

Writer's Workshop

By
★
D. S.
McPHAIL
★

Ouch! That's the second cigarette burn I've got today. I'm so nervous. This crowd is terrific. There goes my newspaper from under my arm again. I don't want to lose that racing form.

The cabbie was certainly slow enough. I almost missed the race. Oh, if I could only be certain I'm going to pick the winner. This is definitely it. If I don't pick this one right, it's the end. Let's see, who's running? Queen Belle is slow and has raced twice in the last ten days—only came in fourth and fifth—slow time in both those races too. Dark Victory hasn't done too much either. These next two are mudders and with that sun and wind this is no track for mudders. Archie's Pride in fifth position.

That's an ironic coincidence—Archie's Pride. Archie will be back today and unless I win I'm afraid that I won't be his wife much longer. Two years, two long years, he's been gone. To think that it was two years ago we parted. What plans we had! Here I persuaded him to stop drinking and gambling and made him want to be someone and do something. Now look at me. I can still hear him saying—"Sure Marg, we'll make a new start. I'm going to South America for two years. I've been offered a good job as a consulting engineer with an oil firm there. Look, I'll send you \$400, a month. You bank it and save what you can from your job too and when I come back we'll start right from scratch—home, family and everything. We'll do all the things we never got around to doing before and we'll manage. We can do it, I'm sure."

Yeh, we'd have been able to do it alright—if only I hadn't been so smart. I didn't believe him. I never thought he could do it. Every month now—\$400. That adds up to about 10,000 dollars now. The money from that last cheque is still in my purse, but where's the rest? My God! I've got to pick the winner. If only I had trusted him. I've never done anything like that before but I was lonely and I had to do something. My \$350 a month looked awful small beside what he was making. I was entitled to more. Gosh, I remember the first time I—ah—borrowed from that account of ours. I wanted that evening dress so much. Then I wanted that mink. I deserved that bigger apartment too, even if the rent was almost three times as much.

I suppose he wouldn't be too angry if I'd just spent our money but if he finds out that I've borrowed half as much again . . . I shudder to think of it. I guess it's his turn to do the moralizing now: I managed to make him straighten himself out before, but it's too late for me now. I didn't realize that the time had gone so fast, even though it seems like a long time since he left. His letters always mentioned coming home but never the day and date. But that telegram today—where is it? I had it in my purse. Yeah, here it is—Arriving tonight. Meet me at Municipal Field at eight if possible love, Archie.

What if we find out about a few of my friends? That's the trouble though. It's been so lonely. What could I do? I thought he was lying in those first few letters when he told me how he was working hard and behaving himself. But it has lasted. Now I'm the sucker.

Gosh, only eight minutes more to bet. I've got to pick the winner and put this last \$400 on him. These horses are all too much the same and the jockeys are all good. The chart isn't much help. The odds are pretty well split on those first two. Let's see the third one is about 7-1. Archie's Pride is about 4-1, right with the favorites. I suppose if I were superstitious I'd bet on him, but 4-1 odds won't do me any good.

I wish I could have got here earlier. Only one race to make or break my life on. To think, too, that three years ago, I condemned Archie and was ashamed of him because he used to bet \$20 a week. After the last two years I can't reproach him for anything—and what's more, I think he's actually been living a clean life. I wonder how much I've spent out here at this track every week in the last year or more?

This could have been my chance too. Look at the people around me. Most of them seem to be happy. I wonder if they are? Archie says he can get a good job up here now. We'd have managed to make a down-payment on a house in that new section out in the west-end. It certainly is a fashionable place. What better surroundings in which to start your family? It's funny too. I used to be almost a prude. Now I'm good for nothing absolutely. Look at that couple over there in the box seats. They're just about thirty, I imagine, no more—just Archie's and my ages. We could have been just as well off. I wonder what happened to all those ideas and dreams of comfort, respectability and prosperity that I had?

That dust is chocking me. The sun's going in behind the clouds, but it's still so darn hot. Everybody's trying to cool off. Here I am sweating for my life, and for all our plans of a happy life together. Everything is going to ride on this horse.

The odds are all coming down—except on Dark Victory. She's actually a good horse, pretty, well-built. That jockey riding her is good too. I wonder why people don't pick her? Let's see—Dark Victory, showed in one of the last four starts she made—won a small stakes last week carrying the same jockey. There are twelve others in this race though. Four or five at the end of the list seem to have pretty good records.

Only two minutes to go. I'd better bet this \$400 on Dark Victory's nose. That's if I can get through these people. This looks like the shortest line-up. The odds are at 20-1 now. That's good, I hope. Those last few horses are beginning to get a lot of backers.

Oh, stop pushing. These people are like animals. This place almost smells as if they might be too. What a horrid place. There are so many people. This is the last day of racing for this meet and this is the biggest race—I would have to pick it for my big one. Guess I'll call it the Life-or-Death Stakes. It pretty well is for me. Thank God I'm next in line. I was afraid that they'd start before I got my tickets.

"Two blocks of 10's on 5142—Dark Victory. \$400, right? Thank you."

They're going to the post now. It will soon be over but that mile around the track will seem like a trip around the world. The odds are better than ever, 25-1 now, and those are pretty near the closing ones. I hope they don't go down like long shots usually do when the betting closes. That horse looks good too.

I don't know whether I can stand to watch this race or not. It's no use moaning now, but what will I do? It's my only hope. If my mother and father and my old friends could only see me now and know my story, I wonder what they would say? It wouldn't be too bad to have a few of those friends around just now, either. I sort of lost track of them all after Archie went away.

Those loudspeakers blare so—I wish they would be quiet, this awful mob too. They get on my nerves. Oh, if only things were different. I know this is the big race of the meet. These people don't know how big. Two person's lives depend upon it. My God, why won't they keep quiet? I can still hear them when I put my hands

over my ears.

Look at my dress—what a mess from the dust from that track, and all the crowding. Somebody has spilled mustard on it too. What rotten luck. In only three hours I'm supposed to meet Archie.

That's the warning bell. They're getting into the gate. Let's see—Dark Victory, Number 2, jockey's colors—red and green on white. There he is.

They're off. Gosh, they're so muddled I can't tell who's who. This crowd is so noisy I can't hear the announcer either. I wish I could push my way through to the rail. There they go around the first turn. Red and White on Green or was it Green and Red on White? Oh Gosh! That's it, Red and Green on White. There she goes about fourth or fifth. Thirteen horses in that race and I had to pick one. Thirteen is unlucky, perhaps, and I wonder if I'll be unlucky. There goes someone up on the outside. I wonder who it is? I didn't even remember to bring the field-glasses . . . what a rush . . . got the telegram . . . then get the money from the bank . . . then grab a cab and . . . there goes another horse around the outside. That's it! Red and Green on White. I can see it quite clearly. Come on! Don't fail me now. Look, up into second place. That jockey is certainly riding well. Don't let that next horse pass you . . . try to keep him back . . . that's it . . . hold him off. Now they're coming. That's the three-quarter mark. Only a bit farther to come. Please, Please, you've got to win.

There they come. Now, pass that first horse—pass him. You've only got a short distance left. Come around him. There! You're gaining—you're past him. Don't cut in too fast, you'll hit that horse behind you—my God—look out—be careful—whew. Come on, hurray, don't let them catch you. You must win, you must—the final odds are still 25-1. Hold that lead. Please please.

This crowd is so noisy, I can hardly see either, they are pushing so. There! you've just about done it—Run! Run! You made it! Oh, oh. How did it happen? First! and I have \$400 on her. If only I could have put more. This certainly is the big race of the meet.

Why don't they post the times and the prices? They always seem so slow when I win. Oh, Archie, I'll pay it all back now. You need never know about it. I'll manage to pay off the debt somehow. I'll put this in the bank for our house and we'll be alright. We'll start again. I've learned my lesson.

Let's see. 25-1 odds, that's just about \$10,000 I stand to win. I hope that the pay is actually more. I wish I could get started towards those windows so I can collect, but this crowd is too thick. Why don't they post the amount so I'll know? Then, I'll collect and rush home and get ready to meet you, Archie. Only three more hours and we'll be together. We'll make out O.K. you'll see.

Now they're getting ready to post the horses and the amounts. Oh, I hope the odds were greater. Now they're posting something.

What's that—"Inquiry"—why? What do they mean? Dark Victory won at least by a length. Why are they delaying? They can't do that. Perhaps they mean inquiry about the second and third horses. Two of them came in right together—but if they did mean that, they post the winner's number anyway.

What are they doing? The jockeys are going up to the stewards' balcony. Now they're arguing. That's my man in the Red and Green on White. Two others seem to be accusing him of something. They point at him and then seem to yell at the stewards—at least their mouths keep working open and close. I wish I could hear them. This is awful. Now they're pointing to the three quarter turn—that's where he took the lead and held it. What's wrong? Why don't they post Dark Victory's number as the winner? I can't stand this much longer. The heat is getting worse and the sun has disappeared completely. Those

clouds are so dark and I have no raincoat.

What are they doing up there? The stewards are pointing at my jockey now. What can the trouble be? He keeps shaking his head as if to say "No". Now they are all very angry. Gosh, the stewards are really arguing with him now. Finally he shakes his head "Yes", and turn around and disappears down stairs. The other two jockeys follow him. What can be going on? Dark Victory won, and I won \$10,000—the \$10,000 that will make it possible for me to continue living—or to start again. Please, don't wait any longer. The rain is starting and it's so uncomfortable. I don't feel very well any more. Please post the amount so I can collect and meet Archie. Please?

What is he saying over that loudspeaker? Oh no—Dark Victory disqualified for bumping. Archie's Pride is the winner.

On a set where a young actress was throwing her weight around. Marjory Main turned to the director and remarked in her raspy voice. "Whenever I see a youngster who is completely carried away

with herself, I'm reminded of the fly riding on a wagon who looked back and remarked; "My my look at the dust I'm picking up."

Experience though still the best teacher, has many hopeless pupils.

For your dancing pleasure . . .

MUSIC BY
DICK BALANCE
AND THE
— ORCHESTRA —

PHONE 6538

EASTER PARADE

Make your 'Welcome to Spring' a pleasure to yourself, and a joy to all who see you in your new EASTER OUTFIT from the

Gaiety Mens' Shop Ltd.

"For Those Who Prefer Quality."



Perpetuate the memories

of your College Days

with a pleasing photograph.

HARVEY STUDIOS

Add the "Royal" to your list of friends

We welcome students' accounts

FREDERICTON BRANCH

W. F. FLEWELLING, Manager