BY GEORGE MILLAR

Maquis
Horned Pigeon
My Past was an Evil River
Isabel and the Sea
Through the Unicorn Gates
A White Boat from England
Siesta
Orellana
Oyster River

HORSEMAN

Memoirs of Captain J. H. Marshall

EDITED BY
GEORGE MILLAR

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Hickling Local History Group

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Introduction

JOHN HOWARD MARSHALL was a man who lived his life for and on horses. And as he also lived by them, that is by selling them, he was an acute observer of the human race. Just as a good sheepdog is happy only when it has sheep to work, so Captain Marshall was content when he had at least one horse to handle and to sell. He preferred working on his own to working for others, partly because he liked to take all the risk and all the profit, partly because selling was for him a subtle process, and the more difficult the sale the more pleasure he derived from it, though he might pretend otherwise.

He never, as it happened, sold me a horse. But he was breaking young horses for me—big, strong, blood ones too—when he was eighty, and he helped me to sell two or three. He was a wonderful man to have at your shoulder when a potential buyer appeared and the Captain, as he puts it in his Memoirs, heard 'the distant roll of drums and tramp of infantry'. In a flash he knew how to treat the customer: with a flood of talk, or almost none; jovially, or in a 'well, if you don't know a snip when you're offered it, more fool you' sort of way.

Numerous men and women in England today earn their living with horses. Some, particularly in the hunting, eventing, and jumping scenes, earn money much as Captain Marshall did. But most of them, at any rate of those I have watched with interest and admiration, have other sources of income. What they manage to make from horse-coping is only a welcome supplement, a reward for skill. Captain

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Marshall had to sell horses to live, and he lived long and well. If that is not clever, tell me what is. Few of those with whom he dealt perhaps realised that he was a well-read, studious, and humorous man, one who would have done well in any business or profession. But there, he was a natural actor, just as he was a natural adventurer who, to the day of his death, took pleasure from the danger inherent in his trade.

By nature he was canny, and kept close hold on his money and his confidences. In the course of setting down his Memoirs I met people who had known him in Leicestershire and London and in the Sparkford Vale and Staffordshire. I learned from some of them that the Captain had been vastly popular with the ladies. Not a hint, not a whiff of that ever passed his lips. Nor, when he was taming our wild young horses or talking to me about his past, do I recall him using any word that could remotely be termed bad language. In all the time I knew him—this only struck me the other day—I remember him laughing frequently at himself, but never at anyone else. He had no children but he liked children and was as skilful with them as with young horses. Many a one he taught to ride, and for nothing, although he preferred teaching horses to teaching people. He went to church on Sundays, and told me without either pride or embarrasment that he believed in God, the Church of England, and the Crown. Despite his many terrible falls and breakages, old age did not cripple him, and, as he aged, he was able, with increasing experience and undiminished determination, to continue doing what he had done from the unnaturally early age of ten. Just imagine it: seventy-one years of horse-breaking!

Personal masculine elegance is an elusive quality, and possibly a rare one in an England that used to be full of it. Captain Marshall was never, so far as I know, a rich man, yet even in working rig he was always a picture, always himself, always different from any other man. Every bit of tweed or wool or cord or silk that he hung on his lean shape looked

right, individual, unflashy. He never failed with hats: his slightly voluminous tweed caps, his summer Panamas, his horizontal bowlers, his vertical tall hats from Mr Herbert Johnson's. Every cubic Marshall centimetre was worth looking at. Then he was incredibly clean and systematic. His bootroom, his stables, his harness room, his wood pile, his muck heap, all were immaculate. To everything its place, its polish, or its saddle soap.

At intervals during 1968 when both of us could spare the time I would go to his house in Cattistock, the next village over the ridge to the west of us, and for an hour, two hours, he would tell the story of his life to me and to an unobtrusive tape recorder. Mrs Marshall, small, neat, and lively, considerably younger than her husband, made us comfortable with all kinds of attentions and afternoon tea or drinks as hour and custom suggested. Border terriers snuffled round our legs, and when I left I was always pressed to carry away fresh eggs laid by the Captain's game fowl, Old English birds, and bantams. I looked forward to such visits, and left them invigorated, as though I had breathed in energy from that young-old horseman.

That December he died in his sleep with absolute unexpectedness. In his stables below the deathbed stood a thoroughbred mare, aged three, that he had broken for polo and was schooling with stick and ball. He was in his eighty-first year.

Captain Marshall's husky voice with its slight Leicestershire accent came from the little machine so jauntily that I have set down his story as he spoke it. He talked horsey language, which is not my language, and it may be that here and there I have committed errors which he, had he lived, would have rectified. If so I apologise to him and to the reader.

Sydling Court, 1969 G.M.

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I

Lord Lyon

WHEN the alarm clock rang Sam and Mitchell lay for a minute half awake in the bedroom above the coach house that the three of us shared. Then they rose silently, gathering their clothes. I pretended to sleep, letting them get a start in the day's affairs, listening to the rookery in Home Field, to the clatter of wooden buckets in the stable yard, to Maggie Wrench, the housemaid, treading from room to room lighting coal fires, filling scuttles, black-leading grates. Breakfast smells came up the back stairs and along the landing.

It was a special morning. I had to put on uniform and feared a hostile reaction from my brothers. I was fifteen, Mitchell sixteen, and Sam seventeen. Yet they continued to treat me as though I were a nipper. I'd been in the Army as long as they because, when I was fourteen, Captain E. G. T. Thompson, yeomanry adjutant of the South Notts Hussars, had enrolled me and had persuaded Trent College to let me off work to attend the annual camp outside Nottingham. I took my own young horse there, Lord Lyon, and that first year the pair of us nearly won both the jumping and the tent-pegging. Hickling, where we lived, was between Nottingham and Leicester, and Sam and Mitchell had joined the other local regiment, the Leicestershire Yeomanry. My uniform, in consequence, was anathema to them. The blue coat with any amount of yellow cording and the yellow-piped breeches had been tightened by the master tailor until

I could scarcely breathe in the one or sit down in the other. The pillbox hat with elastic to go under the chin was an excrescence, a pimple that offered neither shade nor shelter. And the boots were stout enough to repel buckshot. It was the stiffest gear I ever rode in, and to walk in it was a penance.

I stamped down the back stairs, shaking the chestnut treads as though I wore armour, and into the kitchen, glowing and steamy, where my martial appearance raised cries of pleasure and admiration from the staff. Cook, Mrs Murgatroyd, said she was making braised duck sandwiches and brandy snaps, and what other favourites would I like in the picnic basket for the races?

My boots were slippery on the Staffordshire bricks paving the yard. Lord Lyon was being quartered by a man and a boy. He was a stone-grey gelding, aged five and standing fifteen hands three inches. His dark tail was shot through with silver. They worked on him with hay wisps and stable rubbers. The depths of his coat glimmered.

Breakfasting alone, I looked more often than usual at the watercolour of the famous gentleman rider Bay Middleton winning a race on Lord of the Harem. The two other pictures were less apt to my situation, one being a portrait in oils dated 1827 of a horse by Cadland, and the other an engraving of the Earl of Lonsdale. He sat a grey horse, one gloved hand held high, and warned his followers, 'Seeds gentlemen, PLEASE.' I ate bacon, eggs, butter, and honey produced on our farm. The coffee came from London and the long, flat breakfast rolls came warm from the oven of Mr Harriman the Hickling baker.

When I rode Lord Lyon out of the yard, the day lay bright ahead of me. We three older boys had the major share of work on the farm, particularly with the many hunter horses bred, bought, broken in, schooled, hunted and sold. Our father kept us so busy that the plan for this day seemed beautifully simple. I had to ride on twelve miles to Lord Harrington's point-to-point meeting at Woodborough

Hall, win the yeomanry race, and jog him home. He was a sound, brave, and well-mannered young horse. It would take a goodish one to beat him. We generally had rather more than twenty in our stables. My father was always buying and selling. Sometimes he would sell them before he got them home to Hickling, sometimes he would sell them before he'd even bought them. . . . But the five-year-old was surely mine. This was how we came to have him.

Captain Gordon Wilson, who was known as 'Father O'Flynn' Wilson after he won the Grand National on the outstanding horse of that name, lived with his brother Herbert at Brooksby Hall, later Admiral Beatty's hunting box, and he gave my father a grey mare.

'She's been blinded in the nearside eye and I can't hunt her any more,' he said. 'But she's a good'n, not too old to breed, and she might do you well, Sam.'

The Wilsons were a marvellous pair to hounds, and if they said Stella, as the one-eyed mare was called, was good, no hunter could have a fairer recommendation.

'You take to this mare, Howard,' my father said. 'See to her. Call her your own.'

She was a funny one. If you went near her blind side she could be mean, but I got used to working in front of her good eye, even putting on her bridle from the off side. Soon after we got her Major H. T. Barclay, a bang-up Leicestershire swell in the grand manner, fetched back from training his splendid handicapper Bendigo, putting him at the disposal of any Quorn or Belvoir farmers who had mares.

'Bendigo got back to Gaddesby Hall yesterday teatime, for I've just met his handler, Wheatear, in the Harboro,' my father said to me. 'Did I hear you say that one-eyed mare's in season? Well, ask Hibbert to get out a trap, and the pair of you lead her over right away, and when you've got her covered give this to Sol Wheatear.' He drew a sovereign from the round gold case on the end of his watch chain.

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Stella was Bendigo's first mare and she duly foaled a little black one, her only foal. She had a bad time of it. Her pains began at midnight. He was born on her blind side and she was queer with him, not knowing what had happened to her. She let me into the box, but nobody else. I rubbed and rubbed him till he was dry. 'Leave well alone now, boy, and get to your bed,' my father said. But I persevered until she learned to nuzzle him round to her good side and he, clever foal, had a suck. From then on she mothered him well enough. Why Father named him Lord Lyon I don't know.

He was a well-grown colt when I led him with his mother to Melton Mowbray Show and the pair won their class. Melton's eight miles from Hickling. My father had numerous entries, cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry as well as horses, and we went there and came back in a glorified sort of Noah's Ark cavalcade. He said to me when I'd put up their rosettes. 'Well done, Howard. Don't go feeling smart though, for all you did was let the pair of them win.' No credit, thought I, for the work of turning them out. 'So next you'll take'em to Newark,' he said. 'Newark's a *good* show.'

'How do I get 'em there?'

'God gave to you two legs, boy, and to each of them four. It's no more than twenty miles to Newark, and plenty of grassy side roads to stop in and let 'em graze. There'll be two or three others going and you'll walk with them.'

We set out in the dark to do the 48-mile Newark day (for Newark is twenty-four, not my father's 'twenty', miles from Hickling). The foal arrived in the ring fresh and bright, and they were in the money though they did not win. My father overtook us in a trap on the way home.

'Are you tired, boy?' he called.

'Yes, Father.'

'Then just set that mare's rope round her neck. She and her foal will follow the others home. You get in here. Look sharp now. Whoa! Stay at this horse's head. The *seat* needs moving back.' He was always particular about balancing.

The seats on his carts and traps were adjustable, with little hardwood stops. 'Jump up.' And we were away in luxury, the scarlet-silk-lined fur rug generating warmth round my legs.

I took Lord Lyon to Melton Show the following year and he won his yearling class. He was hard to fault as a yearling because he was better grown then than later, he had plenty of bone, and he had Bendigo's neck and shoulder. Before he went into the ring Mr Harry Gale, who had forgotten more about horses than most men know, said, 'You've got 'im looking well, yoong Marshall, you've got 'im looking extra.' I was going through his tail with a body brush. 'Joost put a roober over 'im,' Mr Gale advised. 'No need for a broosh on a coat like that. A nice bit of a roober is all you want. Ah! he's looking a treat, he's *doing*.'

That was the sort of interest we got from our elders. They were quick to blame, but their praise was manna in the wilderness.

And now here was Lord Lyon, aged five and full of beans, walking over to Woodborough to be a racehorse. Bright uniforms and star horses were common then in that part of the Midlands. Nobody would turn his or her head to look as we passed, pillbox hat and all.

The point-to-point course was cut out into a natural bit of hunting country. It came back in a big circle to finish near the start. A row of bookies had already been set up when Lyon and I walked in. Drags and traps and gigs were positioning themselves near the roped-in paddock and parade ground. I was passing quietly behind them when a voice arrested me. 'Think he'll give you a win, lad?'

'Oh no, Mr Maher.' It was one of the things we had been taught, to say no rather than yes where horses were concerned. My interlocutor was, to any boy, one of the greatest men in England, Danny Maher, the American jockey who won the Derby on Sir James Miller's Black Sand.

'Why, it's one of the Marshall lads from Hickling,' he said.

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'It was the young horse took my eye. A good looker, eh George?'

George Williamson, the steeplechase jockey who had won the Grand National (on Manifesto) and every other major steeplechase in Europe, shared Cropwell Court with Mr Maher. It was a house down a drive off the Newark-Nottingham road. The two jockeys had bought it from Lawyer Wildes, a heavyweight who hunted with a fistful of violets in the buttonhole of his red coat. Mr Williamson now stood with a group of the racing people round the tail of a drag where there was an arrangement of bottles, glasses, sandwiches, cold game, and fruit. Matt Williamson was there, who rode mainly in Belgium, and Colonel Birkin, and the Percy Woodlands, all famous and all friendly.

'Small but quality,' George Williamson said. 'He'll take some beating if he's fit, but he carries a fair bit of meat, mind.'

'What's his story?' Danny Maher asked, stroking the grey's cheek. He had the smallest hands I ever saw on a man, yet they said he could hold any horse alive. I told him briefly what I have told you, thinking what a good-looking, dapper, intelligent little man he was. I had often seen him in the hunting field, for although our land was half in the Quorn half in the Belvoir we were handy for the South Notts, or Lord Harrington's Hunt as it was then known, in whose country Danny was a landowner and a covert owner. Such a covert too! You never saw its like. It had been planted entirely of privet and although it was no more than two acres the foxes adored it. A sure find. His lordship used to send a whipper-in round the far side and ride quietly up to it, his white whiskers flapping either side of his chin. A toot on his horn. Hounds went in like a broadside. No prickles there for tender skins. Imagine having two such men as Maher and Williamson in one ordinary country house for the whole hunting season—though of course George would be away race-riding a good deal. Then, in spring, when the

hunting ended Danny would leave the Court in the hands of servants. The stud of hunters would be at grass until the flies became bad, when they would be stabled by day and turned out at night. In that respect our country was a strange one: while we were at our busiest with haymaking and harvest and the livestock, many of our best friends and neighbours would be far away, planning to return only in the autumn with the start of foxhunting and the fall of the leaf.

'And is he yours then, or your father's?'

'He's mine, Mr Maher.' I had never thought of Lyon as a saleable horse. He was more like a brother. And mine he would stay, I thought as I rode him into the Woodborough Hall stable yard. Big as it was, the yard was packed with traps and horses. My father had reserved a place for Lyon in one of the stud groom's boxes.

The yeomanry race was second on the card. It was run at catch weights over eleven stone seven. My brother Sam, who loved a race and was already experienced (or thought he was), had weighed me on the jockeys' scales in the cloak-room at home, and what with clodhopper boots and the ordinary hunting saddle I was a pound or so on the safe side. I stood six feet already, at fifteen, but then, as now, I was thin, with smallish bones. Sam and Mitchell had come with my father in the trap. Sam was riding at that time mainly for a fellow called Ransom who had a farm on either side of the road as you came out of Nottingham for Melton, and who seemed to have the knack of breeding or buying point-to-pointers. But he had nothing running that day. Sam had a ride in the third race though, on a novice belonging to a Pytchley farmer. I found our trap by the paddock, drank one glass of beer and wolfed down a lot of duck sandwiches and brandy snaps. Sam could scarcely pick at anything. He was highly strung over his racing. Once later, when each of us had a ride in the same adjacent hunts' race, we were galloping easily side by side across a plough when Sam screwed in his saddle and snarled, 'Don't you get

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within a field of me at the finish or I'll make you wish you were dead.'

There were ten runners in my race. A man called Josh Piggin, the devil of a one to go, was in it, and so was Sergeant 'Fiery' Cross, who sat straight up and stiff like a pair of scissors across a horse. I could hear the bookies shouting, but whether I was favourite or started at ten to one, I was too green to know. I would not say that I was icy cool, but nor was I agitated. The race passed for me in a sort of daze, not like a good run in the hunting field, much inferior to that. More like being at a dance where the music was good and there were dozens of pretty girls. I sat still on Lord Lyon, nursing his mouth and looking between his ears. Sergeant Cross was outside me for a longish time and Piggin was inside, brushing the flags with his boot. Cross's rigidity wore his horse down and he dropped back. Fence after fence streamed under us and then I saw Piggin was beginning to work. He went ahead of us a shade, breaking his rhythm, and then fell astern inch by inch until I no longer saw him. I felt the little horse take a breather, and then he found himself again and went on, stronger than before, over the last three fences. I had asked him no serious questions. He had told me no lies. He pulled up at a touch and a feel of the leg and walked gaily among the traps and the people. When I had weighed in I led him back to his box, made him comfortable, got him to stale, and gave him a bite to eat and some warmed water.

Lyon and I had a stream of visitors. Danny Maher was in the first batch. He came with Percy Woodland, who won the Grand National on Drumcree and who also won the big 'steeple' at Auteuil. His brother, Bill Woodward, married George Williamson's sister, and they were neighbours of ours.

'Good boy,' Mr Maher said. 'And your grey, well, I like him, I like him very much. I'm not trying to play you, see? You're big on that horse already, and you're still growing. He's just the compact, bold sort for me, and if you let me

try him with hounds and we go well together. I'll give you your own price on him. What do you say?'

'If he went to anyone I'd like him to go to you, Mr Maher. But I don't want to sell.'

'I see.'

The grey glanced at all the people who came, and went back to his hay. My father was in and out repeatedly. He did not find time to talk to me, but when he caught my eye he gave me a wink. After I'd collected my cup, a silver rosebowl, and stowed it in the boot of our trap, I saddled up and we walked and jogged back home, me dozing and dreaming on his back as evening turned to darkness and the dew settled in my uniform and hung on my eyebrows under the pillbox.

His legs next morning were cool without swelling or puffiness—youth is a miracle. The morning was sunny and lazy. Time seemed to hang behind the gilded hands of the clock above the stable roofs. A wild mare had been harnessed to a gig. She stood sweating on the neck, squirming, pawing to go, with a man either side hanging on to her head. My father came into the yard, florid, heavy-moustached, his height made higher by a whiteish-grey square-topped box hat, the outdoor darkness of his skin accentuated by a white silk cravat. His leggings were wide over his feet, a fashion set by the popular Duke of Connaught. From his chequered waistcoat he drew his gold Benson's hunter, opened it with the magic that a watch then possessed, and said to the mare, 'We're late, my girl. You'll have to shift.' She showed him the white of her nasty eye, looking ready to kick him and the gig to bits. As my father was usually late, and in his search for horses he was always catching trains, we took it that he enjoyed the act of rushing to a station, and felt it worthwhile to be beaten fairly by the clock and the punctuality of the trains.

'We're late. Where's Albert? Bertie!'

Albert Mitchell Marshall was my second brother. He

detested the first of his names, and my father used it as a tease. Mitchell was to go as a passenger to Broughton Station and then bring the gig back.

'Cut on down to the field gates at your best pace, Mitchell,' my father said. 'And don't expect me to hang about waiting for you to get aboard. We're late.'

Mitchell shot out of the yard, light as a fly on his feet.

'Howard!' My father was pulling on his pigskin driving gloves. He didn't look round at me. 'Had your breakfast?'

No, Father.'

'Lord Lyon all right, no knocks, no cuts? Good.' A string of farming instructions followed, numerous jobs I was to do that morning and how they were *not* to be done. He gently put his foot on the step and mounted into the gig. Feeling him behind her, the mare was boiling over. 'Whoa my girl, whoa my lady.' His voice with horses was soft. 'You still there, Howard?' he asked, never taking his eyes off the mare struggling for her head, the two men hanging on to her for all they were worth. 'Now listen. . . . Danny Maher wants a day's hunting on Lyon. So just lead him out today to stretch his legs and first thing tomorrow you'll lead him from a trap over to Cropwell Court. You hear me?'

'Yes, Father.'

'Leave Lyon there with Mr Maher or his stud groom and come straight home in the trap. I'll want you to meet me in the evening, seven o'clock in Melton at the Bell. And another thing . . . you did well yesterday when you told Mr Maher the grey was your own and not for sale. Don't go getting a swollen head now, but if he's sold and passes the vet, you'll have put at least fifty guineas on the price of him. You're my boy.' Then he hissed at the two struggling men, '*Now let her go*!'

They jumped back, and under my father's hands the raging mare walked quietly down the road. That was a special trick of his. He could do as he liked with almost any horse (and any boy). Now, though, he was in too much of a hurry to rub

in his bit of showmanship, and after only a dozen sedate paces he gave her the office and she flew like a witch in a gale. His horses could usually go. If they couldn't go, he sold them. If they could, he sold them.

Next day I took Lord Lyon over to Cropwell Court. He never came back. I used to see him now and then carrying Danny in the hunting field. His heels and his tail were what one usually saw. Well, I suppose Danny hunted him out and then he'd be fed to Lord Harrington's hounds. He was a sensible, brave little horse.

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2

Hickling Manor

I WAS born in 1888 at Hickling Manor, the fifth of eleven children.

If you turn off the Melton Mowbray to Nottingham turnpike at Upper Broughton it's a mile and a half to Hickling, which is in the lowest part of the vale, eight miles north of Melton and twelve south of Nottingham. My father farmed an outlying hundred and fifty acres at the western end of the ridge known as Hickling Standard. That bit was well into Quorn country and included Curate's Gorse, one of the best fox coverts in England. He farmed by the house another hundred and fifty acres in Belvoir country, and there owned another famous draw, Sherbrooke's. The boundary separating the two hunts is the River Smite which there, in its upper reaches, is little more than a brook. Our land was the typical clay of Leicestershire, mostly permanent pasture hard grazed, with yawning perimeter ditches and black hedges cut tight and solid. We specialised in down-calving heifers, mainly Lincoln Reds, and put the Shorthorn bull to them—it was nearly always 'roan on red' with us, and if you say there's a finer grazing country than that in the world, I won't believe you. Our milk was made into butter, cream, and Stilton cheese. Often Father bought in neighbours' milk, Mrs Doubleday's for instance, because he sold our Stilton to London where he had a contract with a restaurant near the Stock Exchange called, I believe, the Palmerston. Locally it was thought risky business to let all your best cheese go to

one London buyer. But Father enjoyed risks, and in that quarter they never let him down or we should soon have known of it. He also ran a flock of Lincoln Longwools, to which he put Hampshire Down rams bought at Wilton Fair. Then he had pigs and poultry and grew some oats, wheat, and potatoes. So although his heart was in horses, foxhunting, and the hunter trade he had a productive and balanced farm, and it was solidly built—the brass handles countersunk in all the stable doors, shining, everlasting, seemed to typify the quality and husbandry of the place. The brook, busy with our white ducks, went round Home Field. There were hens and bantams and ornamental gamebirds all about the yards and the grass, as was common in those days. Our house was alive with dogs, greyhounds and pointers and a setter or two. . . . I think I've described a paradise for any animal-loving boy to be reared in. That's what it was. Yet there was trouble. There always is.

My father's passion for sport, his delight in risking his neck and the necks of those closest to him, were not admired by my mother, a gloriously pretty woman from the rectory at the next village, Long Clawson. Her grandfather, old Mitchell, was a tea broker with an office in Throgmorton Street. He bought the living at Clawson for my grandfather, his son Tom. Tom Mitchell had two daughters and a son, all three of whom were regarded as matrimonial catches. Lawyer Elborne of Nottingham bowled over one of the girls and my father bagged the other. As for the son, Albert Mitchell, he was one cause of the trouble between my handsome and headstrong parents.

Young Albert admired my father, especially the way he could pilot any horse across any country. Father used to mount him. I don't suppose there was often a time when there were not too many fresh horses in his Hickling stables. One day the pair of them were out hunting. My uncle was smoking a pipe. The horse flung up his head, ramming the pipe down Uncle Bertie's throat, and the amber stem splintered

inside him. My father put him in a trap behind a galloping mare and raced him to Nottingham Hospital. There were no X-rays then, and he died. The effects of that accident, though it happened four years before I was born, were to alter several lives, mine included.

No doubt my parents had fallen in love with each other. Nothing unusual in that. I suppose my mother felt that when she married Sam Marshall of Hickling she would soon soften and change him. . . . People concealed their feelings in Victorian times, and those feelings therefore pulsed all the stronger. I was aware from early days that, although nothing was ever declared, and neither would run down the other to us children, there was a split between them. From their big, ever-growing family and the circle of their friends each seemed to gather supporters, as though picking a side to play against the other. I was my father's boy. I was grateful to my mother for her care and sympathy. But I knew my father better. I belonged to him as Sam and Mitchell did. The three of us were thrown together by our interests, pursuits, and duties. But three is a bad number and they were hostile to me. I only cared about my father.

My nanny, Miss Randall, was reluctant to leave me. She felt I was being abandoned to some fate or other. She often came back to Hickling, and Mother would tell me she was the best nanny and nicest woman a child ever had to look after him. She attributed my strong constitution to Miss Randall's habit of getting me outdoors so early that the dew fell on my face. It sounds ungrateful, but to me my nanny was no more important than any other woman, and a darned sight less so than, say, Mrs Murgatroyd, the cook, or Ethel, the between-maid. The same applied to my early governesses, both active young ladies who did nothing to stifle my preoccupation with animals. One came from Nottingham, and the other was from the Grantham side of the Belvoir country and was a good girl on a horse. I've forgotten their names.

There's an advantage in being born into a big family.

A new baby is for ever turning up to take the heat off you, and so you get peace. Most children are fussed over far too much, and that is partly because parents now prefer, understandably enough in days of economic stress, to have only one or two children. If you've eleven you can regard the little blighters as expendable, and in the end that's better for them.

No child ever had such a kick-off as I had, born in the heart of England with fresh food to eat and animals all around: able to spend a whole morning with the weaned calves, seeing that the weakling got his share of the milk until he drew strength from it and held his own; able to hold a baby piglet in my arms and feel its heart beat against mine; able to feed a vixen under the potting shed night after night until at last she'd come when I called and would let me sit close and touch her fur; able to bring a hedgehog indoors and keep it in the day-nursery; able to watch the great, slow-moving work-horses in all their moods of energy, fatigue, hunger and somnolence; able to dam the Smite for eels and watch until a tail fanned. A smooth grab, and he was on the ground behind you. Then you had to be smart to catch him or he'd go through the long grass like a snake in *The Jungle Book*. One hard winter we had a miracle. An eel about two feet long got frozen into a puddle in our road. We children used to go and look at him nearly every day. There he was, embalmed in solid ice, half beautiful, half horrid. Then the thaw came and he went slithering across the softening ground into the brook. It was the kind of thing you could imagine happening in India or Persia, some magic country.

When we caught an eel we slit him down the backbone, ringed round the head, and pulled the skin off like a stocking. Then we cut it in flat rings which we fried in goose grease with some fennel and chives thrown in at the finish. The eel rings would jump in the hot frying pan.

In spring our white ducks on the brook kept up a continuous quacking and flapping. Is anything whiter than a

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white English duck or yellower than its beak? Most people coming to the house were asked. 'Would you like a couple of duck to take home with you?' Anybody, even a stranger who rode in with a horse on trail, was likely to leave with a present of ducks or fowls. Those were the days of plenty. Nor was the plenty dear. Three shillings and sixpence a couple, that's what we used to get for our shining white ducks. Jack Mann the carrier, who lived our side of Hickling village, used to buy them for that and take them to Nottingham market. Bet you don't find ducks like those in Nottingham today; they'll be deep-frozen, with no taste, and breasts on them like the cuirasses of the Household Cavalry.

In the Midlands, the expression 'an Englishman's home is his castle' seemed to ring true. The houses stood four-square on mounds, large-windowed, large-doored, well-heated, looking the country slap in the face and saying, 'I'm me. I belong here.' Our house was like that. I don't mean that it was the biggest house even in Hickling—the vicarage was a whopper—or that it was important because it was down a bit of a drive. I mean that without being pompous it asserted itself, and had important features.

The hall, for example. You went through the west porch and the brown-grained front door and stood in a hall that cut right through the house. The floor was tiled in black squares and red squares. There was a rather dim hanging light bought, I believe, in Kabul by some relation or other. The stairs were cleverly tucked in for a few spiralling steps and then climbed straight across the north wall past a window offering a useful view of the stable yard. All those dark doors opening off, the pattern of the floor, the rubies and scarlets of the lamp, the trophies of the chase on the walls, the rack of whips and sticks, the silver salver on a dark old walnut table, it was a mysterious place, our hall. I always thought of it when I read about mosques or catacombs or St Peter's or St Latimer Without or the Inquisition. Don't ask me why.

Both the drawing-room and the dining-room had french

windows with low box-seats. You stepped over the seats, even a toddler could do it, and you were out on the lawn fringing the south elevation. If it was winter, the windows were bolted so that the coal fires could probe the air with heat, and at dusk the thick pinewood shutters and the almost thicker dark red curtains were closed, the brass rings rumbling across the massive brass rods. That was another impression. . . . Our house, our land, our stackyards, our cattle, our servants, our relations with village and county, our respect for the Church, they all seemed imperishable, like the handles of the stable doors, like those curtain rods and rings. My father was a god to me, running my world, producing his boundless wealth. If anybody had told me that Father every day grew nearer being an old man, or that the Empire had probably already passed its zenith, I'd have thought him nuts.

Step across the french window's box-seats in summer and you were in the tropics. I never remember a summer when the sun did not sizzle the hay as soon as it was cut, when the scent of queen of the meadow was not overpowering beside the brook, when the mating dragonflies did not hang as though stuck in the thick air, when the south wall was not smothered in apricots, quinces, and vines. The lawn on that side of the house was bordered by a ha-ha. A plank bridge crossed it to Home Field. A wired-in tennis court and a croquet lawn had been stolen from the field. There were chestnuts, elms and beeches round the north-west and east sides. The other boundary of that part was the Smite, whose banks in places were as high as the walls of this room. Every horse or pony we had used to jump it.

George Harriman the baker was nearly opposite our drive gates. I thought he was the best baker in England, though he had his enemies in the village. *They* said that too often his bread was burned, and that, when it was, Mrs Harriman used to wrap it up extra well before passing it over the counter, and remark, 'I like them well cooked, don't you?' His loaves were tinned, and when they rose up over the edge

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they fluffed out a bit. His bakery was scrubbed out absolutely white. The day-by-day cleanliness of the place struck you when you rode past and heard the crickets that then lived and made their strange rattling behind the ovens of rural bakeries. If you sought out a cricket he looked like a beetle, and ran like one. Everything was spotless in that place, the baskets, the woodwork, the walls, the floors, the windows, the baker's cart and the horse or pony that drew it. George also kept the village shop and post office.

A footpath edged with blue stones ran through the village, and the path itself was tight cobbled with small, round stones that, by their colour and size, couldn't have come from anywhere nearer than the River Dove, on the far boundary of Nottinghamshire. (I've ridden a horse up the Dove for miles with a guide who knew the potholes; not many can say that I think.) If you came down the cobbled path to Harriman's gate, you found two deep grooves worn in the stone where the baker's cart crossed it. Talk about Greece and Ancient Rome and its chariots! What about ancient England? Years later I was to bring a horse back from the war in France and sell it to that bakery, to George Harriman's son John. I let the horse go too cheap. I'm by no means a sentimentalist, but I wanted to think of that horse further deepening those grooves.

Hickling was a self-supporting community. There was nothing we couldn't do. Covell, our postman, was a cobbler by day, an artist with the hammer. I don't say he could make you a pair of patent-leather dancing pumps, but for boots he couldn't be bettered. Then we had Granville Hopkinson, known as Old Hoppy, our saddler, the best in England and a very strong churchman (C. of E.). Our blacksmith was Alwyn Shelton and our wheelwright William Burnett. We had wooden wheels and iron tyres in those days. There was nothing worse than driving with a loose tyre. I've seen the hoop come off and go rolling past the horse's head, and then one was running on the felloes, the wooden pieces

between the spokes. Mr Burnett was wonderfully skilled. He'd light a circular fire, lay the iron hoop on it, hammer it on to the wheel hot, shrink it by pouring on cold water. Then one or two good plugs in all the way round and it was on to stay, you hoped. With his little spokeshave he could turn out in a jiffy the most perfect spoke you ever saw. And when it came to painting spokes with those touches of yellow or red or white, he was an artist.

Such skills were country-wide, and much appreciated. The thought and money that ordinary middle-class people now put into the choice and purchase of a car then went into Burnett's kind of craftsmanship. Any trap was a fascinating object, apart from its usefulness. Take one little detail: a trap had a leather front, a dashboard we called it, as you now call the panel with instruments on your car. Just here, on the dashboard, was a socket to put your whip in. And the socket was made with a spring inside to hold the handle and keep the whip standing erect and yet instantly detachable. . . . Of all things ever made by hand, traps, carriages, and harness seemed to me the most remarkable. Consider the pole to take a horse to the end of his collar, to steer the carriage, and carrying a little strap across the back for him to sit into and stop the carriage, and everything so shaped and refined and correct. I've seen Mr Burnett pull away the stand upon which the shafts of one of our traps or dogcarts were supposedly resting and they'd remain hanging in midair, so perfect was the balance. 'Put a halfpenny on the tailboard, Master Howard.' And the shafts would slowly rise until he stretched up a hand to pull them back and I repocketed my halfpenny.

Ah, what things we youngsters had to learn from our elders! How fortunate we were! It was not like nowadays. When I was a youngster, all of them were either making something or doing something, and from the age of ten I was usually making something myself—a horse. How fortunate we were in England, too! God bless the dear old Queen!

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We had a meeting in the village hall for her Jubilee in 1897. Schoolmaster Wilkinson and Farmer Collishaw (the one with the windmill that bruised our oats and ground our wheat) had an argument until Mr Skelton the vicar brought them up short. It was to be a day of jubilation, with a prize Shorthorn steer roasted outdoors, old ale in barrels set high on stands, and a band, and dancing, and sports for the children.

In those days the children of England could run and jump, and Mitchell and myself were the runniest and jumpiest in Hickling. We'd been taught how to do it by Thomas Rose, a man all springs and sinews who'd been a professional runner, and who had an exotic daughter—what a lovely girl! He lived in the first house above our gates. Miss Emily Corner came next, and she played the organ in church. Then Mann, the carrier, who left every morning except Sunday for either Melton or Nottingham in his substantial waggon with two draught-horses. When we were getting older, strangers used to come to Hickling and ask to see Mitchell and yours-truly jumping the walls and gates and stiles, not on horses, but off our own feet. Once a circus proprietor came to my father, offering to take his two boys on in an act and pay *him* for it. 'I'd call 'em the yuman hostriches,' he said. How Father laughed. Mother did not see the joke.

Opposite the Harrimans was the compact house and farmsteading of Mrs Elizabeth Doubleday. They farmed alongside our Home Field, and they milked and made fine Stilton. Mrs Doubleday was very devout. Once, much as she'd say, 'Good day to you,' she said to me, outside the post office, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' and then she made it even better by adding, 'That's a nicish cob you're on, boy, except he dishes on the off fore.'

Twice each Sunday we went to church. Our cortège usually was a long one with our parents in the van followed by whoever happened to be staying, all us children, and our governesses and a nanny or two. One wet Sunday evening we

were waiting in the church porch while our coats were hung up. A ginger kitten rubbed against my shin. Without thinking I picked him up. Once at my chest he dug in with four sets of claws. Our party was getting under way. There was no chance of disengaging. I put my arms around him and followed into the bright church throbbing with the organ. My parasite, horrified by everything he saw and heard, dug his claws deep through my coat and shirt and into the flesh below.

In so numerous a family there are seating rules. On that particular Sunday it was my turn to go last into church and sit at the end of our family pew. I kept trying to get the kitten loose and could not until I hit on an idea. There were walnut shells in my pockets. . . . We had a fine walnut tree on the west side of the garden, and a bowl of green walnuts often stood on the sideboard near the port and sherry decanters. The shells opened easily with the gentlest pressure of thumb and forefinger, and the nut inside was sweet and juicy, quite unlike the dried-out imported nuts sold in Nottingham. I'd been at the walnut bowl that morning. I went to work on the kitten's feet, one by one. As soon as I prized one loose I pushed a half shell over it.

When I'd shod him all round, the kitten jumped for the aisle and darted about, clattering like castanets on the tiled floor. Mr Tom Skelton, up front, was reading the lesson. After pausing to see who was misbehaving he thought it best to continue. John Hives, the verger, gave chase, and his assistant and brother Billy Hives thought to open the main doors, when the interrupter soon tapped his way out.

After the service I ran on ahead to see to the baked potatoes. It still rained. On Sundays, after luncheon, the maids were off duty, and for Sunday supper we ate cold meats and game and baked potatoes which were left in the oven before we went to church with just enough fire in the range to do them nicely. It was a massive iron range with strappings of polished brass and steel and a long jack for

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spit roasting. The main oven had a trough under the door and a special ladle so that the juices running out of the joints could be basted back over or used for gravy. That evening I ran extra fast. I had time to fill the Crown Derby tureen with spuds, take the red earthen jar down to the beer-and-cider cellar and fill it with ale for Father, and draw drinking water for the rest of us from the pump in the yard. The pump had two spouts; one gushed rain water that was used for the tack and for laundering, but the other sucked from a spring so deep and cold that if you gave it a hundred strokes during a heat wave you'd get water that frosted the glasses. Generally there were some Crown Derby dishes lying on the flagged part of the yard where the greyhounds, fussy eaters, had been offered their milk and meat. We didn't think of such china as valuable, though we were taught it mustn't be broken. It was a crime to break anything, to waste anything. China was there to be used.

Our tables were too solid of leg and back to groan, but they must have known the food was there. Great joints of meat on dishes with little legs and channels down the middle to a pool at the lower end for the gravy, and geese and fowls and ducks and game of all sorts in season. Piles of fresh vegetables and fruits and home-made butter and the heavy cheese, sometimes soaked with port. You would not credit the amount most of us ate then. Four meals a day, and I know I couldn't eat one such today. But Sunday supper was one of the best because it was informal, a picnic, and because we had just come out of church. Father would carve and then each of us would take a great round hot potato and put it on a side plate, bash it open with the heel of his fist, and fill it with butter, salt, and pepper fresh ground in the coffee mill.

During supper I was examining the scratches on my hands. Nothing had been said about the kitten incident. I looked up and saw Father observing me. He twigged. A smile just lurked round his moustache. So I went behind them all at

the table and laid my arms about his neck over the back of his chair. Men smelled good in those days, of soft leather and tobacco and the open, like broom or heather.

* * *

One blustering March evening he found me reading before the morning-room fire.

'You'll do,' said he. 'Get some clothes on, untie the pony from the rail in the yard and bring the trap round here. . . . Drive on,' he said when he'd climbed in and tucked the rug round our legs. 'Right on up to Top Barn fast as he'll go. There's dirty weather on the way. I want to get those ewes down in-by and yarded.' When we reached the field he called impatiently, 'Have you frozen solid, then? Come, on get round them, and bring them slowly to the gate. Slowly, mind.' I began to push them while he called, and he managed to edge the leaders through the gate. He kept glancing at the sky, black, chill, and greasy. 'These should have come in-by yesterday,' he said. 'I told you before I left for Derby. I can't be everywhere all the time.' (That was one of his favourite dodges, parking the blame on whoever happened to be handy.) 'Don't hurry them, Howard. Humouring's quickest in the end with any old sheep.'

I tell you I was frozen. I could have strangled every one of those in-lamb ewes. Now it was snowing. There was a whistle in the wind.

'Not afraid of the dark, are you?'

'No.' I took a squint through the squashy snowflakes at the scurrying clouds, a terrifying sky.

'Well then, I'll cut on back with the trap and send Hibbert up to give you a hand. Take them nice and quiet, mind, or they'll get stubborn, and we'll never shift them this night.' He turned up the wide collar of his coat and pushed his hat more firmly on. The trap rolled away.

The ewes before me were heavy in lamb and heavier with wetness. Most of them had a good shake, and some began

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to stroll after the disappearing trap. But they would not have been sheep if the other half had not made up their minds to move in the opposite direction. I cursed my father's absorption in greyhounds (for the coursing at the Hussey-Packe place between Loughborough and Leicester), gundogs (for the farmers' shoot in the Smite valley), and hound puppies (walked for the three hunts he favoured); not a sheepdog would he have on the place. I cut a switch from the hedge, swept the road with it in front of the fat ladies and shouted at them, 'Hi, hi! Ho, ho! Oh, oh, oh!' This set them in motion, and the road running downhill all the way, and the leaders being hard pushed by those behind, they soon worked up a lumbering gallop. Here was a do! The farther they went, the more they galloped, and the faster the front ones travelled, the harder the others pedalled to keep up. I stood in horror for a minute, hoping my father might not be within miles. He had been particularly proud of their lambing percentage the year before, as one after the other they dropped their twins and triplets. I pelted down the slushy gravel road after them, running in a stench of sodden sheep, the snow stinging my eyes. I tried hanging back, They wouldn't stop. They kept up their gallop until at last the pace slowed and they began changing leg in a very unwholesome manner. At that point the grass verge was a wide one deeply serrated by cattle steppings. Some of them staggered, then fell. They fell faster until perhaps half were down. Then there was a tremendous clap of thunder which seemed to knock all the rest over. I shall not easily forget those struggling falls.

When Hibbert showed up, nothing that we could do would make them move. There was a stack of hurdles nearby. We hurdled them into the road for the night and then walked on down to the yard, where my father was busy with straw and hay and lanterns. He glared at me.

'You never said how to stop them from behind,' I said.

'Nor I did,' he answered with a hoarse chuckle. 'Is that

you, Hibbert? Will the ewes do for the night, then?' Hibbert reassured him. 'Get in that trap, boy,' he said. 'I can hear your teeth dance. D'ye feel cold or hot?'

'Cold.'

'You're all right then. It's when you're hot and should be cold there's summat up.' He took me straight into the scullery, leaving Hibbert to put away the pony. 'Drop all those wet clothes off you, Howard, here on the stone,' he said. 'I'll get a mustard bath for you in the kitchen, where it's warm.'

Soon I was in the tin bath with scalding water up to my chin and a strong smell of the mustard he'd added. My father stood in front of the range, its doors opened so that the fire gleamed orange on his back, and steam rose from him. My mother came in with a huge bath towel and my thick dressing-gown and flannel pyjamas. She hung them all on the back of a basket chair, displacing my father from his stance before the fire. She had a red spot in either cheek.

'On a night like this,' she said. 'You might have killed him. Boys aren't there to do the work of men; little boys like him. He's only nine.'

To my vast relief he didn't take her criticism seriously. 'Can't they just?' he said. 'Boys can do anything if they'll only try.'

* * *

My father was an enigma. He once said to Sam and Mitchell, 'Now you let him alone, you young devils. He's a small boy, and I won't have him knocked about.' I thought, What? He's sticking up for me. It'll only do harm. . . . For those two were a sore trial to me. I reckon their bullying and teasing turned me into what the Antipodeans call a loner. But I was never unhappy.

Young children are conscious of plenty, of prosperity. We seemed to possess the earth. It wasn't only all the animals and the food. Every piece of linen in the house was

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ironed, starched, mended. The laundry went off in a trap to Broughton every Monday and was fetched back on the Friday, and that was apart from all the washing done by the horde of women about the house. How they scrubbed and polished and swept and baked and preserved! That smell of raspberry or strawberry jam simmering in coppers! We were allowed to taste the coloured foam that Mrs Murgatroyd occasionally skimmed off with a giant spoon. In winter, when the shutters were closed and the curtains drawn, we read or played in front of mountainous fires. Coal was there in plenty, and everyone on the farm or in the stables had it as part of his wages. When he needed more, a wagon with two horses was sent off to one of the Nottingham pitheads. The coal shone like quartz, and had gold seams in it. Our house was lit with oil lamps and candles. Everyone economised in candles, it was an English fetish. The back stairs were as dark as a bag, and the hall was always spooky.

My mother remained a Long Clawson person at heart, and she had favourites there whom she would employ at Hickling. One of those was Roger Mann, a carpenter and painter who was also a Wesleyan preacher. I was helping my mother pick apricots (for brandy) when Roger arrived trundling his tools in front of him in a hand-cart. 'I preached 'em on hell fire, Mum,' he said, describing his Sunday doings. 'I made the buggers think, I did.' Mother didn't seem to notice the odd word. I added it to my vocabulary. The first time I used it there was a shindy and a half and even my father seemed angry. I never used it again, but I noted that Roger Mann was allowed to use words forbidden to me. Another of Mother's pets was our gardener, W. Key. It was the age of flowerbeds filled with arrangements of annuals. He was a favourite with us, too, so brown and wrinkled with his calloused hands and the strings tied under his knees. He was said to drink quantities of herb beer, and any afternoon, wet or fine, you might come on him in some unexpected corner curled up in his barrow and snoring. His hat looked

like an old, old mushroom. I learned from his case too because there was a lot of drunkenness in those days, and everybody professed to be very down on it, except in Bill Key's case. They seemed to find *his* drinking habits endearing rather than reprehensible. Grown-ups!

John and Jane Morley lived in our prettiest cottage, a red one in Home Field. Jane worked in the house, and also went to Mrs Doubleday's to wash, and John turned his hand mildly to anything on the farm, in the stables, or in the garden. They were already old when I was a toddler, and aimed most of their misgivings at the railways, which they said were ruining the English as a race—much as people today run down television or the trade unions or the health service. John prefaced nearly every remark with 'Jane says. . . .' Jane, on the other hand, would begin, 'John says. . . .' Mother always said the Morleys were the most devoted couple in the world, and an example of the Bible's 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'. Then one day my father said, 'It isn't a case of that at all, my dear. John and Jane won't inherit anything, though they deserve to, and with them it's "Blessed the married couple who are childless, for they shall love one another with a pure heart. . . ." ' Poor Mother.

Then there was our treasure, Hibbert, who turned his skilled hand to everything and was a true friend to us all without an ounce of soft soap or suction pump in his nature. Many a sharp word or angry look each of us had from him, yet he always got on with the difficult things. How often when I've been tired I've ridden into the yard thinking, 'Lord above, this horse is going to take no end of doing, and then I must dress that mare's foot.' And when I came to the mare her foot had been done. 'Who did it, Joe?' 'Why, Mr Hibbert, before he went on.' Well, now Hibbert has gone on, and that will be one more good'n in Heaven.

Cricket was the only ball game I ever had a fancy for, if you exclude polo, and that came later. As soon as I could

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walk a bit I'd pretend to be a part of the village game. . . . Mr Titus Littler was the vet at Clawson, and what a warrior he was! One afternoon, driving past, he put his reins down and stopped to watch our game. Shelton the blacksmith, a great hitter, was at the wicket. He took a pull, half lofted, and after one bounce on the baked clay the ball tried to bury itself in the ribs of the vet's strong cob. He jumped straight in the air, then made off for home, fast as he could gallop, with the vet in the bottom of the gig. Mitchell and I climbed bareback on a couple of ponies and galloped after them all the road to Clawson. The cob swung into his own drive, the gig on one wheel, and then, carried by his momentum, plunged into the shrubbery. Mr. Littler picked himself off the floor with a grunt and shook himself. Gig, cob, and driver looked inexpressibly comic in those dark foreign bushes. Seeing the pair of us watching, he gave the cob such a pasting with his whip and his tongue, and drove off on his rounds, back Hickling way.

Even better than cricket or eel-fishing was haymaking. Our hay was cut by a pair of horses in a grass-mower. They went out at three in the morning and stopped about ten, when the heat of the day began. I think the summers were better then than now, for I don't recall a difficult haymaking. The hay was turned after a few days to dry some more in the sun and then, without knocking it about as they do now, it was ricked in the field it had been taken from. The ricks were immediately thatched with reed. As soon as I was big and strong enough I used to cut the hay from the rick as it was wanted. I'd get on the south side in a niche I'd cut halfway up. It was possible to be really warm there in midwinter, and to feel tangled with the bounty of nature.

I find myself, as I get old, remembering things I thought to have gone for ever, ways of doing things that certainly have gone, and attitudes of mind that have gone, and the old Queen and the Royal Navy spread all over the world keeping the Pax Britannica. What a shout of delight went

up among us (far from the sea though we were) when the Navy was mentioned, or the Brigade of Guards. You'd have thought we were a band of savages (and perhaps you think that in many ways we were).

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3

Early Rides

I HAD my first ride, not counting du Maurier, our donkey, at the age of four. My father had a mealy-coated Irish hunter called Sinbad the Nailer. That horse was pigeon-toed, came from County Galway, and was the boldest, smartest ride across a country that ever was seen. He was roughish, for he had a mind of his own, and his mouth was one-sided because he'd been a hunt-servant's horse (and you know what they're like, good luck to them, jab, kick, bravest-of-the-brave) when he first carried me, and it happened like this.

Mother had me in the yard hanging on to her hand (Sam told me some years later) when I saw my father mounted on Sinbad and about to ride round the cattle, sheep, and outlying horses. I set up a wailing as brats do, and when they told me to shut up and asked what was amiss I declared that I wanted to be up on top of Sinbah (as I called him, not then being able to get out a 'd'). So my father, laughing, scooped me up with one hand, shoved me in front of him on the crupper with a small cushion under me, and trotted off down the drive.

When you left our drive and crossed the single street of Hickling village, a line of gates and stiles climbed up to the Melton turnpike, probably eight or nine of them with grass fields in between. Father opened the first gate, but he didn't open another. He cantered on and jumped stile after stile with me held in front of him. I'd feel his body come forward and then see the stile swishing below Sinbad's hooves.

Imagine the delight any boy would feel at that. Boys enjoy scenic railways with their twists and sudden breath-catching descents. But you can't compare an old scenic railway with a real, live horse going over a stile. From that day I pestered for more of the same entertainment, and although my mother got up to all sorts of dodges to prevent it, my father was still jumping me about the farm in front of him when I was six or seven.

As for Sinbad the Nailer, I didn't hunt him till I was thirteen. He took some holding, and he was supposed to be touched in the wind, and therefore not to be trusted to a callow boy. I think my father actually loved that horse. It was the only one he wouldn't sell, and he used to declare he wouldn't sell him because he couldn't warrant him sound. To hunt him with the Quorn or the Belvoir was, I can tell you, an unforgettable experience. There was nothing that horse did not know or could not do, from hopping over a tricky one to galloping into a spread. His gallop was just a steady progression. But brave! I tell you if he'd been alive and kicking today he'd be up with those Yankee astronauts, examining the moon. (I doubt if he'd have thought much of it, though, no brooks, only craters, and how that horse enjoyed jumping a glint of water!) I know that when I left for the Army at the age of sixteen Sinbad was still being got up for hunting and going in the van, and he must have been five years older than I was. Touched in the wind indeed!

Before graduating to horses I rode du Maurier, sitting first in a basket saddle and towed by Miss Randall, and then sitting up more or less properly in a Champion & Wilton, and steering him on a snaffle, or driving him in a Raleigh car. My father had bought the Raleigh at the Royal Show. What a beauty! It was American (never tell me those people are not craftsmen) and it was made of hickory with lancewood shafts that you could almost bend over each other. It had a corduroy back to the seat, and cushions of piped corduroy. You sat facing frontwards, and the reins ran out

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over a silver guard. In this exotic vehicle the donkey pulled me to the near meets. I was driving one of my sisters the first time I saw and heard hounds running from close at hand. We'd driven out on the Clawson road. Near our own covert, Sherbrooke's, we heard them coming in full voice and the horn in the background blowing Gone Away-ay-ay. The hounds crossed in front of us, maybe a dozen yards away. The donkey stood and flapped his huge ears, unafraid. We heard the field, galloping. The leaders took the fence into the lane just as they came to it, landed, collected, and legged their horses at the open ditch and fence on the far side, over and away. Sinbad and my father were at the back end of the thrusters' gang. He saw us sitting behind the donkey, who had begun to bray. My father's mouth opened but we couldn't hear his words. Sinbad soared over that ditch and fence. I remember the muscles gathering in his quarters. I think in those very young days I learned the lesson of fox-hunting, the great divider. It divides the brave from the mediocre, the skilled from the clumsy, the real enthusiast from the trumped-up case.

I wonder what sort of effect du Maurier had on our riding. I mean, let's face it, Sam, Mitchell, and myself turned into absolutely first-class nagsmen, able to tame most things and drive almost anything over almost anything. Yet we all of us had rocky beginnings with that donkey. He was all right with a saddle and bridle on when he was coming home. Going the other way was often difficult. He had a will of his own, and it was a will of steel. Bareback, none of us could stay long on him. My father used to amuse his friends by having the three of us take the donkey into Home Field, remove the bridle, and ride him. They'd have bets which would stay on longest. I always thought Mitchell the best runner and the best rough-rider of the three of us. He it was who found the answer. One day when Father had had a convivial luncheon party and the guests included that peer among dealers and livery keepers, Mr Harry Beeby of Melton Mowbray, we

were told to lead out the donkey. Wagers were heavy. Normally the three of us rode du Maurier on these gladiatorial occasions in order of age, and as I came third and the edge had been taken off him by my two predecessors, I won more often than they. But that time Mitchell had gone round the corner when Sam was bucked off, so I took his place, and after a struggle was decanted. Mitchell then jumped on du Maurier *facing backwards*, one hand sunk in the wool on the animal's wither, the other in the wool on the quarters. He remained there, secure, until the donkey rubbed him off against a pear tree. I always reckoned it was a put-up job, because I found out afterwards that Mr Beeby had slipped Mitchell a fiver out of his winnings.

My first pony was a long-tailed Welsh mare standing thirteen hands. We called her Creamy, that being her colour, poor girl. She deserved a better name, for she carried most of us in sequence, went exceptionally well in harness, and was a trump with hounds. Clever! There can seldom have been her equal. You can't beat the Welsh pony blood. Driving from Nottingham to our place, once off the turnpike you went down a steep hill before Parson's Thorns, with some of our farm spread out below you. She would put her little hind legs together and *slide* down that long hill, allowing the weight of the trap to push her on, and only occasionally putting in a few pitter-pattering steps to hold her balance, rather like those funny short toe-runs you'll see skaters make. As a hunter she knew everything except patience and humility. I swear *she*, more than anyone else, taught me the thrill of the chase. She was a maniac. It was her life-stream. Like a first-class foxhound, she cared infinitely more for the sport than for her food. Talk about a fidget by the covert-side. Once she got going and her blood was aboil nothing would stop her, and mind you, I'm talking about Leicestershire. If an obstacle was too big to jump she could swim and climb and slither and even crawl through. I've been on her when she's perched on a bank and *bitten*

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her way through a bullfinch. Of course when they were galloping in a fast hunt she couldn't keep up. Once she and I were careering down the Grantham Canal towpath when Parson J. P. (Jeremiah) Seabrooke from Waltham-on-the-Wolds (about six miles from us and a favoured Wednesday Meet of the Belvoir) came seething up behind on a huge hunter.

'Clear the path, wretched child,' he roared. 'Or I'll ride you into the Brook Kerith.'

I pulled the pony off into the hedge and the Reverend tore past. No sense in taking chances with him when hounds ran. He was one of the thrusters in that flying hunt and the Quorn and the Cottesmore as well.

There aren't many parsons in England today, worse luck, like the Reverend Seabrooke, so I'd best say a few words about him. A manlier or a tougher gentleman you'd never see, and to meet his eye was like meeting the point of a sword. He was a member of the Belvoir Hunt Committee, and he was a Justice of the Peace and a bachelor to boot. Before Waltham he'd been in Aldershot, and had created a legend for himself, and also a pack of harriers, which he hunted. His turnout and performance in the hunting field were alike impressive. He wore a black cutaway coat, one of Stultz's I think, white cord breeches of the most incredibly wonderful line, pale-topped boots (the sort said to be dressed with champagne and apricot puré, but I expect he was more scientific, or ecclesiastical), and an elegant form of Messrs Lock's tall hat, with an extra curl to the brim. His moustaches, white in my youthful days, hung either side of his firm mouth like twin ice-cream cones. He was a man, and it was an honour to clear his path. I never heard him in church, but I often heard him beside a covert.

Another parson in the same hunt, was the Rev. F. M. P. Sheriffs of Caythorpe, near Grantham, and by golly, he went well and spoke well, and must have drawn many a sinner into God's fold. He'd come to the Belvoir from the Quorn,

and loved to talk about the legendary huntsman, Tom Firr, possibly the greatest man across any country that ever lived. Mr Sherriffs had a way with boys. He was born in Dublin, his mind was supple, his sympathies were ready, and his speech was music. When hunting, he was a less formidable character than Parson Seabrooke, and not quite so elegant and well-mounted. But he was great all the same, and he went like a bomb. Goodness, since those days I've seen some parsons, and I've thought if only they could be more like those two courageous men.

Since I've mentioned the canal, I'd better explain that much of our local hunting was affected by it. The Grantham Canal wound across the vale from Nottingham to Grantham, and passed Hickling village close to the northward. Kaye Wood, where we had drawn that day, is a tight little place over the canal near Colston Bassett, where a neck of the Belvoir country runs into the South Notts, or Lord Harrington's as we knew it. If hounds ran across the canal, as they usually did, one normally made for the swing bridge, but some of the keener hands were in such a hurry they'd ride through the canal. They were in an extra fluster to get on because once the fox had crossed the canal you could bet your life he'd run the bank of the Smite for Kinoulton, next village into the Quorn country, and a neutral covert. If they pushed him through that, there would be a jumping festival over the pastures and up and across the Nottingham turnpike. . . . How did they get through the canal? In a few places you could ride until you came to the deep channel for the boats, then some horses would push off and swim across, which was a bit of all right. But others would just walk you downhill into the water, and then you had to duck, hold your breath, and hope your submerging wouldn't last too long.

* * *

When our pony Creamy began to get footy with the vast amount of roadwork she was asked to do, brave soul, we

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retired her and she produced eight foals in a row to thoroughbred stallions. Six of her foals made over sixteen hands, sold well, and went in the first flight in the best company in the world. Amazing that she got them so big.

Her fifth foal, a black gelding called Lazaretto, my father sold to our medico, Dr Swain. Lazaretto was a star, and I expect he was sent over to the doctor's stable at Clawson in settlement of a hefty bill. As the doctor rode about the country he had an amusing way of puffing out his cheeks, and he was for ever telling us to eat more rice pudding. 'It's better than all the coloured medicines in the world,' he would say. Doctors are very often endearing characters. He was. And when Dr Swain had reached his hundredth birthday and the Belvoir hounds met at Long Clawson, the Prince of Wales visited him and gave him a present, a bottle of vintage champagne.

I had no more ponies after Creamy except ones that my brothers and I were breaking for other people or to sell. By the age of eight I'd graduated to horses. I remember being put on a big blood mare, between two others. My father was leading (mounted) on the near side, and George Smith on the off. They held her steady like anchors when she drove into her bridle. After some time, perhaps a whole, long morning, she settled, and they unbuckled the leading reins.

'She's all yours, Howard.'

She behaved. . . . I was highly strung, but my father taught me not to be nervous of horses, that almost every one of them had its key, and that when they misbehaved there was always a reason—usually some stupidity or clumsiness in handling. Father taught me how a horse should look and how a man, or woman, should look on him. He taught me it was the feel that mattered, the balance, the pulse, and that when you decide to be firm with any horse you must, for his own sake, be very firm. He was an artful teacher. Then I was lucky in having Sam and Mitchell ahead of me, both

J. H. Marshall's mother and father: Mrs Mary Elizabeth Marshall and Mr Samuel Thomas Marshall—Sam Marshall of Hickling
(by kind permission of Mrs Catherine A. Dennett)

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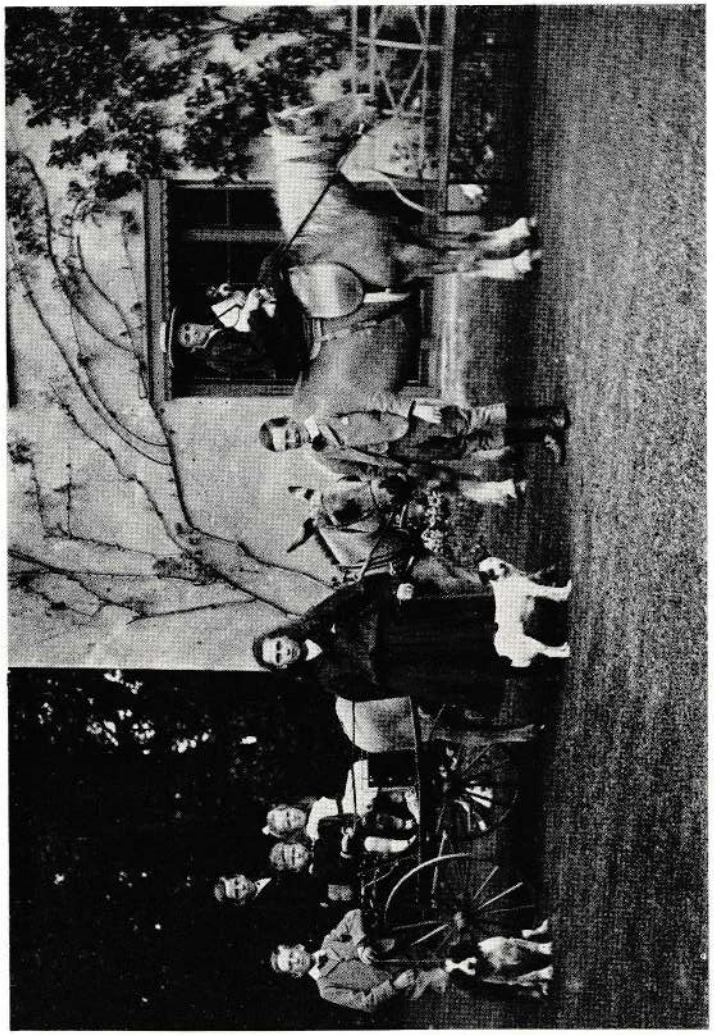

The Marshall children at Hickling Manor in 1904. Howard is standing on the back of the Raleigh cart, Mitchell is on the left and Sam at the head of du Maurier, the donkey. Creamy, now an old pony, has been allowed to drop off to sleep *(by kind permission of Mrs V. M. Marshall)*

as mad about horses as I was myself. . . . A boy can learn nearly everything just by watching and listening.

A great English skier called Bracken, Bill Bracken I think, once sat with me at Olympia in the horse lines and told me about a little consumptive English boy who was sent to Mürren in Switzerland for his health. For long months he had no strength to move on or from a wooden balcony. He watched the skiers flash by, some of them Swiss boys of his own age. At last the doctor told the boy he might try to walk a few steps. What did he do? He hired himself some skis, and he went off on them as though he had been born with them on his feet. He'd learned the trick, the pulse of the thing, by all those avid hours of watching. Walk? he could do better than that. And incidentally, the sport saved his life.

When I was ten I broke and backed my first hunter, a seventeen-hands black gelding called Othelloric, aged five and up to fifteen stone. That was the year we foaled Lord Lyon, too. I'd watched Sam and Mitchell breaking, and couldn't wait to try, and it was easy. I mouthed him and all the rest in a box, got him accustomed to harness, drove him in a breaking-cart about our paddock and then on the farm roads, backed him, schooled him, and got him fencing smoothly. Father sold him straight away for £280 to a cotton-bobbin wallah who hunted with the Meynell.

At the beginning of each summer holidays Father would say, 'You've any number to break, lads. You can use the ten-acre paddock and the traps in the corner. Take what you can get from the owners unless they've settled with me, as they should by rights. If an owner'll give you a fiver or a tenner or even fifty quid for breaking, so much the better. If he gives nothing, say nothing, but let me know at once. All I ask is, break horses. Don't break harness, and don't break shafts. And keep 'em on the grass. Shoes cost money.' Then he'd leave the three of us to get on with it, and an astonishing number of horses went through our hands. Now and then,

usually when we imagined him to be far from Hickling, he'd appear and criticise everything we were doing. He liked to bring a couple of buckets of sawdust and make driving marks on the grass. 'Back him, Howard, till your wheels exactly cross this line,' he might say. 'Exactly. You're over. That's no good. Now stop. I mean stop when I say it, not in a week's time.'

One market day I'd gone to fetch Father from Broughton Station with a blood mare in harness that was more than a bit quick. As his train came in she did some fancy rearing in the shafts, and when he came out of the station she was standing right on end. He made for her head at once, and calmed her. When we'd moved the seat back he took the reins and fairly swept the mare along the top Nottingham turnpike, which was a mass of carts and wagons going to or from market. She didn't behave too well, and he was short-tempered with her and inclined to snarl at me. When we reached the gated Hickling road the mare was driving into her collar at last. I jumped out, opened the gate, shut it, and sprinted after them to get in over the tailboard.

'Come on. Run!' he shouted over his broad shoulder, trying to pacify his mare, and more interested in her than in me. I got a foot on the step, but I couldn't do it without a spill. I dropped back, gasping for breath. 'Run, when I tell you, you tortoise,' he said angrily. 'She won't wait, and no more will I.'

'I can't run any more.'

'Then we must leave you.' And so he did.

I ran down the footpath that cut across a neck of land, but as I got near the road again he streaked past, beating me by seventy yards. I thought I'd pay them out. If I failed to turn up at home they'd send out a search party, suddenly realising how useful and precious I was to them. I hung about in the woods for an hour or more and then strolled down to Hickling, where I called on the Roses and had tea with them. The elder daughter was called Lily Rose, which seemed a bit

daft, but she really was charming and very pretty. Her father, the runner, was a tall, gaunt man who walked with an exaggerated swing of the arms. He must have been a goodish age then. He still practised jump-off starts, and even Mitchell couldn't hold him for the first thirty yards or so. Shortly before dinner I crept into our house by one of the back entrances, tidied myself in our room, and appeared in the dining-room just when my father was about to say grace. It must have been four hours since he left me stranded, yet nobody paid the slightest attention to me. I suppose he'd told them I was sulking. . . . Their indifference taught me a lesson every child should learn, but not many do.

* * *

Were I given a guinea for every hour I spent driving my father or being driven by him I'd now have some money laid by (perhaps). Much of his business at Melton was done sociably in the Harboro', the George, or the Bell. I never went into those places with him, but he knew he could usually find me in Mr Harry Beeby's livery yard.

'You're to make haste, Master Howard, Mr Marshall says. See to the mare's feet and to the gig, and bring 'em and yourself straight round to the Bell,' said the boots, with an air of self-importance.

'Her feet,' Mr Beeby said. 'What's Sam up to now then?'

The roads were still loose-surfaced. It was fairly common for a horse to pick up a stone. We all carried hoof picks as a matter of routine, and the moment a horse went a bit unsound we stopped him and looked for the trouble. When I drove Kit, the American mare, to the doors of the Bell Hotel a crowd was gathered there, and my father came forward at once.

'Now listen. I've wagered I'll drive to Leicester in under the hour carrying one passenger. I won't find anyone lighter than you; are you game? That's all right then. Just wanted to sort it out in case we spill and your mama starts beefing.

Have you looked everything over? Good.' He hardly glanced at the mare and the straight-shafted Lawton gig. 'We leave at the first stroke of two,' he said. 'The other parties to the wager catch the two-six train, and will be waiting by Leicester clock tower, where we finish.'

We took our places. He lit a cigar and pulled on his wash-leather gloves. The clock struck and we were off, trotting rapidly out of Melton. It's fifteen miles from there to Leicester and the last four of them, downhill from Syston, were tricky driving for anyone in a hurry. The horse-drawn trams could block you, and their rails were a dangerous hazard. Our American mare had a queer gait. She went cloppety-clop, cloppety-clop, cloppety-clop, clop, with a kind of a jig to it. If you took a slight pull at her and then let her go she'd dash on with redoubled purpose, and she was always full of hard oats and beans, and fit for anything. Then nobody could shoe them better and trimmer than Alwyn Shelton of Hickling.

We flew to Syston. The hill dropped in front of us, the tramlines gleaming, the granite sets dark and greasy. After a major and daring swerve round two trams at the top he put one wheel between the lines and sent her right into her collar. He sat quite still, smiling into his moustaches, enjoying every minute of it, his eyes dancing but all else frozen, save his hands, giving gently to her mouth. Would she hold us straight? If the wheel went into a tramline we were done. Whew! But the American mare had luck to match her nerve. We reached the clock tower at eight minutes to three. I walked her about to cool her, and washed her mouth out, while all of them settled the business end of it. I wondered what my mother might have said if she could have seen the three of us tearing down Syston hill.

I've always been discreet. Even at that age I had enough sense to keep mum about Father's wager when we got home.

Now *there* (speaking of the one who really won the wager, for what did either of us do but sit still and pray?) was a

mare that earned her keep. Didn't she do some work for us? She was never out of the shafts, never off the road, never sick, never sorry, a good doer and a flyer. Father had got her in a swapping deal with a big rubicund gentleman named Harrison, who lived at Saxondale, between Nottingham and Newark. He hunted with Lord Harrington's, but enjoyed a day with the Quorn when they met his side of the country. And then he'd drop in at Hickling for tea or a dram, and perhaps on occasion to do some horse trading. One such day as we rode home from the hunt Father said to me, 'Take Mr Harrison into the house when he's put up his horse and see he gets tea or coffee or anything else he may fancy. I'll be with him directly, but I must stop here a minute or two and have a word with the vicar.'

Mr Harrison put his horse in one of our boxes, took off his hat, and walked slowly round the stables, running his eye over every inmate.

'What's this one?' he asked, stopping dead before Robin Dudley, a grand-looking horse who refused when he tired.

'Sorry, Mr Harrison. I know nothing of him.'

He walked slowly on and stopped to look at Alexandria, a cream-coloured, well-made, well-set-up gelding aged eight. None of us had yet discovered how to stop him once he got galloping. 'What's this one, Howard? By Jupiter! he looks a good sort.'

'He does, doesn't he? Sorry, he's been here some little time, but I can't say I've had anything at all to do with him.'

He stopped again, this time in front of Fleet Street, a raking, generous sort of hunter for whom my father confidently and justifiably expected an extremely high price. 'What a picture!' said he. 'Here's one up to weight that looks as though he could gallop.'

'Best-looking hunter we have,' I agreed. 'I haven't had a ride on him yet, though I did hear someone speak very well of him.'

'Is he for sale?'

'They didn't say.'

'How long have you had him here and where did he come from?'

'I wish I could answer your questions, Mr Harrison, but I just don't know the answers. My father will be here in a few minutes.'

At last, having looked at every horse, he consented to come into the house. He stopped in the yard, fishing in the small pocket of his hunting coat. 'Here's half-a-crown, Howard, for saying, "I don't know." You won't go far wrong in life if you keep that up.'

Our father had drilled us all carefully in stable tactics, or whatever you choose to call it. 'Don't go blabbing to anyone, *anyone*, about the horses, d'you hear me? It's easy enough to say, "I don't know." And anyway, nine times out of ten you *don't* know.'

There was always an assortment of show traps and gigs in the coach house below our bedroom as well as a brougham for my mother's use in bad weather, a nice-looking curricle with a pole for a pair, and a drag. Many a hilarious drive we had in the drag, to or from hunting. And one was not so hilarious. The drag with Thomas Goodburn, the coachman, went off one evening to Widmerpool Station to pick up the hunting party. I was not one of them, I was away at school. Anyway, the party was in great spirits, and on the way home the drag ran over a heap of stones at the verge and overturned. Several of them were injured, and one man was killed, a nasty business. There had to be a coroner's court, but the accident was held to have been an act of God.

We had two ways of getting about. We rode or we drove. Horses were as natural to us as our feet and hands. When Mr Otho Paget brought his beagles up to us from Thorpe Satchville Hall, or Lady Lonsdale brought hers from Oakham, we never dreamed (unless the ground was iron-hard with frost or deep in snow) of following them on foot. We rode after them—though it was rare in that favoured

country, where you could hunt the fox six days a week, to bother with any old beagles.

My father was one of the best shots in the county, and I went through a craze for that sport. Most country boys go through it, and some never get over it. In the old days when we had an Empire the residue of the gun-hungry ones could join the forces and have the prospect of bigger targets. I'd keep a shotgun in the trap, and I had a mare so sensible to drive that I'd leave her to potter along the road on her own while I beat round the hedge-rows and had the odd shot.

One morning I was driving Father to Broughton Station. As usual he was filling me up with orders, as though pouring them into a jug. 'I want you to do that, do you hear, Howard? Not anybody else, you. If anything goes wrong with that mare I hold you personally responsible. Understood?' (Very often he had asked another party to do it too.) As we neared the station he happened to look round and, with a compensatory movement, shifted one foot astern. With that foot he felt a hard object under the carpet. What a suspicious character he was? He bent down at once and pulled up my gun.

'I've spoken to you twice about this before,' he said in sultry tones. 'It won't do, my man. . . . One day you may be old enough and rich enough to have the sense to shoot only your own game and that of your friends by invitation. But if I let you shoot now, you wild varmit, you'll get yourself a name and you'll make trouble with neighbours. I'm impounding this weapon' (waving my dear old twelve-bore in the air) 'for your own good and mine.'

He could not, however, take the gun with him to Lincoln, so he left it with the station master. I stood by the train while he leaned out of an open window, talking, talking. 'Get Shelton to look at the new roan's feet. Tomorrow I'll ride Prince of Denmark, leaving home (tell Hibbert) just before ten. You'll come, and Sam, on Danny Dicer and

Borax. Second horses: Pinkerton, Silas Levy, and Andromeda Mia. Got it? . . .' Strings of names, strings of orders. 'Oh, and another thing, Howard. . . .' But the train was heaving itself away, with slow puffs.

As I unhitched the mare the station master opened his office window. 'Pssst!' I went over. 'Mr Marshall left me your gun, Master Howard, to keep safe till he gets back late tonight.' A long pause. 'You got any cartridges on you?'

'Yes.'

'To fit this gun?' He took the gun from a cupboard and gave it to me. 'Step this way, I'll show you the shot of a lifetime. There's a covey keeps coming into my garden. Partridges, see? They're in the pathway now. If you crawl carefully to that bank and sight down the path you'll near get the whole bang-jing.'

I did as he suggested, lay flat to the ground and drew a bead through the tussocks. The birds were approaching in two files, like soldiers. I fired twice, and (I'm ashamed to say) killed sixteen out of seventeen. My accomplice helped me pick them up. 'Best give me the gun back, Master Howard. Here's four brace for you and four for me. When Mr Sam sees the birds he'll relent about your having the odd pop, I know he will.'

He knew wrong. When my father came home that night there was hell to pay.

'Howard, come into the hall.' In the half-dark of the hall, beside the rack of whips and cutting whips, he gave me a dressing down, and he did it well. I had disobeyed him. He was going to sell the gun and give the proceeds to the building fund of Hickling Church. He did not care whether I ever shot again, and as a matter of fact I never have, seriously. He pointed out that I ought to be too busy to get up to mischief. In summer, apart from hay and harvest, the water tanker had to be taken round fields that had no brook, the tubs of the store cattle had to be topped up with linseed cake, the ewes were always in bother with foot trouble or the fly,

and there were horses (including Stella and her foal) to be ridden, doctored, schooled, broken, sold. In winter there was hunting, and in summer work and cricket. What more did I want, my father inquired. . . . And also, when I was little more than ten years old, there was school.

I was packed off as a boarder to Trent College, a grey cliff of a place across the Derbyshire border. Life there was a considerable penance. I had become geared to working on my own. Such of my two elder brothers' society as had been forced on me had made me wary of other boys. Because of my riding abilities, which were known in the school, I was regarded as something of a freak. I think the masters resented that (horse) side of my life, whereas the boys were amused, and in favour of it.

As an English schoolboy I was a bad bet. I can't wonder that my term times were merely sentences to be worked off before the Hickling holidays came again (when I would work ten times as hard, but at things I wanted to do). In my second year at Trent I won both the junior and the open high jump, beating the head of the school into second place. I had beaten my seniors with great reluctance, but the Headmaster at once called me into his study and gave me a dissertation upon the dangers of 'swollen head'. I was then twelve, and I thought him an ass, for I was a polite, shy, and nervous boy, and I was so very bad at the rougher sports such as football and boxing that a petty success in something so ordinary as the high jump was unlikely to swell my head. . . . Everyone, after all, goes to one school or another, and I don't think of my schooldays as important either to me or to anybody else. I'll round them off with a description of the last memorable episode in them:

It was the year that Mr James de Rothschild's St Amant, ridden by Kempton Cannon (not alas by my American friend, Danny Maher) won the Epsom Derby in a snowstorm. Yes, a snowstorm in June, freak weather, and it was even worse, of course, up north in Derbyshire with a wind growling round

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the walls of Trent College. Six of us in G Dormitory had subscribed three shillings and fourpence each. I had taken the pound to old Kipling, who did the boots, asking him to get it on St Amant to win with Messrs Hibbert & Heap, a Nottingham firm of bookmakers who had a branch office at Long Eaton, near the college.

'You're on,' Kipling whispered to me at the noon break. 'Sixes. But he won't win.'

I made no reply, thinking that if St Amant failed no feelings need be hurt. When he *did* win, brave little horse, and it was clear that Messrs Hibbert & Heap owed us seven pounds (which then seemed a colossal sum), my co-investors were unanimous that it would be putting unfair temptation in Kipling's path to allow him to collect. Boys are suspicious creatures, and riches defile. As the horsey member of the syndicate, I was chosen to collect our winnings. The others would cover up for me while I missed chapel and supper, and would see to it that one of the big sash windows of the form rooms on the ground floor was propped open for my return to college. It was to be the second window on the right as you faced the main doorway. I got out of it, and the others closed it gently behind me. From a potting shed I took a couple of potato sacks to wrap round the barbed wire of the perimeter fence so that I could edge through it.

The night was horrible, black, wet, and hugely windy. I got through the wire (my nickname at school was Squirma Marshall), crossed the canal on the funny little dog-legged, lock-keeper's bridge, made straight for the house of the bookmaker's clerk, and rang the bell. He opened the door. At first he didn't want to let me in. It was my youth that plagued him.

'We're a reputable firm,' he kept saying. 'We're an honest firm. You could get me shopped, you could. We don't do business with squirts.'

'You accepted our bet through the College boot-man. You knew perfectly well whose money it was. Now you must

settle or take the consequences. There are five others involved and their parents are important people in Nottingham and Derbyshire. My father knows everyone in the Midlands who has to do with horses. You'll never hear the end of it if you welsh.'

He kept me on tenderhooks for quite a while.

'You ought to be tucked up in bed. How did you get here?' he asked.

'Climbed out of College and crossed the canal.'

'Lord Almighty!' Then he asked me to swear that if discovered with the money I'd never say it came from him or his firm. I swore it. He got out a small chamois-leather bag and counted seven gold sovereigns from a wall safe into it. The sight made me feel faint. 'What's the matter?' he asked, looking closely at me. 'You're devilish pale. Have a snifter of whisky. That'll put you to rights.'

I'd never been nearer whisky before than on farmers' breaths or lying about unwanted on sideboards. The taste was vile. How could people swallow such stuff? Much of it trickled down my chin and over my coat as I coughed and spluttered. We shook hands, and he let me out into a turmoil of wind and rain. I ran as fast as I could, tremendously uplifted by my success with the money. When I came to the lock I slipped on the sodden, greasy timber and all but fell into the basin, which happened to be empty, and would have made an enormous tomb. I'd crossed the canal and was on the towpath, going alongside the school's barbed fence, when I heard a strange, loud splashing, I don't know what it can have been. I ran on and, in the darkness, missed my two sacks. I stopped, dared not go back, and there and then tackled the fence with its barbed-wire overhangs. I cut my hands and tore my suit getting to the top, and when I was trying to work out how to descend safely I was blown off balance by the wind and rain, got caught up, and fell to the ground inside the perimeter bit by bit with a noise of rending cloth. I lay on the sodden ground panting. First thought,

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my bag of gold. 'Here it is.' I felt no breakages and my cuts were superficial. Springing to my feet, I galloped up to the school. Yes, they'd propped the window open with a piece of board. I jumped, caught the sill, pulled myself up. And then my right hand slipped on the wet wood, my shoulders twisted, knocking away the prop, and the huge sash came down like a guillotine, pinning me across the back of the neck. Not a move could I make, beyond taking most of the weight of my body with my arms. (I was able to get my hands through under the sash.) My situation could hardly have been more compromising. To sum up: there I was, trapped and longing for discovery, covered in mud and blood, stinking of whisky, my clothes severely torn, and a bag of illicit sovereigns in my trouser pocket.

My groans and howls alerted an elderly night watchman. He carried me to Matron's room, and woke her. Matron, not at all a bad sort and devilish handsome, had him carry me to the infirmary, where she dressed my cuts, doped me, took off all my clothes, and put me to bed in a single room with a cup of bouillon and some dry rusks.

By jove, the school was abuzz the following morning! Patrols of masters were out round the pubs and haunts of vice (apparently those existed, though I never knew them) trying to trace my movements of the night before. There was a conspiracy of silence. The Head had decided that the good name of the college was the first consideration. I was to be kept on my own until the doctor would allow them to obtain or flog the truth out of me.

In G Dormitory they were frantic. What had become of me? Why were all those masters snooping and asking stupid questions about women and drink? Where was the St Amant money? Had Kempton Cannon done his stuff in vain? My absence was glossed over by all those in authority; that could only mean that they had me incarcerated. Sooner or later they would break me down. Then all in the dormitory would be for it.

After eleven o'clock on the second night I was roused by Matron and taken in my camelhair dressing-gown to the Head's study, where she left me after giving my arm a squeeze that I suppose was meant to be reassuring. He sat not at his usual desk but at a side table. I was told to sit opposite him, with my back to the door. On the table lay a cane, dark and oily-looking, as though soaked in human blood, and also a small heap of sovereigns, which he kept turning over, relishing the feel of gold.

'This your money, Marshall?'

'Some of it, if it was taken from my pocket.'

'Where did you steal it? . . . Answer when you are spoken to. . . . Where did you steal it? . . . Well? . . .' He took out his pocket-watch, looked carefully into its face, stroked the taped handle of the cane with his fingers, and said, 'I shall give you exactly three minutes to come out with the truth.'

I found my tongue. 'I'll never tell you, never. You'll never find out from me.'

'Never find out, *Sir*,' he corrected me. 'Come, come. You have not been a satisfactory member of the school. But with your plunge into debauchery you seem to have lost such rudiments of good manners as you formerly possessed. Tell me, when did you first take to drinking whisky?'

I turned over in my head his assumption that I was a thief when I'd only been collecting what belonged to me and my friends, and his dirty trick of hauling me out of bed at nearly midnight, when I was propping my eyes from sleep. Soon I began to shake with rage, a most unusual condition with me. I picked a heavy leather-bound book from the shelves behind me and flung it with all my strength and fury at the gas light above his head. He gave a cry and the light went out. I opened the door, slammed it behind me, and ran, not back to the infirmary, but to G Dormitory, where I jumped into my bed and pulled the sheets over my head.

Soon I became aware of a friendly twittering round the bed. The dormitory was in ferment. A council of war was

held when I'd simmered down. The five of them decided to stand by me through anything and take my part against the authorities. Each would swear if asked that I'd acted on the room's behalf, and had not behaved dishonestly or dishonourably. It was all very highfaluting and inspiring. Each was also pledged, since I had given my word to the bookie, never to divulge where the money had come from. . . . All those fine resolutions, which comforted me at the time and restored my faith in human nature, proved unnecessary. No move was made by authority, either against me or against the dormitory. All the same, I was glad that that was officially my last term. I was sixteen, and was to go into the cavalry. I cannot think why my school experiences had not shown me that the Army was an unpromising field for my endeavours. Boys are dense, and should be given much help by their parents.

One morning at breakfast during the ensuing summer I saw my father open the long envelope that I knew held the Trent College accounts and reports.

'Surly and violent at times!' he exclaimed. 'They call him surly and violent.'

'Call whom?' asked my mother.

'Howard, who else? Then here's another queer do: the college is never too ready to give anything away, yet they've credited me with seven pounds against the fees, and they write it off as a refund against an overcharge last term. . . . But there was no overcharge. It beats me. . . .'

'That money's mine,' I said. 'Or part of it is. They tried to make me say I stole it. They'll never know how or where I came by it.'

'Hoity-toity, won't they now?' When my father used that tone you had to be careful. 'That's a fair bit of money. So if I give you my word here, in front of your mother and several of your brothers and sisters, that I won't pass on any information you may give me, well, I think you'll out with it.'

'I will, I will,' I cried. 'And if the Head had put the

question to me that way it might have been difficult.He made it easier to keep my word because he set about me with insults and accusations.'

'To keep your word? Who to?'

'Why, to Hibbert & Heap.'

'*Hibbert & Heap!*'

'*Bookmakers!*' my mother said. 'You wicked boy.'

'The Derby,' I said. 'St Amant. The six of us in G Dormitory had a pound on at sixes.'

'Sixes on St Amant,' my father said. 'You did well, and you shall have your winnings, Howard. Be off now, all of you. I'll see you three boys in the yard in ten minutes.'

I stood outside when I'd closed the door behind me. My father was laughing. My mother was silent. Not a cheep out of her.

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be at you the second you left the ring. 'You didn't go half fast enough for that horse. Dawdling round like a girl. Next time you show one, gallop him, or never call yourself a son of mine.'

* * *

It wasn't unusual for my father to buy a dozen hunters in the Saturday sale at Wade, Sheppard, and Warner's Repository. He'd leave them standing there over Sunday and roll up at Leicester on Monday morning in a drag filled with men, boys, and saddles. When we'd got the strange horses saddled, off we'd stream up the tramlines to Syston, making for the Quorn meet. The horses were all warranted—he never bought one that was not. We were proving them. If they were unsound, or bad hunters, back to Leicester they went, the Saturday deal nulled.

At 2 p.m. we'd rendezvous with him at some prearranged place out in the country, possibly at a crossroads or on a bridge or outside an inn. Not only would he know everything about the horse he rode, he'd have an accurate opinion about each of ours.

'You take that one straight back to the Repository, Tommy, he's no good to us.'

'How'll I get home, Mr Marshall?'

'Never bother your head about that, son, we'll fetch you somehow. Push on now, and no more hunting, mind.' Tommy rode off, none too pleased. 'I've *sold* yours, Howard. No bother, was he?'

'No, Father.'

'Nice easy fencer?'

'Not too bad.'

'Hack him on home, then. Give him to Hibbert. Tell him he's sold to Colonel Blakely. When you've had your tea and Hibbert's had time to make a job of the horse, ride him on to the colonel's place, Quatre Bras.' (It was 2.15. We were nine miles from home, which was another twelve from Quatre Bras.) 'That's a valuable animal, Howard.' (One

wondered how much extra value he had accrued between Saturday and Monday.) 'Don't knock him about. Use up all your time. Go on all the grass you can find. Don't clatter him on the road, and remember, tell Hibbert to take trouble, and the colonel's one of the best, a payer on the nail. A nailer. Anyway, I'll probably be home before you leave for Quatre Bras.' (That was a favourite trick of his, to be imminent, to keep us saying to ourselves, He'll be here any minute.)

* * *

I was riding the sold horse through the night on the second leg of his journey to the buyer. I could see the glow of Leicester reflected in the cloud layer. All about the black, knobbled surface of the earth were fireflies, the lanterns of carriages and traps. In the loneliness of the night I was governed by my father's will and my own sense of duty, nursing the horse—he had had a very long day—smoothing his mane. A strong trotter came up astern. It was one of our gigs, sent to take me home, and the driver was furious.

'Good God! Are you only this far? You aim to keep me outdoors all night? Trot on then, damn you!'

'You give me that gig,' I said. 'You can walk this horse on for a change.'

'Not me. I'm going to the Bras. Shake that old file up or I'll leave for Hickling without you.'

He wouldn't dare. I rode on slowly, stubbornly.

When we got home my father was asleep by the dying fire in the morning room. 'Hungry?' He asked me.

'Yes, a bit.'

'Grab some cold pheasant and ham and murphies in the larder and get to bed. It's late. We'll talk at breakfast.' It was hard to please him. I think that he was trying to make us resourceful and independent. I call that kind of parent more unselfish than the type that cossets children, currying their favour. He looked quite different, sitting there in the

small hours, older and bald. But if he'd been a hunchback with three eyes (come to think of it he did have three eyes) he'd still have had control of me. We had heard that when young he was very gay, yet to us he seemed almost inhuman except for his love of sport. He told us it was ridiculous to go gallivanting in owl-time, as he put it. When we wanted to stop out late, perhaps for some distant dance or party, we'd lay horse rugs on the Staffordshire bricks of the yard so that he wouldn't hear us drive out, and we would do the same when we came home.

* * *

Among the mounted foxes' masks and brushes on the walls at Hickling were many sketches by Basil Nightingale, the sporting artist, another friend of Father's. Nightingale was then celebrated, and he (or rather his work) will certainly be so again. He lived in Melton, and we mounted him when we hunted in our vicinity, for he was a dear, and we all loved him. He'd come to the nursery or the day nursery and ask us what animal we liked best, and draw it straight on the wall, and there it stayed.

Later on, when I was already a fledgling, he was having a day with the Quorn. They met at our place. Hounds had split in the afternoon hunt, my father going with one lot and Basil with the other. Time passed. Everyone was safely home except the painter.

'Where's Basil then?' Father kept asking. 'Has nobody seen Mr Nightingale. Meg Merrilees is a patent safety, though I wish now I'd put him on Sinbad.'

As it happened, Basil had taken a header into a brook. Merrilees had floundered in, and got herself wedged. Luckily her head was above water, but it took him a long time to get her out, and then longer to find his way back to our place in the dark, his hunting boots full of slime.

'Where did it happen?' he was asked when he'd been togged out in dry clothes and was getting some hot food

inside him. He tried to describe the place, but lacked the born foxhunter's bump of locality and memory for names. 'I could draw it though,' he said. Out came the pencil, and on the damask table cloth with his 3B Venus he drew a brook, the side of a small wood, and part of a house beyond.

'Jericho!' my father exclaimed. 'I should've known it. The banks are hollow there for some way either side of your ducking, my friend.'

* * *

When the Quorn met at our house there was a full cask of ale set up in the yard and a table of eatables, while indoors more luxurious foods and drinks of many kinds were laid out. Our nearest Belvoir meet was at Mother's village, Clawson. I think we must have hunted about equally with the two packs.

Until I was ten the great Earl of Lonsdale was Master of the Quorn. He was an extraordinary person, a man's man, a lady's man, and a nobleman who was equally at home in his rightful places or among the so-called dregs of society. He sent us a brace of pheasants and a haunch of venison every Christmas. As for Lady Lonsdale, she knew the name and Christian name of every farmer's wife in the Quorn, yes, and the names and ages and prospects of the children. The Quorn was in a bad state when his lordship took it on, but he didn't half knock it into shape. Firstly he encouraged his wealthy subscribers to buy forage and oats and everything else they could from the local farmers; secondly he put the second horsemen in their proper place—on the roads. Before he came you'd get four hundred mounted madmen knocking down your fences and ruining your grass, and two hundred of those would be servants, the so-called second horsemen. I have never forgotten Lord Lonsdale's voice—he was the kind who could send a whisper halfway round the world and actually knock you over with his shout—nor his extraordinarily powerful yet lissom seat on a horse and the straight

line he struck across our country. My father for a period had a standing order to find his lordship twelve chestnut hunters every twelvemonth. They took a lot of finding. Lord Lonsdale's standards were the highest, and although he rode light, he was a heavy man.

Despite the wonders of Lord Lonsdale, however, and our many good friends in the Quorn, the Belvoir was my favourite hunt. I shall never forget those Saturdays when the Belvoir came down from Holwell Mouth or Clawson Thorns to draw Sherbrooke's, a vintage field, having changed to their second horses for what was likely to be the hunt of the day. Sir Gilbert Greenall, only twenty years my senior and so only in his thirties, was Master. He had taken over the hunt when that superb huntsman, Frank Gillard, was retiring, and he chose Ben Capell to be Gillard's successor. Sir Gilbert was a topnotch breeder of hunters, hackneys, show hacks, and ponies, and the quality of his hunt servants' mounts had to be seen to be believed. It was a great hunt. They all have their ups and downs.

It is in the houses of hunting farmers that hunt servants, dropping in for a drink and a chat or some well-prepared fresh victuals, are at their most natural. I suppose we saw a side of Ben Capell little known to the subscribers for whom he produced sport to order, four days a week, in every sort of weather save frost and snow. Ben often wished the Marshall boys a thousand uncomfortable deaths.

Sherbrooke's was normally an afternoon or evening draw, and was right on the edge of the Belvoir country. It seemed to us amusing to induce the Sherbrooke's foxes to break covert across the Smite and make for Curate's Gorse. When the fox population seemed to favour Sherbrooke's we'd lay plenty of smelly dead hens or lambs or sheep in Curate's, to encourage fox-flow in that direction. Ben soon understood our mischief, for, being a good huntsman, he was also a detective, and after a hard day's hunting (how many people in England today can understand just what that ordinary

phrase means?) he was totally averse to being drawn from Sherbrooke's deep into Quorn country and farther and farther from his well-strawed kennels at Belvoir Castle on some murky winter afternoon. We three boys would wait carefully posted so as not to miss a fox crossing the Smite and making off for Curate's. How we would halloa and yelp and howl! The hounds battered their way out of the thicknesses and flung themselves through the water with its evening skin of ice forming. Then that gallant field would come round the covert and ride straight and eager, a whole line of them at the brook. There never was a finer sight in all England. Poor Ben, of course, had to join issue and get in front of them, perhaps according us a gesture full of hatred as he galloped past. Huntsmen have their little artifices—they wouldn't survive two seasons without them—and Ben's trick from that boundary covert at that late hour would have been to pick up his hounds and blow them at a gallop towards Belvoir. He'd have given his field a few fences, and perhaps had the luck to sweep up an outlying fox in some hedgerow or patch of gorse, *en route* for home.

Once when things worked out as described above, the Belvoir bitches flew so that they pulled down their fox halfway to Curate's Gorse, and that time Ben came back all smiles. But the next time the fox ran, hard-pressed, smack through Curate's, up and over Fosse Way past Broughton Lodge, round Willoughby-on-the-Wolds to Willoughby Gorse, where they all but had him but, headed by a farmyard cur, he swung left-handed for Eller's and then ran west of south for three miles to Walton Thorns. They caught him not far from the Quorn kennels. Eleven miles as hounds ran, and a seven-mile point, all in enemy territory. Not a bad little evening hunt. Even Ben was secretly feeling pleased by the time he had done the long ride back to us.

'Which of you young devils is going to have this?' he said, as he rode into our stable yard uncoiling the kangaroo-hide thong of his whip and cracking it with a sharp echo. 'Gruel

and he was through. On they went, the fog slowly lifting. He was just able to steer the mad hunter clear of two ponds full of ducks and fringed with wire. A series of fences. The grey horse did not deviate from his course, the jockey stayed with him. The Widmerpool Brook, after a terrifying steeplechase of many miles, opposed Mitchell on the crackpot horse. At that point the Brook had no bottom, ran wide on the take-off side, and washed the clay banks under. Mitchell dug in his heels and Bullet just cleared it and, with a scramble, pulled his great hind legs to safety. Hounds had killed their fox in front of the landing, and Mitchell, first there, was given the brush.

On Tuesday morning Mitchell turned up at Beeby's yard opposite the church in Melton, properly dressed for hunting and none the worse for his scarifying experience of the previous day.

'You killed that grey 'oss Bullet,' was Mr Beeby's greeting. The grey had died of a broken blood vessel during the night, and a good thing too, I think, for *he* would have killed anyone less expert and less bold than Mitchell.

Another day I called at Mr Beeby's, as I normally did whenever I was in Melton and had a minute to spare. He met me in the yard at the door of a box, and he was very depressed.

'Oh, Howard,' he said, 'if only you had had the riding of this 'oss. I used to think brothers were brothers, alike in brain and performance, but it ain't so. I sent Mitchell away on this five-year-old yesterday to qualify him for the Belvoir. Ever such a keen owner too, and the horse would walk any hunt race in England. I ask you. . . . Hounds found in the Vale, at Jericho Court to be precise, and, as you know, the fastest hunt of the season ensued. I was there, and saw Mitchell and the 'oss in question. It was a steeplechase and they just went straight over everything, stick, stone, or water. The Honourable Wyndham and your brother were the only two followers in the field when hounds killed their fox,

and they were given the brush and the mask respectively by Sir Gilbert. Now don't think, my dear boy, that I'm criticising any lad who can go as Mitchell does at the top of any hunt. I'm only pointing out, I asked Mitchell to *qualify* this very valuable young horse. Now come and see him.'

The five-year-old had two big knees, full of blackthorns. Needless to say, he did not run in that race, but he turned out well afterwards. There's an old saying: 'Never go into the stable today of the horse that you hunted yesterday.'

* * *

Because I enjoyed horses and foxhunting as much as my father and many other fortunate people did, I seldom in those days even noticed my mother's hostile reaction. But once when I was in the brougham with her on the Nottingham side of the country, we met Lord Harrington, mounted and followed by a groom, on the outskirts of Shelton. Recognising us, he stopped our coachman and leaned his face with its two wings of white whisker in at the window. After inquiring about the health of our father and the whole family, he said how much he hoped I'd soon be out with his hounds again, because any Marshall was welcome, and so on. . . . He seemed to me the most pleasant of old men, so old that I could not understand, in my greenness, how he managed to hunt his hounds beautifully. He rode on.

Mother asked me to shut the window. I pulled it up on its silk-bound velvet strap, and I hear the catch in her voice and saw the tears in her eyes. We sat, bumping against each other in that leathery, groomy, saddle-soapy atmosphere of closed carriages. (I cannot think why I was there with her—either it was a funeral, or a sickbed call, or I was convalescent.) I was insensitive and she was reticent. We said nothing to each other.

* * *

Parents, even in a family of eleven children, have favourites. While for some reason my father seemed to take to me more

than to the others (perhaps I was more *serviable*), mother's darling was Sam the handsome, the first born. But Sam was a demon on a horse, less artful, less patient than I was, and racing was his passion. When he was sixteen he had a shattering fall in a farmers' hurdle race on the old heart-shaped racecourse at Croxton Park, just south of Belvoir. He was so badly hurt that they dared not move him. (Roads were rougher then, and ambulances were uncouth by present standards.) He had to lie in the grandstand for a whole fortnight, wrapped in blankets. Mother visited him every day. Those must have been odd scenes, I have since thought, the handsome lady with her basket covered in white napkin, crossing the empty racecourse and ascending the empty stand to the pale youth stretched out on its terracing.

In my last year at Hickling, 1904, Sam had taken a fancy to Sondoroa, an absolute brute of a mare, a potential Gold Cup horse and a potential killer. All of us had had a go at her, even my father. Nobody could control her save Sam, and he only sometimes. Well, it was coming to point-to-point time, and Sam had been absent for three and a half hours, exercising Sondoroa.

'Get out a horse quick, Howard, and go and find Sam,' my father said at last. 'He's stuck somewhere. Maybe he needs a hand. Hope you'll find him. Go Clawson way, I should. I've an idea he rode off that side, and he promised me he'd stick to the roads.'

There was no need to labour the point. Mother was sitting with a face that might have been white-washed, tapping at the work table with her nails, her crochet lying across her knees.

I cantered through the gloaming towards Long Clawson. Coming out of that village there was (and still is) a narrow bit of metalled road opening out into wide verges with really deep drainage ditches (it's about the lowest part of the vale) and stiff fences behind them. I heard a horse coming at speed and saw sparks flying from the road before I made out the

mare. Then I heard her crash into one of the hedges, and fall into the ditch below. And as she got rid of Sam and jumped, possibly six feet to get out of the ditch, she kicked him in the ribs and the back. I managed to pacify my own horse, and to catch the mare, 'Whoa gal, whoa now. . . .' But Sam lay still. I couldn't even hear him breathing. I believe I was in tears.

A car jolted and rattled along the road. It was welcome indeed, and its driver more so, for he was Doctor Atkinson of Clawson.

'Let those horses go, Howard,' he said when he had examined my brother. We found a hurdle and together, inch by inch, shifted his poor, flaccid body into the back seat of the big open car. 'Now catch your horses again and cut on home,' Doctor Atkinson said. 'Tell Mr Marshall I'm taking Sam straight to Leicester Infirmary. Only hope I shan't get a puncture on the way. Let's see, are you on the telephone?'

'My father won't have one.'

'Best ask him to come to Leicester then, right away.'

Sam was in the Infirmary for six months, and his health was permanently affected. That horrible mare had kicked away a bit of his liver, and they kept plugging it with silk gauze, so he told us with gruesome relish any time that we called to see him. He had never been strong, and I know Mother hoped the doctor would order him not to ride again. Whether the doctor did, I don't know, but nothing would have kept Sam off horses. He'd have ridden if both feet and both hands had been cut off. Mother was on a losing wicket there. And she would have been with me. Even today, at fourscore years and more, I need horses. They are oxygen to me; my life and my amusement.

Hickling Local History Group

5

The 16th Lancers

WHY did I leave Hickling? I belonged there. Why did I leave it so young? I suppose I wanted to play my part in the world and do my best for England, and I know I was curious to see places and people. India was a magnet. I imagined myself pigsticking, playing polo, and exchanging lethal shots in some nullah with the brave Pathan. Then there was Captain Thompson always talking about his regiment out there, and telling my father I would get commissioned rank, marry an heiress, win the Grand Military Gold Cup and the Grand National, and become a *Field*-Marshal.

And why was I allowed to leave Hickling at the age of sixteen? I'd been useful on the place since I was ten, or even less. Apart from all the fun and the hunting, I had put in months of slogging work on the horses and on the farm. I had thought that my father loved me, and I know that in his way he did. Why then did he push me so quickly away? He never had me taught any trade or profession, unless you count what he taught me about horses, and at that time the horse trade was depressed. I suppose he felt himself swamped by his family. There were too many of us and we were leaving school while he was still young, able, and busy. In any event he was a hard man and he wanted me to be hard. He pushed me out, and I cannot honestly say that I was unwilling to go until just the last moments of leaving Hickling, and even then I was borne up by anticipation of the good things to come. At the age of sixteen I was an optimist.

When I'd taken the King's shilling in Nottingham Drill Hall they gave me a medical examination, a railway warrant, and orders to go to Aldershot and report to the adjutant of the 16th Lancers at the South Cavalry Barracks.

Outside Aldershot station I saw a clean and active sort of man, and asked him my way.

'You come to join up?' he asked.

'Suppose so.'

'Then turn about and go straight back 'ome. You'll be better off anywhere nor what you will be 'ere.'

'Having got this far I'll have a look at it.'

'It's your own funeral.' He told me he was a 16th Lancer and a horse servant (army groom) to Colonel Tewson, who was second in command to Colonel Gough.

Next morning I searched him out and found him with his horses at the end of C Squadron block. He had a nice charger and a couple of polo ponies in there, and I thought, By golly! from what I've seen this is the best corner of the God-forsaken hole. I wouldn't mind being on this caper for a bit. (And at that time I had not got started with normal duties, which were to prove even worse than I expected.)

'I'll buy that suit off you when you draws your uniform,' my new acquaintance offered.

'I don't think I'd better sell it, thank you. I've got several brothers at home just about my size. Indeed I'm not sure it doesn't belong to one of them.'

That day I was moved from the Intake Centre to my alloted barrackroom. There were twenty-five of us, old sweats and young ones, on iron cots round the wall, and in the corner the troop-sergeant's bed. You pulled out the foot of the cot, put three 'biscuits' on the frame, and what blankets you had on top. There was one pillow, hard as concrete and of about the same texture, covered with rough canvas, I should think. The stabling was in long blocks with barrack-rooms above surrounded by balconies. You could come out

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6

Off to America

So it was at Weedon that I left the 16th Lancers, Weedon, only fifty-four miles from Hickling. I knew that my father, Sam, and Mitchell were at Hickling. I could imagine how disappointed my father would be with my poor showing in the cavalry, since possibly his head still swam with the dreams put there by Captain Thompson—commission, rich wife, hunters, polo. Ah well, I wished too that the Captain's forecast had been accurate. Because, let me get this straight in your mind, I never once felt the slightest twinge of jealousy for all those sparks of cavalry officers with their clubs, their money, and their friends. I admired them and liked them. If I'd been lucky enough to be inside their boots, why, I'd have played out the stakes of life much as they did, I hope. Later, in Flanders, they were to show that if they knew how to enjoy life, they also knew how to die with grace and dignity.

But no need to be morbid. . . . I took the train to London in high spirits. I had a bit of cash in my pocket, since I had not divulged my *entire* resources to Colonel Graham. I arrived in London on a Thursday and went straight to get a room in the Y.M.C.A. off Tottenham Court Road. I then searched the second-hand clothes shops in the Charing Cross and Victoria areas. I'd had plenty of time with Geoffrey Brooke to learn how a riding man should dress himself. I knew the tailors of London, and when I saw names like Sandon, Lesley & Roberts, or Huntsman, on the labels by the inner pockets, that was the time to start trying on. Had I had the

money, I'd have bought everything new, had it made for me naturally, but I really don't know that I'd have got the same pleasure out of the proceedings. I was very poor indeed by Friday evening. But I actually had an invitation to stay with friends.

Jim Dawkins, who had been in my barrackroom at Aldershot, had come out of the Army and married a widow who kept a little shop at Richmond. Jim, more than thirty years my senior, had had a hard go in life, often in trouble. Molly was five years his senior. How they laughed over my A.W.O.L. business and my dismissal from the service, and Molly Dawkins was thrilled by my thorough exploration of the used-clothes market. She pressed every bit of clothing, exclaiming at the excellence of the tweed and the whipcord, and wherever she could find work for her needle she used it. Meanwhile Jim and I were working away at my new-old Maxwell riding boots, boning and polishing until they looked nearly as good as the king's. Because the man who looks after a boot is just as important as the man who wears it, and nearly as important as the man who makes it.

On the Saturday night they took me to a music hall in Richmond. We sat out, after, in a riverside beer hall with further singing from the stout ladies and the gentlemen with waxed moustaches who had entertained us indoors. The Thames went sliding past like dark brown oil or, as Jim said, like stout without much head to it. Somewhere around midnight we ate vast plates of whitebait and then raspberries and cream. I remember the gnats swimming into the yellow glare of the gas lights and the man bouncing up and down on his hard-looking behind as he thumped the wilting piano. It was a bonus night in my life. Those people had asked me to stay not because I could ride or because they wanted anything from me, but simply because they thought me a good sort. I had gone to them because I was poor, and had nowhere else to go, and once with them I found everything perfect, Jim so friendly and so gay, Molly

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fortably entrained next morning at Pennsylvania Station, which I did.

Two weeks later I received a courteous and friendly letter enclosing a further substantial cheque coupled with the suggestion that I might 'take some friends out to dinner.' (Some dinner! I had better uses for such a sum of money. In those early days I believed in letting other people buy *me* dinner.) He wrote that I had saved his life (which was really the reverse of what I had expected to do) and he confessed that in his early days in the mid-West he had ridden all sorts of horses, and had only given up when he got heavy, believing that weight-carriers were dull conveyances. In short, as I had been privileged to observe at Durland's, he was anything but the juggins he'd originally made himself out to be.

All the same, that horse learned his stuff mainly tied to a telegraph pole and on one ride of eighteen miles along a dead-straight road. As usual when a horseman (of sorts) has pitted brains and skill against an outstandingly bold animal and got his confidence—I was sorry to see him go. At least in his case the destination was the bleat in the Horses for Sale columns of the equestrian press, 'A Good Home'.

I did not know him long but I shan't forget him, my Kentucky horse.

8

Family Interlude

WHEN the *Minnewaska* docked at Tilbury I was fussing over my charges, twelve American horses, six of them race-horses bound for Epsom, Newmarket, and Chantilly. I could sense England in the background, a mixture of smoke and grass smell, indescribable. The Customs and other authorities seemed peculiarly stubborn until Ambrose Preece appeared, round, rosy, prosperous, cheerful, and smoothed troubles away.

'Howard,' he said flinging both thick arms round my bony shoulders, 'Howard, how are you? Oh, I have a mare, such a mare, wait till you see her. Shan't show you her tonight. You're out of sorts. Don't argue, I see you are. How are Godfrey and Alicia? Well, never mind, let's cut on home, shall we?'

Cutting on home entailed taking the train to London Bridge where a groom waited for us with a tandem in which we spanked along the north bank of the Thames and up to Combe Warren. In the morning after our usual breakfast but without the presence of Miss Preece, who had married one of the Burbidges, the owners of Harrods, he took my arm and impelled me to the stable yard. In one of the larger boxes he introduced me to Sceptre, an extremely well put together show hack. She looked absolutely the ticket to me, but I said little. They put a saddle and bridle on her. It was raining, so we took her into the riding school, and I set about finding her paces. I had barely cantered her when I swung her back to Mr Preece and got off.

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'I know, I know,' he said.

'She makes a noise.'

'But listen, Hobday has operated on her and says she'll be right as rain. It's the English air, thick as pea soup, that's bad for one like this. Otherwise we'd keep her over here, and nothing would touch her. But in the dryer, more sparkling atmosphere of New York you won't hear a whisper out of her. Otherwise she'll do, eh?'

'She might be good enough to win in any company if. . . . I don't know much about Hobdaying.'

'I'm driving you into London now, Howard. I've got business at Fulham Road and you can get a hansom up Bond Street way. I want you to do me a favour. You'll go straight to Tautz's and order a complete outfit, everything for schooling and showing. Do yourself proud. I had a word with them last time I was that way. They'll let me have the bills. You'll enjoy that.'

'I will,' I said.

'I've had a letter from Godfrey about you. You've been a good boy and we're pleased with you. Generally with blokes of your kind there's trouble with women and trouble with drink. With you, so far, nothing. But Godfrey tells me your home affairs are on your nerves. So cut along up there for a day or two, and go first class.'

'I will,' I said. 'That's very handsome of you.'

Father met me at Melton Station. He was alone at Hickling. My mother had moved to Hoveringham, between Nottingham and Newark-on-Trent. Perhaps he would have felt her absence less if she had gone farther away. It was as though a goad had been planted in him. He was both wounded and infuriated. She had taken all that belonged to her, a lot of the furniture and the younger children. It was a relief to learn that Mitchell was coming over for dinner.

He had been riding show jumpers for Mr George Van de Poole, who kept a stable at Cassington Hall, and worked a good deal with and for 'Banker' Loewenstein. I was aston-

ished by my brother, for in my mind he was still a youth, yet here was a tall, slashing, handsome man. He had been in Belgium for some time.

'I learned a lot in Brussels,' he said. 'They're the lads to get a horse up over an extra high fence. They tend to be long-legged, and don't ride with too short a leather nor an exaggerated forward seat, but are always balanced and can give a shift of weight at any split second. From Brussels Mr Van de Poole and I took sixteen horses, all toppers, to St Petersburg. We went by sea through the Baltic and, when we were off-loading, Paddy, our groom, slipped on the icy deck and fell between ship and quay. When I got down to him his head was under water and there was a strong current knocking the ice blocks against each other and the pair of us. We were saved by the Scots captain, who in an instant had a rope and a light lowered to us. Paddy had on Mr Van de Poole's huge top coat with a fur lining that trapped the air. Otherwise he'd have gone under. The horses were all for sale. Those Russkies were hard buyers. Many times I had to ride the lot over six-foot fences before breakfast. But in the end every one of them was sold, and the prices were really something. . . . Now tell me about America, How.'

'These last years you boys have knocked round the world, haven't you,' our father said. 'More than I ever did. I had to *work* for my living. . . .'

It was true, the food did taste better, fresher, up there. The ceilings in both dining- and drawing-room were lower than I remembered. All the warmer in winter, though.

'Your mother never should have married,' he told us. 'Pass the port, Howard. When her sister, your aunt, married Lawyer Elborne, their mama said, "That's one marriage in the family, and may it be the last." Well she knew that your mother and I already had an understanding, and I was always in a hurry in those days. I see you still like the walnuts, Howard.'

'How's the tree?'

'Strong and healthy. Home Field's good for trees.'

'And the cattle?'

'Don't do much with cattle this last ten month. The horse trade's thin too. But war's coming with the Germans. Oh, I know you'll say it'll kill hunting, but think of the Army trade, Howard.'

'Yes, Father.'

'I've got horses to see in Derbyshire tomorrow. If you could drive with me to Widmerpool it would be a help. I shall be back at Widmerpool day after tomorrow. Hope you can stop a bit. I've plenty for you to do.'

'I'll have to take tomorrow's night express to London. I'll drive you to Widmerpool and then take the trap on, if you agree, to pay my respects to Mother.'

'As you please. Take some port and circulate it.'

'No thanks,' I said, passing the decanter.

'What d'ye mean, no thanks? Not turning pussy-foot are you?'

'I take a drink, but not often.'

'Tell your mother that. She may approve. Cigar?'

'Thanks.' I took one.

'That's better,' he said. Like many hard-living men he was generous by nature, and always glad to have others indulge with him. 'Let's see, ten o'clock. Like a look round the stables, lads? Come on then.'

'I'm interested in America, Howard,' Mitchell said to me. 'If I find my way out there can you fix me up temporarily with Godfrey Preece, schooling? You can, honestly? That's fine. I'd best be off then. Thank you, Father; so long, Howard.'

In the stables it was more like old times, not a straw out of place, and everything sweet and clean. I thought the standard of horse a bit lowered, but possibly my own standard had risen, and memory always plays tricks. There was nothing I could buy from my father for Godfrey in Long Island, but he listened carefully when I told him of our trade,

particularly in blood polo ponies, and what we would pay for them. When we had been the rounds he went to his study, and I went alone upstairs. They had put me in the main spare bedroom with its fourposter. I walked along the back landing to 'the boys' bedroom' over the coach house. It was used as a store room. There were no beds in it. Walnuts and hard William pears were laid out in rows on the white-wood floor. A mouse slid into a hole in the wainscoting. I walked back to the spare bedroom, opening each door as I went. My father's bedroom was as bare as the room of a campaigning officer, and looked as though it were seldom used. His small dressing room next door was much as before, with the boot jack and long line of riding and hunting boots, the wardrobes full of solidly-built coats and breeches. He must have come up very late to bed that night, but he was doing justice to a huge, old-fashioned breakfast at eight o'clock when I joined him.

'Is the road to the turnpike still gated?' I asked.

'It is. Got your running shoes on? That skewbald mare is a shifter. When you've dropped me at Widmerpool you'll have a look to the stock at Curate's Goss, won't you? There are thirty-eight bullocks in the reed field and a hundred and fifty-three ewes, the south side. Fill the cake tubs. The bin's by the gate of the lane. Bennett should have the water to them by then, just check on the troughs. I'm expecting a little mare over from Saxelby this afternoon or evening. If you're here when the fellow comes give him this.' He pulled out his watch chain and took a sovereign from the case at the end. 'If you have to leave before, ask Bennett to do the necessary. She's a nicish mare, and will sell.'

He seemed to go into a patch of gloom, and sat with his hand on his coffee cup staring at the empty end of the mahogany that he and I remembered crowded.

After the usual scene in the yard, the mare pawing and snorting, the groom holding her back, he walked her off. Then along the road we spanked, the high land of Hickling

Standard on our left and Parson's Thorns, that beautiful little black covert, tight as a bottle, set in the side of the hill, and below it as perfect a bit of hunting vale as you could see this side of heaven. A mile and a half to the right along the turnpike and we dropped down to the little station.

'It's goodbye then.'

'Yes, Father.'

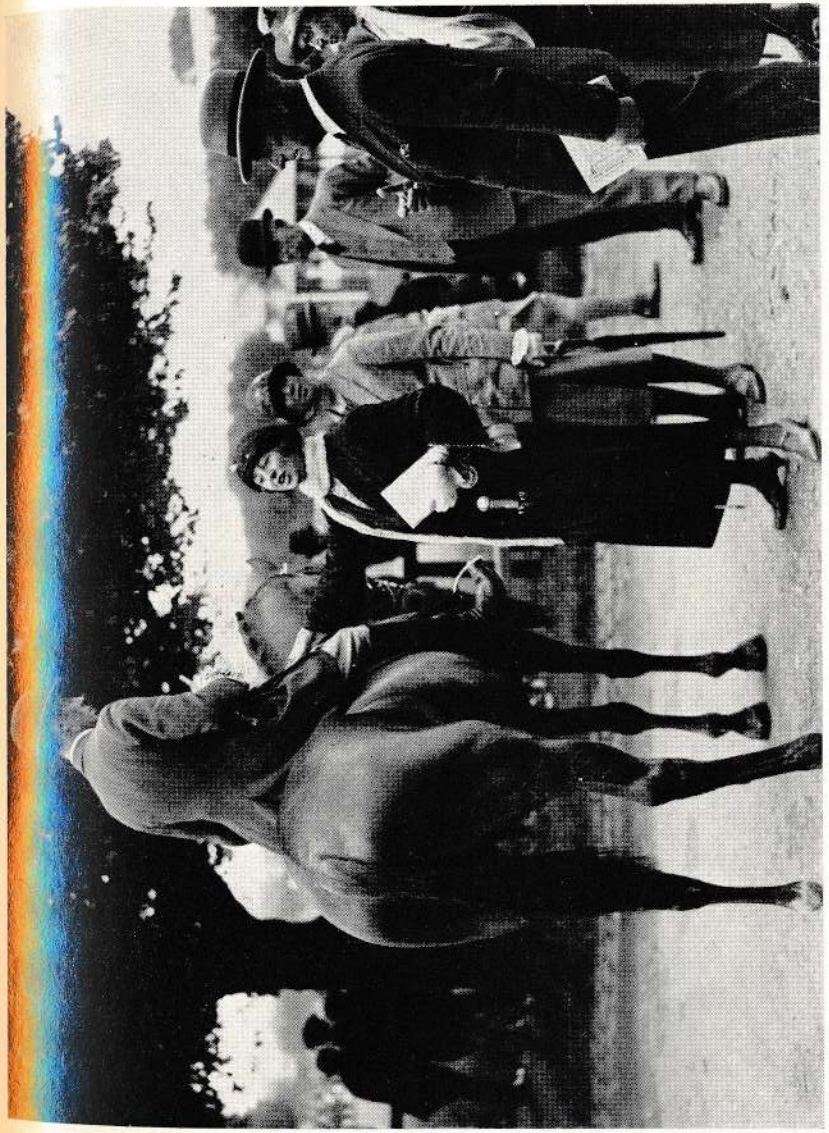
'Here she comes, dead on time. Don't go knocking that nice mare up now, Howard. There's a hoof pick under the seat. Don't get her home hot—surely I needn't emphasise. And you won't forget the ewes and the bullocks? Watch for a ewe on her back; there's thunder about. Goodbye then.'

Curate's Gorse is a big covert and a beauty. No sign of neglect there. I did not see a fox, but I could smell them everywhere, and the jays had been chattering as I drove down the lane and hitched the mare. The bullocks looked magnificent. It was easy to get stock to *do* there. The ewes were a lot of old girls, broken-mouthed. Either they were a batch he'd bought cheap on spec, or he was thinking of getting out of sheep.

As my father had told me, the house at Hoveringham was pleasant and substantial. I drove straight into the carriage yard and a boy took the mare and promised to rub her down and get her a feed. I left when I'd seen her stale. Mother was in the garden with, wonder of wonders, old W. Key, still a walking (or snoozing) advertisement for herb beer. It looked like the same barrow, too. That was a good start, and Mother was friendly, almost affectionate, but when she asked after Father and I said he was lonely she gave a snort and became huffy. She said she was thankful to be away from Hickling, and then I felt we were not getting on. I ate lunch with them, she and a governess from Derby and three of the youngest children. As at Hickling, the food was extra good, and I asked in consequence what had become of Mrs Murgatroyd.

'She's here, in the kitchen.'

And when I went to her, there she sat at the scrubbed



Dublin Horse Show. Constance, Duchess of Westminster, J. H. Marshall and 'Philipino', winner of the class for five year olds bred in Ireland (*by kind permission of Mrs C. M. Marshall*)

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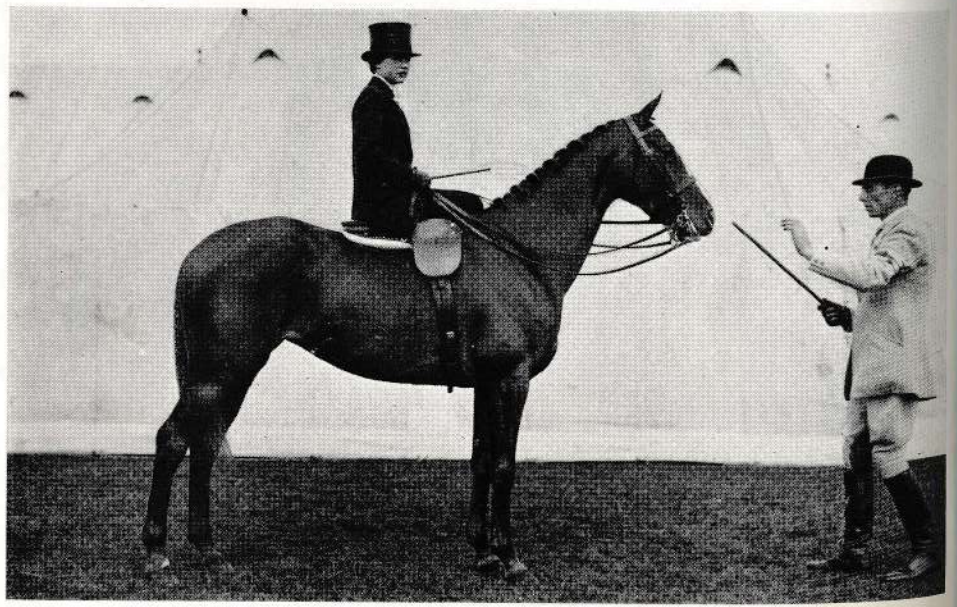
J. H. Marshall on 'The Sheik' at Olympia in 1927
(by kind permission of Lady Mary Grosvenor)

Lord Hindlip's daughter, the Hon. Diana Allsopp, on the chestnut mare entered for the Balmanno Cup *(by kind permission of Mrs C. M. Marshall)*



deal table, and she was eating jugged hare just like the rest of us, but she'd put a yellow mountain of mustard on the edge of the plate and, as in the old days, was conveying neat mustard to her mouth on the point of her knife. *There* I had a welcome! She flung her arms around me and I hugged and kissed her and she cried in a hiccuping kind of way. She had not a single grey hair, and looked just the same. When I told her so she said, just as she always had done, 'Cooking seems to suit me then,' and gave her highest neigh of a laugh. 'I'll never truly like it here, not like Hickling, Mr Howard,' she said. 'You mustn't forget me, now, when you come home from America with a fortune and take over from Mr Marshall at Hickling. I'll come and cook for you and your lady, no matter who else in the world wants me to.'

That was a pleasant picture. But I did not see how I was going to get rich with Godfrey. Hard work and low pay was the motto there.

I had forgotten what it meant to me, that landscape of strongly fenced pastures, tight coverts, numerous brooks and vistas of canal, the narrow roads with their wide verges, the huge stacks of hay and corn.

That night, leaving a thank-you note for my father on his desk piled with unpaid bills, I caught the London express, and in the morning I was there for breakfast with Jim and Molly, grilled kidneys and watercress over the shop. I had managed to get a Hickling Stilton for them from Miss Munks, Mrs Doubleday's grand-daughter. They still kept red cows and a proper old-fashioned dairy in their little farm by Home Field.

The shop was now only the nucleus of Jim and Molly's business. They had a tea-garden running down to the Thames, and a share in the hotel alongside the garden. They owned two houseboats on the river, and rented them to Army officers.

'What's got into Jim?' I asked Molly as I helped with the washing up.

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'Everything he touches turns to gold. And he'll hardly do anything bar work. He says it exciting. It's not like the Jim I married, somehow.'

'How's The Weazel?'

'Oh, he's sold,' Molly said with a giggle. 'Jim takes the papers round in a motor now.'

'Good grief!'

'And it's always breaking down, and you know the hills we have in Richmond. I don't think it's safe. But he won't listen, and it's true we've increased the round no end since he took to motor delivery.'

'Cachet, that's what it is,' Jim explained incomprehensibly. 'I've got this de Dion Bouton you see, How, for delivering. And then I've got a big Minerva. We hire him out, with shover. Weddings and such like. Soon as I find another going reasonable, a fine big comfy one, I'll have two, and another shover part time.'

I looked after the shop that morning while Jim went on his rounds in the French car, which shook as though it had the palsy. The shop had not greatly changed, except that there were two metal tubs holding ice-cream provided by Mr Luigi, the Italian down the street. I had a good many children and fresh-faced nannies as customers. After lunch Jim drove me across Richmond Park to Combe Warren. The branch I had jumped on the star polo pony had long since been cleared, but the remembrance of my rides across the park made me feel superior toward the de Dion Bouton. Haliburton came instantly out to take my bags when we drew up under the portico, and I could see that *he* was impressed.

My Tautz clothes had been delivered from London, and were excellent. Sceptre's wind was not yet what I would call clear, though it had improved. The mare had muscled up well, and taken a splendid bloom. Her mane and tail were perfection, and she had developed a sense of theatre. A show hack has to be an actress. . . . Those Preeces were artists with horses.

At the back of the stable block in the poultry houses Ambrose had 'stabled' a collection of fighting cocks which he had procured with difficulty in Yorkshire. I was to deliver them in New York to Mr Chipchase, who was Mr Judge Moore's manager of show hackneys. Then there was a kennel of dogs, chiefly foxhounds and Jack Russell terriers. In the horse line I had no fewer than twenty-five polo ponies and thirty enormous Percherons. Then there was an assignment of Jersey cows and heifers, and three Jersey bulls. I enjoyed that trip. There was plenty to do, and the Percherons proved to be delightful companions, considerate and genial.

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'Don't hold the train for me. I'll catch the next one. . . . Now young Marshall, you're just my man. Here's my quandary. I've got two hundred remount men enlisted and travelling to Woolwich tomorrow to draw their kit and then over to France. They're first-class men on the job, all from good stables. But they're wild as hawks. I must find somebody to take charge of them. You're the very man.'

'I'm just back this minute from America and haven't been home for years. My father should be outside in the trap, waiting for me.'

'He is. I'm coming with you and the three of us will settle things right away. If I know Sam Marshall he's not going to interfere when you have this chance.'

He was sitting in the trap behind the skewbald mare. They both looked older, and the trap was less well turned out than it would have been a few years earlier. His voice was deeper and stronger than either of ours, though, and I saw he was glad to have me home. We talked it all over until finally, tired and dispirited, I said I would leave it to my father to decide.

'Now then, Howard,' he said, 'you'll not forgive yourself or me if this war ends by Christmas and you haven't even had a go. Also it seems to me, and Captain Harris swears it is, a good opening for you. You'll be away on a tearing scent and right on his brush, leading two hundred good blokes down to London.'

It was his choice once more, and so I only had one night with him in a house echoing with emptiness. He had remembered my liking for walnuts, and put a bag of them with my bits of luggage for the London trip. We drank a cherry brandy in the hall before he drove me to Melton.

Our detachment formed up at the Bell and I headed it as the town band led us to the station. The crowd yelled its faith in us, bandy-legged crew that we were, and pressed gifts on us. Most of the gifts were made of glass with corks in them. I had a few minutes alone with my father at the

station and then I poked myself away from the others in a first-class carriage. At Leicester a small man came up the train to find me, asked if I had anything to read, and gave me the *Sporting Life*. 'Make me your adjutant, Mr Marshall,' he suggested. 'I'll do you proud. I was three years at Chantilly and can *parlez-vous* a treat.' He gave me to understand that things were hectic farther down the train. Bottles were sailing from the windows, all empties. When we reached St Pancras and the doors were opened my detachment literally fell out, though most of them got to their feet and walked about shaking hands with everyone. The would-be adjutant stood beside me waving in the breeze; a black bottle poked out of his greatcoat pocket and a cheroot stuck out of his mouth.

A police superintendent walked up and asked me coolly, 'You the gentleman in charge of this little lot?'

'I'm supposed to be, I regret to say, until I can report them in at Woolwich.'

'If I were you, sir, I'd take that cab to Charing Cross, then a train to Woolwich and make your own number there. I have a dozen 'buses round the corner. I'll very soon have those jokers packed into them and on their way.'

Deeply grateful, I left my wild charges in his capable hands. They all arrived safely, for which, unjustly, I got credit with the authorities.

At Woolwich they threw kit at us and just about everything else besides. They didn't like us, but they couldn't get the better of us. Most of our Melton lot had, like myself, had a fair taste of Army life and methods, and each of us had forgotten more about horses than anybody at Woolwich would be likely to know. In a surprisingly short time we seemed to have made ourselves comfortable and had acquired or assumed a kind of discipline. There happened to be a tent-pegging competition and, picking myself out a handy polo pony sort that would go a good straight gallop, I won the thing without difficulty. This cemented my position as leader of the contingent, and I was entered as

to come first, and then the men, and last of all oneself. And I had learned a thousand other things as well. Often when I had met the Major merely in the course of duty I felt that I had drunk from his calm, balanced wisdom as though from a spring. I only want to emphasise what kind of a man he was. I know that there were some who thought him a sybarite. But I understand that the Buddha did not despise creature comforts. For the rest of a long, long life I was to remember Major A. B. Mayne, and thank God that our ways had crossed, and that he was so patient with me, the Major I mean, not God. . . . As well as taking over the A.H.C. I undertook on behalf of the Deputy Director of Remounts to accept every artillery horse that was unfit for service, to give a replacement out of my company, and to endeavour to make the rejects fit for work again. It was a wearing job, and on the whole it was an unhappy time for me. The wastage in horses was frightful. I used to wake in my tent or billet with the taste of death in my mouth and the smell of corruption or pus about me. However, there were simple rewards.

Frequently I would get a reject that I could cure quite easily of whatever caused him to misbehave or miss work. Not seldom it was something as simple to put right as a saddle gall, an aching tooth, or an ill-fitting shoe. Then I would get attached to the patient, and conjure excuses to prevent him going back too soon to the mud and the shells.

One of the serious ailments common on the Western Front was a kind of opthalmia that clouded a horse's eye and made him blind, or nearly blind, rather similar to New-Forest eye in a cow. Hundreds, thousands perhaps, of good animals were destroyed because they had caught this disease, and were sold as meat to the French. My friend Scott-Nimmo the vet fixed me up some eye-ointment, and I managed to cure a fair number with it, some of them quickly.

I had a pleasant and hardy pair of Irish draught-horses to pull my company water-cart, a mare and a gelding. They

did me well through all the cold, the mud, the flies, the dust, the blood, the guns, and they seemed so intelligent that I would not have been surprised if they had been able to write their names, which were Molly and Dick.

Poor Molly caught the damned opthalmia in both eyes, but as she was always under my observation and I had plenty of Scott-Nimmo's ointment, I had hopes of curing her. She was happy in her work because Dick could see for both and they only worked as a pair.

Whenever I got the chance I used to turn my working horses loose to graze a bit (if there was any grass) and to forget their harness. I had turned out Dick and Molly above our camp, on a little hill behind Mont St Eloi. They were nibbling at whatever fragile grass remained among the diggings of the disused trenches. The gelding found his way over the trenches and semi-bogs and through the horribly rusted barbed wire to some better grass on the other side. He whinnied back to the mare. She went to his call, but stood on the edge of the first trench, half unwilling, half unable because of her eye trouble, to get across to him. He kept whinnying, and then he came all the way back, still talking to her. At last he was beside her again, and he pushed her legs one by one with his soft nose, gently guiding her down into the trench, and along it, and up over the other side, and through the bog and the entanglements, and so, finally, to the precious green grass.

When he had got her there I sat for a long, long time on the upturned canister (I expect it had held poison gas), wondering if I would ever again see anything so touching, so noble, no matter how long I lived.

* * *

In 1916 my father died, alone and unhappy. Very soon after his death Sam, who had been wounded in France, was invalided out. But he could not save or arrest the dispersal of Hickling, the house and the land, to pay off creditors. It

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was my father that mattered to me. Of course I loved Hickling, but I loved him more, and I miss him today, when I have far outlived him. He was only fifty-six, and I wonder if he understood how deeply he would be missed by many, especially me.

* * *

That year in the square of Arras there was a casting parade of artillery horses. Colonel F. S. Kennedy-Shaw, Deputy Divisional Inspector of Remounts, and a few others were there to look them over. As we moved down the line I noticed a bay mare standing only fourteen hands three inches and aged about six. Overshadowed by two immense Shires, she looked pathetic but game. I read the label attached to her headcollar:

DANGEROUS
UNRIDEABLE
RECOMMEND DESTRUCTION

Her death sentence was signed by a colonel of artillery.

Corporal Wren followed me, according to my instructions, with a hunting saddle and bridle over one arm.

'See if you can put that lot on her,' I whispered to him, pointing at the mare. 'Gently now. Take your time over it.'

Presently he came along with her. She led quietly. There and then I got on her and started off over the cobbles of that grey and historic place in the drizzle that so often falls in the Pas de Calais. At that time only the odd building had been demolished by the war. The cafés were open. Soon I was cantering back, her shoes hitting sparks.

As I dismounted I hissed at Wren, 'We don't go without this one. Get it?'

'Yessir.'

I tore the label off her headcollar and shoved it, crumpled, into my pocket. Then I began to pick our first twenty-five horses. We had a lead horse with a breast collar and a strad stick across his backside so that the traces did not gall him.

From the strad a ten-fathom boat rope went back to another steady horse with breeching and a strad stick in front. By keeping the rope taut and attaching horses on either side of it, two men could take on twenty-five horses or more.

'It's the big 'uns we want,' Colonel Kennedy-Shaw said. 'Runts like that mare you rode, Mr. Marshall, should go to the abattoir to make soup for the French.'

I made no reply, but catching Corporal Wren's eye, I gave him a brides-in-the-bath look. And when I got back to our lines near Mont St Eloi I found her picketed with the crowd and looking happy with a nice bit of sweet hay and oats in her poor tummy. Good bloke, Wren, you could trust him with your sweetheart.

From that day I rode her in my work and she got fit immediately as those horses do that are always keen and eager to please you. She *was* keen, to the point of being hot, and a little beyond, but there was no vice in her, not a hint. It was not long before I thought to find what sort of a lep she had in her, and when I had tried her the once I sent for that wily Caledonian sportsman, Jock Scott-Nimmo, the horse vet.

'Howard, you're a genius,' he said when he had watched her disdainfully sail a triple bar and the paddock gates and then do the same in reverse order. 'She's no racehorse of course, but she's a top-class fizzer of a jumping mare. A flipping flea. I doubt there's a mare in France to beat her over a course. We keep her right under our hats. Agreed? No more showing off on her, now.'

So, when one of my farriers who came from Newmarket went home on a leave unexpectedly accelerated by me, he carried specimen shoes, and he brought back jumping shoes into which studs could be screwed as required. He travelled back to France with some of the Irish Division. They were returning from a freshener period in God's country, and were immensely proud of the horses they had found over there. As soon as they had settled into their quarters at Hazebrouck, near Dunkirk, it was announced in Orders

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daring to stop, until we hove up at Sandy Gilmour's farm near St Neots in Bedfordshire. Sandy had been in France with me under Major Mayne and with him the horses had their one comfortable night of the whole journey.

We went on next morning, the weather getting harder and colder. Frost and ice slowed us. When we got snow on the road we went better. It took us three more days, each with its difficulties, to reach Dick Black's place at Frisby-on-the-Reach, where the horses were to winter out. I had nearly lost all three when we struck a patch of black ice near Huntingdon. Both led horses went down at once, and how the shaft horse kept his feet I don't know. Fortunately no leg damage, but the mare cut her head on the back of the cart as she struggled up. The wound bled into her eyes and made her, for once, reluctant to get on. Dick drove me to Melton station after breakfast. I had no heart to look at Hickling now that there were no Marshalls there. The country round Melton and the Black family's cheerful talk of the cubhunting wrung my heart and made me feel very much on my own, a jackal howling outside the walls. There had been nothing my father did, whether buying or selling horses or general farming, that I could not do. I had believed since my mother left Hickling that sooner or later I would take over and run the place with him and for him, and go hunting with him, the pair of us as equals and friends, father and son. Why could he not have waited for me?

Hickling had gone in the War, and so had Richmond. Combe Warren, at one side of the park, was empty. It had always seemed possible that Ambrose Preece would retire or move elsewhere, but I would have bet a hundred pounds to a shilling that the end of the War would find Jim Dawkins owning quite a slice of Richmond. What had he done, though, but got himself into the Army again. In September 1917, when I was in England on short leave, I had gone to see them. The shop front still declared, Mr and Mrs F. J. Dawkins, Newsagents and Tobacconists, Sweets and

Toys, Minerals and Ice Cream. But Molly, poor dear, was all in black, Jim had got himself killed on June 7th of that year in Lord Haig's attack on the Messines-Wytschaete ridge. He was a sergeant in the Machine Gun Corps when he copped it. Molly produced the Military Medal he'd won at Mametz Wood the year before. All through the War the shop and its corollaries had made money, especially the car-hire business and the tea garden. After Jim's death Molly married again, very rightly I think. Her third husband was a builder in Herne Bay, and before she went down there to live she sold off all Jim's strange developments in Richmond. Many's the time I think of him, and wish he were here.

* * *

When I had wound up my unit in France I was appointed to command a horse transport company at Colchester, and very soon I was able to get the jumping mare down from Melton. I sold the other two horses up there. Elder Statesman went for a really good price to a friend near Market Harborough who hunted him and then raced him locally with some success. The horse's name was changed and he ran in the 1921 National, but came down at The Chair and damaged a tendon. A good sort. He got us out of London that time, anyway. The other gelding I let go to the Hickling baker for a hundred pounds. He drew the cart for donkey's years, never sick nor sorry. I should have got two hundred pounds for him, but deals at a distance are always tricky, and sentiment came into it. As for the mare, I took her on the strength as my own charger under the Army order that allowed one horse per officer if that horse did military duties. She had been named—badly, I fear—Little Lady.

Soon motor lorries took over our garrison transport at Colchester. I presented myself at the War Office.

'A trustworthy and experienced officer is needed to wind up a horse transport company at Crowborough, Captain Marshall.'

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Another Swedish officer had joined Count von Rosen. They did some reckoning with a gold pencil in a crocodile-bound notebook. Presently he came back at me.

'Eight 'underd, ten.'

'That will do me,' I said, thinking that indeed it would, for a mare I had bought for seventeen pounds and had won a packet on in France.

He made one stipulation. Nothing about a vet. Merely that I was to take her to the East India Docks with the Swedish horses and see her safely on the ship for Gothenberg. Then I was to return to the De Vere Hotel, Kensington, where they were staying.

You may think I was greedy in the price I asked. Well, a gunner friend of mine, Squeaker Morrison, had an invitation to take his good horse Carintho to jump in Rome,and some Eyeties had bid eight hundred pounds for the horse.

'Did you win anything down there then?' I asked when he had got back to London and was telling me of the offer.

'Not a thing. He was terrible, right off form.'

'And you didn't clinch! You'd easily have bought two others just as good as Carintho for that money.'

Squeaker shrugged his houlders. He liked the game, and usually was fond of having a deal. I was mystified, and made up my mind I would behave differently should I ever be lucky enough to be in his situation.

When the Swedish string left Olympia I squeezed myself and the mare safely in among them. At the top of Haymarket (that was the route we took) our cavalcade was held up and I managed to hail a prowling taxi. He pulled his flag down and tailed us to dockland. The keen mare gave me something to think about when, in the East End, the urchins threw orange peel and other missiles at us all. She tucked herself into her box on the ship happily enough.

In Kensington I was given my cheque and a warm welcome by the compatriots of that celebrated horseman, Gustavus Adolphus. Von Rosen, I learned, was Master of the Horse

to the King of Sweden, so the jumping mare was going up in the world, as she deserved. He insisted on taking me to the farewell dinner given for the foreign competitors by the Earl of Lonsdale.

It was a splendid affair in the Pillar Hall, most perfectly organised, like everything in which his lordship had a hand. He was more of a miracle than a man and of course he never forgot a face. When the speeches had broken covert he had me on my feet, playfully accusing me of gatecrashing. Me gatecrashing! I went hot and cold. That's one misdemeanour I am incapable of committing. Nobody was ever better than Lord Lonsdale at being either rude or charming. When he was playful with you it was like being in a small cage with a big panther, I should think. What the deuce did he want me to say? Did he know I'd sold my mare? There was little he didn't know.

I told them my breast pocket was securely buttoned and pinned as well. I declared that the slip of paper with a Swedish signature in that pocket gave me as much of a glow as did the company of all those equestrian geniuses from foreign lands, and as did his lordship's presence and his princely hospitality. The end of the dinner was almost rowdy. Lord Lonsdale came through the noise, obviously making straight for me. I thought I was in for the dickens of a wigging.

'I have not seen you since your father's death,' he said gently. 'We all miss him. We breed few men now of the stamp of Sam Marshall of Hickling. . . . If that mare had been a hand higher I'd have bought her myself. A very taking mare. By the way, you wanted to sell her? I thought so, or you would not be Sam's son. But I told Rosen he'd have to go high to get her.'

My room in the Kensington Palace Hotel seemed a lonely place when eventually I got back to it, though I had made one of the best sales of my life, had immensely enjoyed the whole day, and was happy about the mare's destination.

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'Don't you do anything so daft, sir,' Beeby answered at once. 'They're sticking to him. You stick to them. In the end he'll go, and he'll go fast and straight.'

In another quarter of an hour out he came stealing, the same dog fox, and all five of us quiet as poachers, our breath hanging round our wet faces. We let him well away.

'What did I ruddy well tell you, sir?' Beeby hissed at the Prince. 'Now you'll probably gallop after him all the way to Ranksborough and get home to bed envying not a commoner in the land.' He let out his screeching halloa.

Welsh was hunting hounds. He jumped out of the wood, skating on the roots as the Prince had done. 'Which way, Mr Beeby, where'd he go?' Toot, toot, the horn. Hounds bunched, then launched themselves into an avenue of scent and screamed away. We followed, the five of us.

* * *

By mid-January our wonderful trade in horses was easing up, and I was grounded through lack of mounts more often than I liked. At that time the Quorn had their second meet at Willoughby Lodge, a mile south of Widmerpool. It was a raw, cold-scenting day, with too harsh an east wind to promise sport. Welsh drew the near coverts blank, Green Hill and Flint Hill, and then as I saw hounds crossing the Nottingham-Melton and Leicester-Newark roads I knew they were going to draw our old covert, Curate's Gorse. Now Curate's has the railway just west of it, and although it sits on a west-dropping slope, we never thought it a good draw in east wind. Well, he drew carefully through it three times without a whimper, then lifted them and hacked on to Parson's Thorns, where they at once stirred a fox that ran to Holme Pierrepont, nearly in Nottingham, and we had a good afternoon hunt, too. But the Curate's Gorse business stuck in my gullet. I knew that England had changed and cheapened, and it hurt me as it did many others. But the

changes, the lessening of standards, in that unimpressive clump of trees and undergrowth just below the Melton-Nottingham turnpike, hurt me more than anything. I think it was the next Saturday the Belvoir met at Eaton Grange. We spent much of the earlier part of the day in the woodlands along Harby Hill, Brock Hill, Hazeltongue Lodge, Holwell Mouth, and Bleak Hill. We had our second horses when in the afternoon the south-west wind abated and grew suddenly warmer. It felt like business when they went to draw Clawson Thorns. They had a fox afoot in no time and after a ringing hunt, in which we twice crossed the canal and twice the Smite, he tried to take refuge in Sherbrooke's. At least I was spared seeing that covert drawn blank. He was pushed through it. We jumped the Smite yet again and leaving Hickling slightly on our right we galloped across what had once been my father's fields and fences, up and over Hickling Standard and killed him on the slope from Kinoulton as he struggled to reach Kinoulton Gorse. It had been a fast hunt. Not many were up at the finish, and the field was straggled all over the place. I turned my horse away from the rest of them and lit my pipe as I walked him down the Kinoulton-Hickling road, that being the direct route for Melton. Not a field, not a ditch of that strong vale that I did not know by heart. I thought of my old man in his high-crowned hats with his ducks and his horses and his sometimes extravagant ways. And of course I reflected bitterly on my own situation. I longed for my father; for the flagged kitchen with its sizzling joints of beef; for the velvet gloom of the hall, with its sounds of life elsewhere, on either side of the green baize door; for the chilly boys' bedroom over the coach-house, even for my brothers' teasing and bullying.

'What's wrong, Howard?' Mr Beeby asked. He had cantered up behind me on the grass verge. (I knew quite well why he was on the verge. He rode a well-known hunter he had sold to Lord Ivor Churchill. Lord Ivor, ill in London, had asked us to keep his string, and especially this one, his

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favourite, fit pending his recovery. It was the best hunter, a star, and the most awful hack in the Midlands. It would dodge and prop all the way along a flat road and was fully capable of falling down and breaking its knees. Lord Ivor always had it led or boxed to the meet.) 'I've seldom seen you go better, Howard,' Mr Beeby went on. 'But when we get back you must have some Gregory's Powder, you must really. You look ill, my friend, green in fact.'

I wanted to tell him about the turmoil of bitterness that was in me. Instead I blurted out uncouthly, 'I think I'll go south and work in the Blackmore Vale for a time. That man Stanley Young seems to get hold of good horses. There could surely be a lot of trade between the West Country and the Melton area.'

'Take your time about it,' he said in a serious voice. 'Ah, we're in Hickling. 'Tis that has turned you, I see. Well, whatever happens, this grand old hunting country will be good enough for me. You're your own master. I wish you'd stay. Sleep on it. And meanwhile. . . . You never rode this 'oss, did you? *Such a hunter*! Just let me change with you.' He looked with approval at the nice little horse I was on. It was one of his own, of course, and had been bought for two hundred guineas in the Eglinton country, and sold that day to Mr and Mrs Farmer, a delightful American couple well known in the Shires, for three hundred and fifty. He had carried me well, and was still full of go. So was Lord Ivor's quad, but as his stud groom said to me once about that particular animal, 'He could cross any country in England with the best, but if you set him to jog down the Mall from Admiralty Arch to Buck House he wouldn't know whether he was jogging on his feet, his nose, or his knees.'

I pushed my horse up alongside Lord Ivor's horror, adjusted my leathers to Mr Beeby's length, and slid to the ground on the off side. He lightly swung himself from one saddle to the other, gave a feel at his new mount's mouth, and, with a wink and a touch of his leg, he left me.

'Well, good-night, Howard. Eight miles to Melton,' he called over his shoulder.

'I'm feeling low, I'm very depressed,' I said to Lord Ivor's hunter. 'But nothing on earth would induce me to ride *you* on this or any other road.'

We started to walk, me leading, he stumbling over his toes, and then we had company. It was an American lady, Mrs Perkins, on one of her hunters from Maryland, a pretty brown mare, absolutely cooked, hardly fit to go another step.

'Slide off,' I called to her, hurrying to release her small foot and help her down. I loosened the girths and pulled the mare on the wide grass verge ridged with cattle steppings. Several cars had now appeared with grooms in them, looking for their employers. Mrs Perkins said her own man had taken home her first horse two hours earlier.

'I'll soon get you a lift to Melton in one of those cars,' I said. 'Come back immediately in your own car with your groom. Make sure that he brings a bottle of Day, Son & Hewitt's pick-me-up for your mare, as well as a rug and roller, and *two* sets of kneecaps.'

In half an hour the lady was back in her car with her tough-looking groom. We gave the mare her drench. She was reviving quickly. The kneecaps were buckled on both horses and I put the groom up on Lord Ivor's mighty hunter. He wasn't an American, and he wasn't a local either, or he'd have known that horse's reputation.

'Just drop your ridden horse at Mr Beeby's yard,' I told the groom as I settled myself in Mrs Perkins's car and drew the fur rug over my knees.

When I'd changed out of my hunting clothes I strolled round to Beeby's. Mr Vincent, the stud groom, came popping out.

'I thought those were your fairy footsteps on the sets,' he said. 'Now clear off, Captain Marshall. We don't want any trouble round here.'

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'What d'you mean, trouble?'

'That bloke of Mrs Perkins that brought in Lord Ivor's gelding. I don't know how many times he tumbled with him. He's got a sore leg and a sore nose and a split boot, and he's very, very angry with you. I should go straight back to the Bell and enjoy your dinner and keep off the streets tonight.'

I did enjoy my dinner and while doing so decided to finish out the season and then try to work again on my own. I liked everything about my life under Beeby except for these aspects of it: we were too near Hickling for my peace of mind, and I did not get any selling to do. I was surprised how much I seemed to miss that, the financial side of horse dealing.

* * *

Before I leave Mr Harry Beeby I must tell you about his poker lesson.

He never did much showing, but he made an annual trip to London when Olympia was on. All his usual and potential clients were there, and if you're in business it's unwise to let people forget your face and voice.

I was riding many show hacks and hunters when they gave him his poker lesson. Tring Show was held in the middle of the Olympia session, and a few of us riders would occasionally dodge a class or two at the major show in order to pick up a prize at the smaller one. That evening I got back rather late from Tring. They told me at the Olympia doors that Mr Beeby was looking for me everywhere. I found him in the stables.

'Howard my lad. I'm due at Mrs Whitburn's do in Portland Place. Take these numbers and ride my two jumpers, will you. They'll be on soon. No bother?'

'I've just come through Portland Place in a cab,' I said, 'and the awning and red carpet are out at Mrs Whitburn's. Royalty expected, shouldn't be surprised.'

'Don't rub it in. I must change, I suppose.' He left, muttering that such entertainments were not for him.

Although we knew Mrs Whitburn quite well at Melton, it seemed a different matter when, as a hostess, she was queening it in her London mansion.

The doors flew open. A competitor came out. I remembered that in a matter of minutes I'd be in the ring on one of Beeby's jumpers. Through the entrance I could see some of the obstacles. It didn't look to be a straight jumping event, but one for 'handy hunters'. I slipped round the corner to the competitors' box to watch one go. He was a poor entrant, and he was eliminated before the last test, a big park gate whose posts were let into the ground. The gate was supposed (had I but known) to be opened by the competitor and then latched behind him. I was tired, however, after an extra long day with little time for food, and I wasn't concentrating. I merely made a mental note that the gate *looked* on the high side, but no doubt, thought I, that was an optical illusion. The rest of the course was a bit of jam. I hurried back to the stables.

My first mount was a nice sort of lady's horse, well put together and with manners. In I went, enjoying myself, popped into the lane, turned along it, popped out left-handed and over a treble, straight back in over two small fences, right turn and out through a rail which had to be lowered and then put back, over two hurdles, turn and thread my way quietly through them. The little horse was easy, and we had done very well. Now there was only the park gate to contend with. I took him back to the very end of the ring. The gate was in the middle distance. It struck me from there too. Whew! What a whopper to be set in a handy-hunter course! It would have been outsize in a puissance. I set Beeby's horse at it for all he was worth, and as we picked up speed I half-saw, half-sensed the house rising to us, heard the growing rumble of intense interest. He met the top rail with his arms above the knees, and turned the most fantastic aerial somersault. Any time I remember that normally happy Olympia arena I think of the angry rattle

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in in front of them and went on. They were all behind me, and that was the place for them. How he strode out! He was the Emperor after Austerlitz, he was the band of the Royal Scots Greys, he was a mackerel sky scudding before the westerlies over Bantry Bay, he was magnificent. We had the best of judges, Major Cantrell-Hubbersty of Raglan Hall, and by jingo! we were going well. He had eyes for none but us. The front was the place for a mettled youngster like him. He'd have fretted himself hot elsewhere. We cantered. We galloped. Shades of Sam Marshall of Hickling, how we tore round that ring! 'Easy boy, easy there, see, I give you your rein. You can have your head, my lad, it belongs to you, and the judge has called us in.'

'Now then, Marshall, I saw that bit of a performance behind the stand. Between ourselves, what did it mean?'

'There's nothing at all the matter with him. He'd got a piece of wheat straw no bigger than my thumbnail under his saddle and, you'd hardly credit it, it was driving him nuts.'

'Will he carry me? Is he quiet now?'

'He will, he is, I guarantee it.'

'God help you if he isn't.'

He had a ripping good ride and when he came back he said, 'Marshall, you stop there. *Don't move.*' And he put them all below us. Some of them were annoyed at it, but none of their mounts could hold a candle to him for looks, presence, and style, once he had simmered down. What appealed to me about him, and it was typical of a Farman animal, was that he looked a proper workmanlike, hard horse, ready to win a steeplechase or to charge at Balaclava. Baroness Burton's Farman was by Velocity, who won the Cambridgeshire, and of course he was put to many a top-class hunter mare because the Meynell was, and is to this day, a rich country of good dairy farmers, of brewers, and of established landed gentry.

Not long after, and not by accident either, I went exercising from Tutbury and negotiated the long slope to Castlehays, a

tall red-brick house standing two miles up its own private road with a great range of farmsteading to one side of it. Open to the winds of nature, with views for miles nearly all round, it was a proper Wuthering Heights in bad weather and, to my mind, a paradise in good. As I drew near the buildings I came on a man ploughing behind a pair of heavy horses. The share grunted as the mould board turned the heavy, waxy soil with round pebbles in it and the field was coming up a teapot-brown sort of colour. Strong land. I'd have asked him where the boss was; then, to my surprise, I saw that it was Mr Major himself. He'd be thirty-one years old then, neatly put together, and with the expression and quiet manners of the Englishman who is neither from the south nor the north, but nearer the north in spirit. He showed no sign of stopping the plough just because I'd appeared, so leaving my horse standing at the edge of the field, I walked up the furrow with him.

'Why not tie him up?' he asked curiously.

'Because I've trained him to stand untied.'

He looked hard at the horse. 'Well, he has a leg in each corner,' he said in disparagement.

'How many more of those young Farman horses have you got on the farm?'

'A few, why?'

'I'd like to have the handling of them.'

'They *take* handling. How d'you make your living?'

'Breaking, making, and selling horses.'

'Is that the way of it? If you asked me the most difficult way to earn money I'd say that was it.'

'Oh, money. I never have any of *that* stuff.'

'That makes two of us then.'

'When could I have a squint at your youngsters?'

'Not today. I'm ploughing and I won't finish the headland till dark or later. Tomorrow's Sunday. I should get back to the house by midday. Come half past twelve and I can give you a bite to eat. Simple fare. I'm a bachelor.'

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'So am I. . . .' I waited for a bit, listening to the slow surge of the heavy horses laying into their collars. 'I've got to leave the Dog & Partridge soon. They need my room. So I won't be around much longer.'

He said nothing, concentrating on his ploughing.

When I got inside the house it was even bigger than it looked from a distance, a solid pile, the King's property. My host was a tenant of the Duchy of Lancaster. His father and mother had been well-known farmers in Cheshire. They had taken Castlehays for their son, had left him to make the best he could of it on his own, and had themselves moved to yet another farm, on Epsom Downs. . . . There were boxes and buildings galore at Castlehays and he had numerous horses that needed working. He had not the time required for the job. It was enough to make one's mouth water, but I sized him up and kept mum. He was not the sort that any man could push. After lunch, excellent fare and plenty of it, prepared by Mrs Farrell, his housekeeper, we moved to the sitting room, where we sat before the fire, smoking our pipes. I was thinking that I should not outstay my welcome, when suddenly he spoke.

'Would you like to hang up your hat?'

Just like that. I was almost too taken aback to answer. It seemed too good to be true. That wonderful great place, all the room in the world, a bustling farm and one's forage right on the spot. . . . I said yes, and it was one of the best yesses of my life.

I went to lunch and stayed three years.

We fitted together like lock and key. I was able to have my own furniture, some of it from Hickling, around me. I was a lot older than he, and that made it easier. There was never, that either of us can recall, a harsh word between us.

On the nights before hunting I'd plait up both horses in the stables a few yards from the front of the house, and then go into the kitchen where the pair of us would pull all our tack to bits and clean it thoroughly and our boots and clothes

until both we and our horses were completely ready for the morrow's sport. The Meynell was, and I believe still is, a splendid country to ride over, but hunt followers were rather more carefully organised than usual, to avoid giving umbrage to the farmers over whose land we rode. It was the practice of the Field Master to hold us on any road that ran parallel to the track of hounds, and not far from it, to one side or the other. That was where I ran into trouble. I was there to sell horses or to show how effective my schooling might be. On such occasions I found it more than flesh and blood could bear, to stick to the road. Ted was ploughing one hunting day when hounds ran towards Castlehays, and he saw the whole field bottled on a small road while fifty yards off the line of the road I was coming towards him on his own Farman horse, jumping something like twenty perfect (and quite easy) fences. After that I received a severe wigging from one of the Joints, Sir Ian Walker, and Ted also was told that if he could not keep me in better order, and teach me some hunting manners, he had better get rid of me. He did no such thing, and incidentally that little foray clinched a deal, and we sold the horse.

When Ted was working on his farm, and by Jove he was a worker! He would scarce lift his head when the hunt passed, let alone jump on a horse or into a car and follow. Yet when he was out hunting he was hunting, and if hounds ran over his own farm he would not stop even if there should be a crisis.

He was a warrior of the hunting field, the sort who was full-stretch all day from the meet until they said, 'Good night, gentlemen.' He was determined to be in what he called the first eleven, in other words the first flight. He would come home in the evening, happy, and his voice would be gone and his horse cooked. You never saw such a fellow for love of foxhunting. His coat was all scarred and his breeches and boots and hat. I said when I first stayed at Castlehays, 'By Heaven! Here's a coat's been in an argument with a bullfinch.' But it was always the same, and if he bought a new

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Back at Castlehays, I saw Ted Major's Cubitt being pulled to pieces, and the wheels being scrubbed inside and out.

'Hullo, is there a girl, then?' I asked him.

'I'm off to Cheshire tomorrow,' he admitted, shuffling his feet. 'I hope to be spliced within a year.'

'You're dashed cocksure. Is washing the car supposed to help?'

'I certainly hope so.'

He was so modest, so good-hearted, and so serious that I had no doubt of his success, should he have chosen wisely, and I truly believe I hoped he would succeed, if that was what he wanted, even though that would undoubtedly mean another shift for me. By then I had stayed with Ted for two years, and there was quite a spell yet to go.

He came back smiling all over his face, engaged to Miss Joan Eardley. Her people were farmers, and she was a charming, good-looking, and efficient young woman. I've always noticed that a farmer is only as good as his wife, and it was clear that in his choice Ted had chosen prosperity and, with any luck, happiness. I heard from him only the other day, and he said he was sending a turkey for Christmas, and that they'd reared a thousand turkeys on the farm as a sideline. Funny what a wife can do to change a man. When I lived at Castlehays the only kind of fowl he'd allow near the place was a dead one for the table.

Whether getting engaged had made him think of matrimony for me as well, I don't know, but suddenly one evening he announced, 'I've taken tickets for the Meynell Hunt Ball in the Grand Hotel, Derby, next week. My cousin Muriel Bates is driving over from Cheshire for it, and I count on you, as a dancing man, to come. It's a must.'

There were a lot of rich people in the Meynell. If they put on a show it was always well done, and that Hunt Ball was no exception. He had told me his cousin was very pretty, and he had not exaggerated. She was also small, light on her feet, and an exceptional dancer. When she and I got going

on that floor we danced until breakfast. . . . I did not see her again for nine years, and then I married her.

I have to end this description of my time in the Meynell country pretty well as I began it, with the splendid-looking Farman horse that bucked Ted off at Rangemore. When you jumped that one he often bucked like the dickens and he did it on landing which was, many thought, an unfair trick. To cure him I carried a little wicker bottle full of water. As he landed (and bucked) I just dotted him one between the ears, sprinkled some water in his eye, and scolded him. We thought I had him cured. Time and again I rode him, with and without the wicker bottle in my hand, and he never bucked. Ted rode him, jumped him in cold blood and with company; no bucks. So we sold him to some Meynell people called Boyd. They were good customers and we let him go for three hundred pounds, which certainly was not overdear. A week later he was bounced back at us. Bucking.

I worked and worked on him. Why did he buck? Surely I could find a cure? Ah. what a ride! You would never get to the bottom of him. Then he was so cunning. He was an actor. He would lay his nose in my two hands and look dreamily into my eyes. I rode him without a single buck. I asked him to buck. I took him out on the downs where all horses got over-excited. I walked him downhill in a cold wind, his coat staring, his rein lying on his neck. Would he? No.

'Let him go back to them,' I said to Ted. 'There's no sign of a buck in him. I can't make him buck.'

'I don't trust him,' he said.

In my heart I agreed with him. 'I'd take him back today,' I said. 'Only it's such a filthy morning. I suppose I'll just have to ride him out exercise.'

'Watch yourself, Howard.' He finished his breakfast and got up, stretching. 'It's too horrible outside to do any good on the farm. I'm going to have the morning at my accounts. See you lunchtime.'

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The Rose-Bowl

'WHAT *shall* we do with all these show horses when we get them home?' Lord Stavordale enquired of me and of the mellowing afternoon.

I was riding for His Lordship at Windsor in July 1939, and had been so busy about my duties that I was at first puzzled by the question. He knew he could trust the horses to Mr Ball, his stud groom.

'There's to be war,' he said. 'Within the week we shall be at it against Germany, us and France.' He handed me a dry biscuit and a glass of champagne. We were standing at the open boot of his car. His face was very sad; it was a young face, and gentle. There was not a more delightful owner to work for in all England. He was very tall, and had the languid stoop that was fashionable in the beautiful London of the 1920s. His voice, slow, unforced, had that tenuous lingering cadence that I, coming from the harsh north, always found so attractive. He was dressed in London-season light clothing, while I was booted and spurred, black coat, tall hat. Tendrils of Havana smoke hung round us in the sunshine. Nestling in my pocket alongside my old pipe was a new gold lighter from Dunhill's in Duke Street, a present from a grateful owner. His Lordship wore a waxy, heavy-scented gardenia in his buttonhole. It was browning at the edges, as gardenias will. Bursting bubbles in the champagne tickled my nose. 'We going to win this class?' he asked.

' 'Fraid not, my lord. Jack Gittens has that extra good

galloper in, and Captain Wickhouse-Boynton dearly loves one that can fly. Although ours is a mare with potential, Gittens will scorch us with his gallop. And he knows it.'

So it proved. I walked back to Lord Stavordale.

'She went well for you,' he said, 'and she's a taking mare, but he was right to stand us second. Well, that's the last of the very last show.' He closed the boot of his car with a clonk. 'I shan't be here tomorrow. I've a horse, Flickermouse, in the three o'clock at Salisbury and we think he could just about win. It's a bumper's race, though, and you never know with them, do you?'

While I was in the ring on the mare I had seen Geoffrey Brooke's daughter, Mrs Lloyd-Thomas, among the onlookers and she had waved to me. Her husband, an equerry to Edward, Prince of Wales, had been killed race-riding. I wanted to see her, and soon I found her, and learned that she had been looking for me.

'They say it's to be war, Captain Marshall.'

'Yes, they all do.'

'I want your advice, and if possible your help.' She spoke of a batch of exceptional young horses she had recently bought in Ireland.

'Don't let 'em come over,' I said. 'They'll be better off in Ireland than here.'

'It's too late. They've already made the crossing, and they'll be turned out at my place near Shrivenham when I leave this show. I shall desperately need some expert help with them, and if you could possibly come up and look after them I'd be eternally grateful. Can we exchange addresses?'

'The general isn't here today?' I asked.

'You mean daddy? No, he's in London today, at the War House. They're still living in Malmesbury House in the Close at Salisbury. He won't get back there till tomorrow. You can imagine what sort of a stew he's in.'

'Stew?'

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'Yes, of course. Job-hunting. He'd come out of the Army, and now he's finding it awfully hard to get back in.'

'That's my problem too,' I said. 'I'm fifty, but fit. There must be a place for everyone in such a war as we're going to have. That's why I had hoped to see your father. I was his soldier-groom when we were both in the early twenties. I thought he might help me get back in, if it's only firing a gun.'

'A lot of his old cronies are after him, and he can't even get a fighting job for himself.' she said. 'But I'm sure he'll do his very best for you, Captain Marshall.' She sounded remarkably, I would not say insincere, but unconvincing. 'And don't forget,' she added as we parted, 'if your entry to the Army is delayed, come to Shrivenham and give me a hand with those six young ones. They'll all want careful breaking.'

Back at the horse lines, I asked Mr Ball about Flickermouse. 'Oh by Jove!' he said, 'I wish I could get a fiver on him, Captain Marshall. But as you know I must stop here tomorrow with three horses in the parade. So no Salisbury for me, worse luck.'

'Lord Stavordale's talk of war has knocked the wind out of my sails,' I said. 'I don't see any worthwhile rides coming my way tomorrow, so I'll push off for Salisbury in the morning, and I'll lay your fiver for you if you wish.'

'Here you are then,' said he, pulling out his wallet and abstracting a large white note.

It was unusual for me to decide to go betting. I expect I was really going to Salisbury because the Brookes lived there, and if I wanted to bet it was because the thought of a War in which I as yet had no part to play was unsettling.

Flickermouse took the eye in the paddock. I got thirty pounds to five pounds on him twice, just as the amateur jockeys were mounting. Lord Stavordale's horse ran game enough, and was beaten a short head, so goodbye your fiver, Mr Ball. I wished I'd had the sense to stop at Windsor where

I belonged, and where I pretty well knew what was going to beat what. A farmer friend from near Sherborne, Mr Greenham, a racing man, came up to me.

'Now then, now then, Captain Lugubrious. What's done can soon be undone, as I can prove.' He held the card for the next race under my nose, covering one number with his thumbnail. 'You'll get it all back and more on this one if you make haste. Nettleweed, Steve Donoghue's Nettleweed, *and it's tens.*'

I hurried to the place where Dutton and the others stood silent. 'Hundred pounds to ten pounds Nettleweed,' I said, and I was on. Just then a sudden rush of punters caused them to close their books with a unanimous snap. Nettleweed won easily, and the valuable Mr Greenham came back at me with, he swore it, an even better proposition.

'Play it all on Musical Queen if Carslake has the ride. Otherwise don't touch it.'

Carslake rode her to a good win, and by the time I had bought my farmer saviour a drink and paid my expenses I went to the car park nine hundred and ninety pounds richer than when I arrived. Not that I thought of buying myself a better car than my little Ford. If ever I had any money it went on horseflesh. I would rather sell a horse any day than have a successful bet. Nor would I wish to moralise about betting. I just never could afford it, worse luck.

Dear little race course, Salisbury, especially when the sun shines. I always had a soft spot for that place.

It seemed only good manners not to barge in on the Brookes. I parked at the County Hotel in Salisbury, and telephoned. The General himself answered.

'Marshall! Where the devil are you?' he barked in his old impersonal way. 'Come right round, and I'll give you a drink. Hurry now. I've got a Territorials' meeting at seven-thirty.'

I walked towards the Cathedral, and in the jeweller's shop near the corner I recognised a second-hand silver

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rose-bowl that was being offered for sale at thirty pounds. It was the bowl I had won at Lord Harrington's point-to-point in 1903. No doubt of it at all, because there, bang in the middle, was engraved the badge of the South Notts Hussars. Nor was there anything more than coincidence in its presence in that window. I never could bear having anything about me that was not properly kept, and when I set up half a house at Gillingham I got tired of seeing my silver trophies in the office because they were nearly always tarnished. So I sold them to a Sherborne dealer, thinking I'd seen the last of them.

I stood blinking at the rose-bowl through the plate-glass window, remembering Lord Harrington's white whiskers, Danny Maher's slender hands, the foaling box with the one-eyed mare in it and the damp little black foal, and my father bidding me leave it and go to bed.

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