

Thoroughbreds.

By W. A. FRASER

Author of "The Outcast," "Mooswa," and Other Stories.

(Copyright, 1902, by McClure, Phillips & Co.) CHAPTER XXI.

The next day, intent on persuading Porter to accept the money over Diablo, Crane took a run down to the Ringwood farm.

Crane stated the facts very pleasantly, very seductively, to John Porter. Porter almost unreasonably scented charity in Crane's proposal. He believed that the bet was a myth; Crane was trying to present him with this sum as a compensation for having lost Diablo. It wasn't even a loan, it was a gift, pure and simple. His very helplessness, his poverty, made him decline the offer with unnecessary ferocity. If Allis had refused it, if she were strong enough to stand without this charity, surely he, a man, battered though he was, could pass it by. He had received a hopeful message from Allis as to Lucretia's chances in the Derby; they felt confident of winning. That win would relieve him of all obligations.

"I can't take it," said Porter to Crane. "Allis is more familiar with the circumstances of the bet—if there was one—than I. It must just rest with her; she's a man now, you know," he added, plaintively. "I'm but a broken wreck, and what she says, goes."

"But there's a payment on Ringwood falling due in a few days," Crane remonstrated, even as he had to Mrs. Porter. Porter collapsed fretfully. He could stand out against prospective financial stringency, but actual obligations for which he had no means quite broke down his weakened energy. He had forgotten about this liability, that is, had thought the time of payment more distant. He would be forced to recall the money he had given Dixon to bet on Lucretia for the Derby, to meet this payment to the bank.

Quite despondently he answered the other man. "I had forgotten all about it! This shake-up has tangled my memory. I can pay the money, though," he added, half defiantly; "it will hamper me, but I can do it."

A sudden thought came to Crane, an inspiration. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. Porter brightened up; there was such a world of confidence in the other's manner. "We'll just let this Diablo money stand against the payment which is about due on Ringwood; put it in the bank to cover it, so to speak—later we can settle to whom it belongs. At present it seems to be nobody's money; it's sitting there a few thousand going begging for an owner," he added, jocularly. "You say it isn't yours; I know it isn't mine, and most certainly it doesn't belong to the bookmaker, for he's lost it fair and square. We can't let him keep it; they win enough of the public's money."

Reluctantly, Porter gave a half-hearted acquiescence. He would have sacrificed tangible interests to leave the money that was in Dixon's hands with him to bet on Lucretia. It would be like not taking the tide at its flood to let her run unbacked when her chances of winning were so good and the odds against her great enough to insure a big return.

It was after banking hours, quite toward evening, by the time Crane had obtained this concession. He had brought the winnings for John Porter's acceptance, should the latter prove amenable to reason. Now it occurred to him that he might leave the money with Allis, a half-hearted acquiescence. He would have sacrificed tangible interests to leave the money that was in Dixon's hands with him to bet on Lucretia. It would be like not taking the tide at its flood to let her run unbacked when her chances of winning were so good and the odds against her great enough to insure a big return.

"It doesn't matter," remarked Crane; "I can leave this money with you. It's to meet a payment of three thousand due from John Porter about the middle of June. You can put it in a safe place in the vault till the note falls due and then transfer it to Porter's credit."

"I'll attend to it, sir," replied Mortimer. "I'll attach the money to the note and put them away together."

On his way to the station Crane met Alan Porter. "I suppose you'd like a holiday to see your father's mare run for the Derby, wouldn't you, Alan?" he said.

"I should very much, sir; but Mr. Lane is set against racing."

"Oh, I think he'll let you off that day. I'll tell him he may, but, like your mother, I don't approve of young men betting—I know what it means."

He was thinking with bitterness of his own youthful indiscretions.

"If you go, don't bet. You might be tempted, naturally, to back your father's mare, Lucretia, but you would stand a very good chance of losing."

"Don't you think she'll win, sir?" Alan asked, emboldened by his employer's freedom of speech.

"I do not. My horse, the Dutchman, is almost certain to win, my trainer tells me. Then he added, apologetic of his confidential mood: 'I tell you this, lest through loyalty to your own people you should lose your money. Racing, I fancy, is very uncertain, even when it seems most certain.'"

Again Crane had cause to congratulate himself upon the somewhat clever manipulation of a difficult situation. He had scored again in his diplomatic love endeavor. He knew quite well that Allis' determined stand was only made possible by her expectation of gaining financial relief for her father through Lucretia's win.

ning the Derby. Should she fail, they would be almost forced to turn to him in their difficulties. That was what he wanted. He knew that the money won over Diablo, if accepted, must always be considered as coming from him. The gradual persistent dropping of water would wear away the hardest stone; he would attain to his wishes yet.

He was no bungler to attempt other than the most gently delicate methods.

Encouraged by Jockey Redpath's explanation of his ride on Lucretia, Allis was anxious that Dixon should take the money her father had set aside for that purpose and back their mare for the Brooklyn Derby.

"We had better wait a day or two," Dixon had advised, "until we see the effect the hard gallop in the handicap has had on the little mare. She ain't clean up yet, but she might, she's a natural, though; if her feet, but it's only a matter of a week, a gallop like that takes it out of them a bit."

It was the day after Crane's visit to Ringwood that Dixon advised Allis that Lucretia seemed none the worse for her exertion.

"Perhaps we'd better put the money on right away," he said; "she's sure to keep well and we'll be forced to take a much shorter price race day."

"Back the stable," advised Allis, "then if anything happens Lucretia we can start Lucretia."

The trainer laughed in good natured derision. "That would do much good; we'd be out of the frying pan into the fire; we'd be just that much more money out for jockey an' startin' fees."

"If Lucretia would only try, something tells me she'll win," contended the girl, "and she's got the best of the other runners."

"And something tells me she wouldn't try a yard," answered Dixon, in good humored opposition. "But I don't think it'll make no difference in the odds we get whether we back the stable or Lucretia alone; they won't take no stock in the chestnut's prospects."

So Dixon made a little pilgrimage amongst the pencils. He found Faust and asked if him a quotation against Porter's stable.

"Twelve is the best I can do," answered the Chevalier.

"I'll take fifteen to one," declared Dixon. "Can't lay it; some of the talent-men as doesn't make no mistake, is takin' twelve to one in my book fast as I open my mouth."

"I want fifteen," replied Dixon doggedly. "The bright morning seemed to whisper to the trainer's words, 'The mare's coughin',' struck a chill to her heart. She could not speak, the misery was too great, but stood dejectedly listening while Dixon spoke of his suspicions of foul play."

What villains there were in the world, she thought, for a man to lay them odds against her horse, knowing that she had been poisoned, was a hundred times worse than stealing the money from their pockets.

"I don't suppose we'll ever be able to prove it," declared Dixon, regretfully. "But that doesn't matter so much as the mare being done for; we're out of it now, good and strong. If we're out of it two days, good we might a saved the money, but we've burned up a thousand."

"We'll have to start Lucretia," said Allis, taking a brave pull at herself and speaking with decision.

"We might send him to the post, but that's all the good it'll do us, I'm feared."

"I've seen him do a great gallop," contended Allis.

"He did it for you, but he won't do it for nobody else. There ain't no boy ridin' can make him go fast enough for a live funeral. But we'll start him and I'll speak to Redpath about takin' the mount."

Allis was thinking very fast; her head, with its great wealth of black hair, dropped low in heavy meditations.

"Don't engage him just yet, Dixon," she said, looking up suddenly, the shadow of a new resolve in her gray eyes. "I'll talk it over with you when we get back to the house. I'm thinking of something, but I don't want to speak of it just now—let me think it over a little."

Dixon went deep in thought, too, as he went back to his own stables. "We haven't got a million to one chance," he was muttering; "the money's burned up and the race is dead to the world as far as we're concerned."

That Allis could evolve any plan to lift them out of the slough of despair he felt was quite impossible, but at any rate he got a distinct shock when, a little later, a slight-form girl with gray eyes set large and full in a dark face declared to him that she was going to ride Lucretia in the Derby herself!

her up," volunteered Carter, seeing Dixon's investigation. "I'm afraid she's took cold," muttered Dixon. "Have you had her near any horses that got the influenza?" he asked, looking inquiringly at Carter.

"She ain't been near nothing, I kept her away from everything for fear she'd get a kick or get run into."

A sickening conviction came to Dixon that it was the dreaded influenza. The trainer pursued his investigation amongst the stable lads. When he asked Bob Nast if he had noticed anything unusual about the mare the boy declared, "Just a cough, phlegmatically that he had not. Then, suddenly remembering an incident he had taken at the time to be of little import, he said: 'Two mornin's ago, when I opened her stall and she poked her head out I noticed a little scum in her nose, but I thought it was dirt. I wiped it out and there was nuthin' more come that I could see.'"

"What's the row," asked Mike Gaynor, as he joined Dixon.

When the details were explained to him Mike declared emphatically that some one had got at the mare. Taking Dixon to one side, he said: "It's that devil on wheels, Shandy; you can bet yer sweet life on that. I've been layin' for that crook; he cut Diabolo's bridle an' 'trew th' old man an' he done this job, too."

Dixon worked over in his mind many contorted ways of breaking the news to Allis and had finished up by blurting out: "The mares coughin' this mornin', miss. I hope it ain't nothing, but I'm afraid she's her up."

"Another boy will have the mount of Lucretia," Allis answered.

"What difference will that make? You can't trust him."

"You can trust this boy, father, as you might your own son Alan."

"I don't know about that. Alan in the bank is all right, but Alan is a jockey would be a different thing."

"Father! you would trust me, wouldn't you?"

"I guess I would, in the tightest corner ever was chiselled out."

"Well, you can trust the jockey that's going to ride Lucretia just as much. I know him and he's all right. He's been riding Lucretia some and the horse likes him."

"It's all Lucretia," objected Porter; the discussion having thrown him into a petulant mood. "Is Lucretia that bad—is she sick?"

"She galloped today," answered the girl, evasively, "but if anything happens her we're going to win with the horse. Just think of that, father and cheer up. Dixon has backed the stable to win a lot of money, enough to—enough to—well, to wipe out all these little things that are bothering you, dad."

She leaned over and kissed her father in a hopeful, pretty way. The contact of her brave lips drove a magnetic flow of confidence into the man. "You're a brick, little woman, if there ever was one. Just a little bunch of pluck, ain't you girl? And Allis, he continued, 'if you don't win the Derby, come and tell me about it yourself, won't you? You sure to have some other

things or would she just wait until race day and take her place in the saddle then."

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"A new boy I'm tryin'," Dixon explained to Gaynor after he had lifted a little lad to Lucretia's back at the paddock gate and they stood watching the big chestnut swing along with his usual sluggish stride.

"He's got good hands," said Mike, critically, "though he seems a bit awkward in the saddle. You couldn't have a better trial horse for a new boy; if Lucretia's satisfied with him he can ride anythin'."

When Allis, who was now Al Mayne, the boy, came around and back to the paddock she slipped quietly from the horse, lolloped carelessly about for a few minutes and then made her way back to Dixon's quarters.

Nobody had paid any attention to the modest little boy. Riding lads were as common as flies in the race. To-morrow mornin' you had better center him just slow around once, an' then send him the full mile-an-a-quarter as though there was money hung up for it. I'll catch his time, an' we'll get wise to what he can do."

This program was carried out, and as Dixon looked on at his watch after the gallop to make sure that he was not mistaken in her prophetic hope that the despised Lucretia would win the Brooklyn Derby.

"Dixon was surprised when the trainer said to Allis as she dismounted. 'He's not slow, either; he's as fresh as a daisy. God! well, do those blackguards up yet, I believe.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

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"I'm sorry that Porter's mare has gone wrong," Crane said. "I think we would have won, anyway, but it'll just about ruin them."

Figuratively, Langdon closed one eye and winked to himself. Crane must know that it was his implied desire that had led up to the wrecking of Lucretia. Langdon thought Crane just about the most complete hypocrite he'd ever met; that preacher face of his could look honorably pious while his own rack did a cool ninety thousand over the trainer's dirty work. However, that cut no figure; it was the \$10,000 Langdon was after.

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Other eyes than Dixon's had seen Lucretia's strong gallop, other watches than his had ticked off the extraordinary good time: 2:11 for the mile and a quarter, with the horse seemingly running well within his own power, and a foot of the journey and finishing strong, as if he were almost good enough to warrant his winning.

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lop. And the same boy was to ride Lucretia in the race, he understood, for Redpath had been released, and was looking for another mount.

It wasn't in the natural order of things that one small stable would have in it two horses good enough to win the Derby, especially when one of them was a cast-off, but there was the gallop; time, like figures, didn't lie. Langdon admitted that he had never seen such an improvement in a horse as had been made in Lucretia. Shandy had told him that it was Miss Porter's doing, that she had cured him of his sulky mood; the gallop Langdon had witnessed seemed to bear out the truth of this.

What was he to do? They couldn't repeat the trick they had played on Lucretia. The Dutchman might win, he had worked the distance in 2:09, but then he was all out at the finish, and there was \$10,000 at stake. He tried to find out who the boy was that had ridden Lucretia, but nobody seemed to know; he was a new boy, that's what had picked up somewhere. Perhaps he might be got at. If this could be managed it would simplify matters somewhat—remove an unpleasant contingency.

The morning after her fast work on Lucretia, Allis, draped as she was into the personification of Al Mayne, arrived at the course before their horses. As she was leaning over the paddock rail waiting for Lucretia to come, Langdon, who had evidently determined upon a course of action, sauntered up carelessly to the girl and commenced to talk. After a few preliminary observations he said, "You're the boy that's ridin' for Andy Dixon, ain't you?"

The small figure nodded its head.

"I seen you gallop that chestnut yesterday. Where you been ridin'—you're a stranger here, I reckon?"

"Out west," answered Allis, at a hazard. "Oh, San Francisco, eh? Are you engaged to Dixon?"

"I'm just on trial."

"Goin' to ride the chestnut in the race?" Again the boy nodded; under the circumstances it was not wise to trust too much to speech.

"It ain't no good—he's a bad horse, I guess. I've got the winner of that race in my stable. If he wins I'd like to ride you for a year. I like the way you ride. I ain't got no good lightweight. I might give you a thousand for a contract, an' losin' and winnin' mounts when you had a leg up. How do you like ridin' on Lucretia?" he continued, the little chap not answering his observations.

"I ain't goin' to ride no more for him after this race," answered the other, quite truthfully enough, but possessed of a curiosity to discover the extent of the other's willingness.

"I don't blame you. He's no good; he don't never give his boys a chance. If you win on the chestnut like as not they'll just give you the winnin' mount. That ain't no good to a boy. They ain't got no money, that's why. The owner of my candidate, the Dutchman, he's a rich man, an' he won't think nothin' of givin' you a retainer of a thousand if we win this race. That'll mean the Dutchman's a good horse, an' we'll want a good, light boy to ride him—see?"

Allis did see. Langdon was diplomatically giving her, as Al Mayne, to understand that if she threw the race on Lucretia she would get the place in their stable at a retainer of a thousand dollars.

"We can afford it if we win the race," he continued, "for we stand a big take. Come and see me any time you like to talk this over."

After he had gone, just as Allis was leaving the rail, she was again accosted; this time by Shandy. She trembled an instant, fearing that the small, red-lidded, ferret eyes would discover her identity, but the boy was too intent on trying to secure his \$10,000 to give hundred dollars to think of anything else.

"Good mornin'," he said, cheerily, "I used to be in Dixon's stable. It's a—; and he's a swipe. I see my boss takin' you just now. Did he put you next a good thing?"

Allis nodded her head knowingly.

"He's all right. So's the other one—the guy as has got the mule; he's got a bank full of it. I'm on to him—his name's Crane."

Allis started.

"You don't know him?" continued the imp; "he's too slick to go messin' about. But if the old man promised you anything, see, God bless me! you'll get it. Not like that other skunkin' hole where you don't get nothin'. I stand in five hundred if our horse wins the Derby."

"I'm goin' to ride him," asked Al Mayne. "Ride nothin', I don't have to. I've got my job already."

"I don't believe they'll give you five hundred for nothin'!" said Allis, doubtfully, knowing that the boy's obstinate nature, if he were crossed, would probably drive him into further explanation.

"Say, you're a stiff. What'd the old man want you to do—pull Lucretia?"

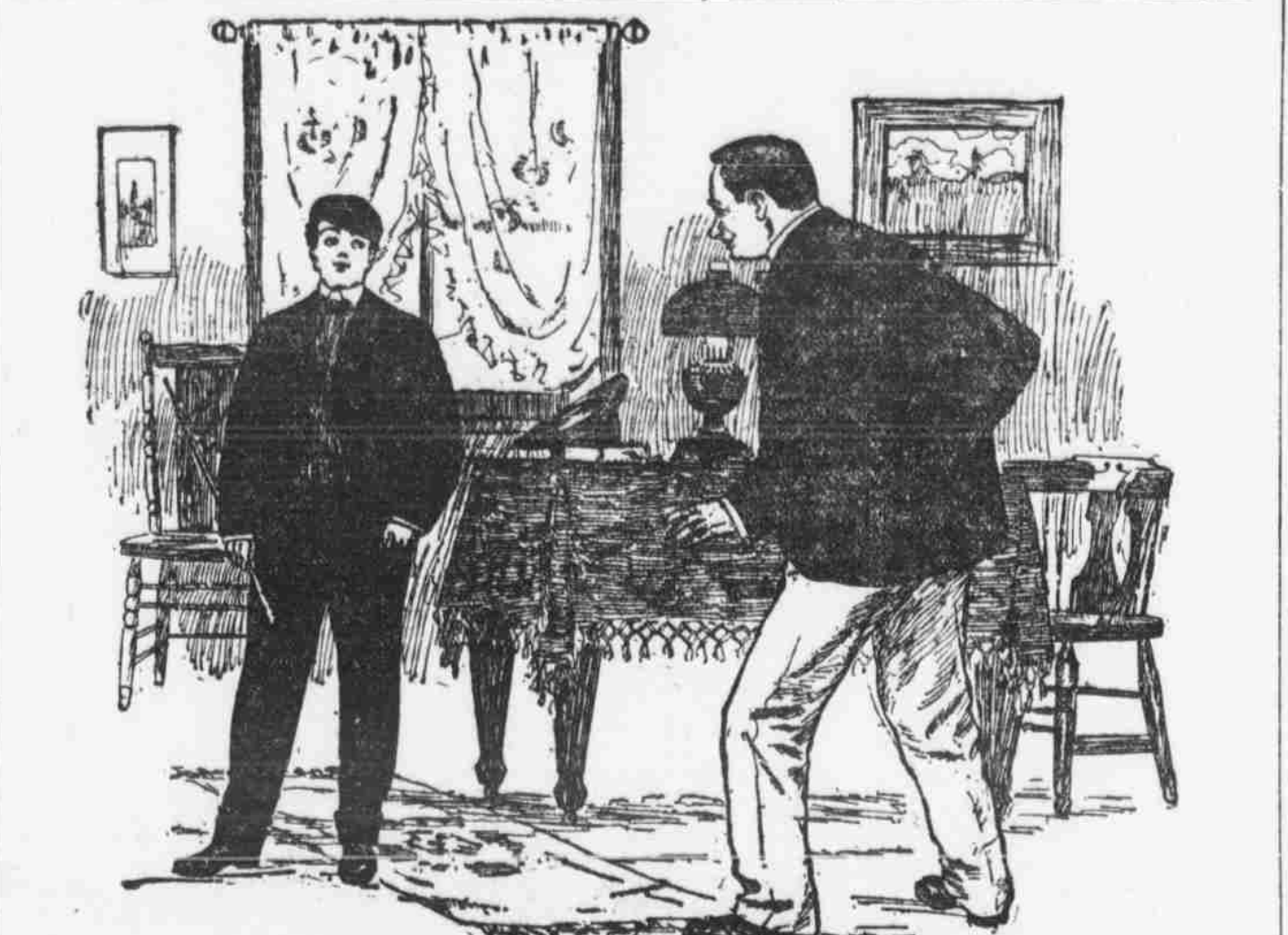
Allis nodded.

"I knowed it. What was the use of stoppin' the mare an' let the chestnut spoil the job?"

"Is that what you get the five hundred for?" asked Allis, a sudden suspicion forcing itself upon her.

"Say, what'd you take me for, a flat car? But she's sick, ain't she? An' you jes' take care of the chestnut now, an' I'll give you a hundred out of my five, God bless me, if I do."

As he spoke Shandy lolloped hastily about to see that no one was listening, then he continued. "If you give me the double cross an' peach, I'll split yer head open." His



"BY JIMINY! IF IT ISN'T—WELL, I GIVE IN, MISS ALLIS, YOU FOOLED ME."

in for a sick spell.

lowed rosy hope to tint the gray gloom of their many defeats until she had worked herself into a happy mood. Lucretia's win would put everything right; even her father, relieved of financial worry, would improve. The bright morning seemed to whisper of victory. Lucretia would surely win. It was not within the laws of fate that they should go on forever and ever having bad luck. She had come to have a reassuring look at the grand little mare that was to turn the tide of all their ill fortune.

The trainer's words, "The mare's coughin'," struck a chill to her heart. She could not speak, the misery was too great, but stood dejectedly listening while Dixon spoke of his suspicions of foul play.

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Allis' visit to Ringwood was a flying one. Filial devotion to her father had been one motive, but not the sole one. Her brother Alan's wardrobe received a visitation from hands not too well acquainted with the intricacies of its makeup. A couple of coats and sundry other garments were looted with a cheerful disregard of their owner's possible requirements.

John Porter was undoubtedly brightened by the daughter's visit. Lucretia's defeat in the handicap had increased his despondency. To gradually prepare him for further reverses Allis intimated rather than asserted that Lucretia might possibly have a slight cold, Dixon wasn't sure, but they were going to run Lucretia also. Like the trainer, her father had but a very poor opinion of the chestnut's powers in any other hand but in that of the girl's.

"Who'll ride him?" he asked petulantly. "It seems you can't trust any of the boys nowadays. If they're not pinheaded they're crooked as a corkscrew. Crane tells me that Redpath didn't ride Lucretia out the handicap and whether he rides the mare or Lucretia it seems all ones—we'll get beat anyway."

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