untrack herself; an today she comes, without any pull in the weight, and wins in a walk from the Dutchman; and didn't he beat her just as easy the other day?"

Belle Langdon looked into Crane's face, and her eyes were charged with a look of reciprocal meaning. Crane winced. How aggressively obnoxious this half-tutored girl, mistress of many gay frocks, could make herself! There was an implied crime-partnership in her glance which revolted him. Dick Langdon must have talked in his own home. Crane's conscience—well, he hardly had one perhaps, at least it was always sub-evident; to put it in another way, the retrospect of his manipulated diplomacy never bothered him; but this gratuitous sharing in his evil triumph was disgusting. The malicious glitter of the girl's small black eyes contrasted strongly with the honest, unaffected look that was forever in the big tranquil eyes of Allis.

They were just at the head of the steps, and the tout was saying to the fat expostulator: "I could have put you next; I steered a big better on the won a thousand over the mare. I saw Boston's betting man havin' an old-time waltz, then I knew it was a lead-pipe cinch. He's a sure thing better, he is; odds don't make no difference to him, the shorter the better—that's when his own boy's got the mount."

"It's all right," he said, after the race, grunted the fat man.

"G'wan! the stable didn't have a penny on Lucretia last time; an' what do you suppose made her favorite today?" queried the tout, derisively. "It was a bar of money," he continued, full of his own logical deductions, "an' I'll bet Porter cleaned up twenty thousand. He's a pretty slick cov, or is old 'Honest John,' if you ask me."

The girl at Crane's side cackled a laugh. "He's funny, isn't he?" she said, nodding her big plumed hat in the direction of the man-group.

ain't in it with a gentleman owner—what you takes to racin'. When a man of brains takes to runnin' horses as a profess, he's generally a Jim Dandy. It was he of the wine-opening who let fall these words of wise value.

"You mean Porter, Jim?" asked number two of the trio.

"Maybe that's his name. An' he put it all over Mister Langdon this trip."

"As how?" queried the other.

"Last time he runs his mare she's got come in her from the whole journey, an' all the time he owns the winner, Lauzanne, see?—buys him before they go out. Then Langdon thinks The Dutchman's the goods, an' buys him at a price; he takes a ball of long goods for him—I've got straight that he parted with fifteen thousand. Then the gentleman owner, Honest John, turns the trick with Lucretia, an' makes The Dutchman look like a sellin' plate."

"I guess Langdon'll feel pretty sick," hazarded number three.

"I'd been watchin' the game," continued the wineman, "an' soon's I saw a horse today from the wise guys in the ring, I plumped for the mare 'toots sweet.'"

What an extraordinary thing manipulation was, Crane mused, as he listened; also how considerable of an asset the public was in its theoretical wisdom.

Then the three men drifted away to follow some new toy balloon of erratic possibilities, and Crane wound through the narrow passage which led to the paddock. There he encountered Langdon.

"He didn't run a very good horse, sir," began the trainer.

"I thought otherwise," replied Crane, measuring the immediate vicinity of listeners.

"I had to draw it a bit fine," declared Langdon, with apologetic remonstrance.

"Running second is always bad business, except in a selling race," retorted his master.

"I've got to think of myself," growled Langdon. "If he'd been beat off, there'd been trouble; the stewards have got the other race in their crop a bit yet."

"I'm not blaming you, Langdon, only I was just a trifle afraid that you were going to beat Porter's mare. He's a friend of mine, and needed a win badly. I'm not exactly his father-in-law, but I'm his banker, which amounts to pretty much the same thing."

"What about the horse, sir," asked the trainer.

"I was sitting with some friends here," she explained.

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The banker shortly muttered the banker's words, and steps are clear on the other side, Miss Langdon, you can get down there. I've got to go into the paddock; you'll excuse me."

Being vicious for the fun of the thing had never appealed to Crane, he raced as he did everything else—to win. If other men suffered, that was the play of fate. He never talked about these things himself, almost disliked to think of them. He turned his back on Belle Langdon and went down the right-hand steps. On the grass sward at the bottom he stopped for an instant to look across at the jockey board.

Three men had just come out of the refreshment bar under the stand. They were possessed of many things; gold of the bookmakers in their pockets, and it's ever-attendant chattering in their hearts. One of them had cracked a bottle of wine at the bar, as tribute to the exceeding swiftness of Lucretia, for he had won plentifully. At that particular stage there was nothing left but to talk it over, and they talked Crane, avaricious, unhesitatingly in his fighting, devoid of sympathy, was not of the eavesdropping class, but as he stood there he was as much part of the other men's conversation as though he had been a fourth member of the brotherhood.

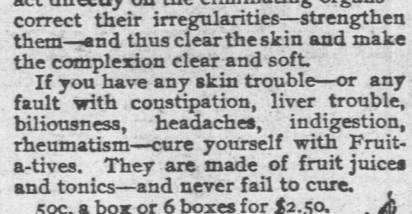
"I tell you none of these trainers

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Porter put it to me pretty straight that the horse had been helped."

"I told him to go to hell."

"This wasn't exactly truthful as we remember the interview, but its terseness, as if by a mutual instinct, the two men walked on till they stood in front of Lauzanne's stall.

"He's a good enough looking, ain't he?" commented Dixon, as he dipped under the door bar, went into the stall, and turned the horse about. "He's the picture of his old sire, Lauzanne, he continued, looking the horse over critically; 'an' a damned sight bigger rogue, though the old one was bad enough. Lauzanne won the suburban Derby on his head, and he has the legs, an' God knows what in his stomach. He was second in the Brooklyn that same year. I've always heard he was a mule, an' I guess this one got it all, an' none of the gallop-in."

"How does he work with the others?" queried Porter.

"Runs a bit, an' then cuts it—won't try a yard. Of course he's sick from the dope, an' the others are a bit fast for him, but he's got a good deal of cheek, cheap, he'd have a light weight, an' might do better."

Porter walked on to Lucretia's stall, and the trainer continued in a monologue to Lauzanne's stall. "He's a good enough looking, ain't he?" commented Dixon, as he dipped under the door bar, went into the stall, and turned the horse about. "He's the picture of his old sire, Lauzanne, he continued, looking the horse over critically; 'an' a damned sight bigger rogue, though the old one was bad enough. Lauzanne won the suburban Derby on his head, and he has the legs, an' God knows what in his stomach. He was second in the Brooklyn that same year. I've always heard he was a mule, an' I guess this one got it all, an' none of the gallop-in."

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all men, whether they race horses or point the truthful way, and this year had been but a series of disappointments to the master of Ringwood. After Lucretia's win in the Eclipse, Porter did not land another race. Lucretia caught cold and went off. He tried Lauzanne twice again, but the chestnut seemed thoroughly soured. Now he was back at Ringwood, a cloud of indebtedness hanging over the beautiful place, and prospect of relief very shadowy. If Lucretia wintered well and grew big and strong she might extricate him from his difficulties, the winning one or two of the big races the following summer. About any of the other horses there was not even this much of promise.

Thoroughly distrusting Lauzanne, Porter had given him away—but to Allis. Strongly enough, the girl had taken a strong liking to the son of Lauzanne; it may have been because of the feeling for his presence at Ringwood. Allis Porter's perceptions had been developed to an extraordinary degree. All her life she had lived surrounded by thoroughbreds, and her sensitive nature had been quick to their courage and loyalty, in a manner quite beyond possibility in a practical, routine-following horseman. To her they were almost human; the play of their minds was so attractive and interesting as to the development of their muscles was to a trainer. When the stable had been taken back to Ringwood, she had asked for Lauzanne as a riding horse.

"I'm going to give him away," her father had replied, "I can't sell him, nobody would buy a brute with such a reputation." This word brought to Porter's mind his chief cause of resentment against the chestnut. The public having got into its head that Porter was playing coups, generously suggested that he was pulling Lauzanne to get him in some big handicap light.

"I won't fret such a skat all winter," he declared angrily, after a little pause. "Well, give him to me, father," the girl had pleaded. "I am certain that he'll make good some day; you'll see that he'll pay you for keeping your word."

As Allis rode Lauzanne she discovered many things about the horse; that he was not a mere horse, but that his intelligence was extraordinary, and, with her at least, his temper perfect.

Allis' relationship with her father was unusual. They were chums; in all his life, in all his moments of wavering, buffeted by the waves of disaster, Allis was the one who cheered him, who regird him in his armor—Allis, the slight olive-faced little woman, with the big, fearless Joan-of-Arc eyes.

"You'll see what we'll do next summer, dad," she said cheerily. "You'll win with Lucretia as often as you did with her mother; and I'll win with Lauzanne. We'll just keep quiet till spring, then we'll show them."

Langdon's horses, so silently controlled by Philip Crane, banker, had been put in winter quarters at Gravesend, where Langdon had a cottage. Crane's racing season had been as successful as the master of Ringwood's had been disastrous. He had won a first-class race with The Dutchman—ostensibly Langdon's horse—and then, holding the purse, he had won the Derby, and slowly, threw him out of training and deliberately planning a big coup for the next year. The colt was engaged in several three-year-old stakes, and Crane had been working to find out his capabilities. As his owner expected, he showed them in a severe trial gallop the true Hanover staying power.

Although Crane had said nothing about it at the time, he had his eye on the Derby when he commissioned Langdon to purchase this gallant son of Hanover. It was a long way ahead to look to lay plans to win a race the following June, but that was the essence of Crane's existence, careful planning. He loved it. He was a master at it. And, after all, given a good stayer, such as he had in The Dutchman, the mile-and-a-half run of the Derby less to chance than any other stake he could have pitched upon; the result would depend absolutely upon the class and stamina of the horses. No bad start could upset his calculations, no little interference in the race could destroy his horse's chance if he were good enough to win. The Dutchman's races as a two-year-old would not warrant his being made a favorite, and Langdon, properly disinterested, had never given to the Dutchman what he had pitched upon; the result would depend absolutely upon the class and stamina of the horses. 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