

BLACKOUT BRIGHTLIGHTS



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NEVER SEE HIM
IN THIS BLACKOUT

00
AH!
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IS—I CAN
TELL BY HIS
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WASHED
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WEEK-END RIDES A Country Road, a Chestnut and a Bay



FRANKIE and Johnnie were easy to catch on Sunday; it wasn't raining for one thing; and the 20 miles on Saturday had taken the edge off their flippancy for another. Their coats began to shine under the brushes as we groomed them in the sun; Frankie ate his carrot whole, with a boyish-looking bulge in his cheek; Johnnie, against my better judgment, insisted on chumping off bit by bit in my hand.

But there, no sooner in the saddle, no sooner headed inland than I found myself riding, not Johnnie, but the dancer, Jasinsky. The grooming had made the curve of the neck smooth and shining as an old and well-polished mahogany table. The sun shone out of an Auckland blue sky scalloped with clouds so white and pillow-like you felt, as an American serviceman once said to me, you could put up your arms and grab them; the roads were soft and silent after yesterday's rain, the grass more sharply green than ever. Under that sun and against that green Frankie shone golden and Johnnie nut-brown; the Major looked at Johnnie and I looked at Frankie, and you wouldn't have heard any words of complaint from either of us.

* * *

BY now, after Saturday's ride, I had almost given my heart, boots and all, to Jasinsky. But the turning of the scales came with the crossing of the bridge. The notice at the top of the track down to the beach at Howick said **PEDESTRIANS ONLY**. That obviously covered the horses, and if the worst happened (a traffic officer, for instance), we could get off and become pedestrians with them. Slither, slither, down we went; Frankie decided he didn't like the going, too steep, too wet, too dark and woodsy, too everything. So I invited Jasinsky to take the lead, and he did, quivering, snuffing, ears back and forth most busily. We turned a corner and saw the little bridge, a railing either side for the hands and close planks below for the feet. Ingenuity and patience would get a bicycle across. No. Jasinsky was pretty definite about the bridge. He took a poor view of the affair altogether, but the bridge was just quite definitely not to be considered or faced. A snort, a cavort, for punctuation.

I got off and said to that beautiful face: "You can trust me. Will you follow me?" A gentle sigh was all the answer I had. But he followed me across, trembling a little. Maybe he doesn't measure up to Shakespeare's standards—not so many horses do:

Round-hoofed, short-jointed, fetlocks
shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head, and
nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs, and
passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock,
tender hide.

But Jasinsky trusted me, I him. And Frankie trusted him, too. Where Johnnie could go, Frankie could follow after. And the grass on the other side of the bridge looked good to Frankie, who never, never misses the chance of a fleeting bite. Give him the chance, and he will crop as he goes, missing his lower lip by a whisker as he walks. If Frankie were a boy and you sent him for the bread, he'd bring it home with a mouse-hole picked out of the crumbly end. But then, who wouldn't?

* * *

ROUND the beach at Howick at full tide, the pattern of the green water whitened at the edge, and far away or nearer the islands in a dazzle of sunshine, green and brown under a patch of blue sky; and the Major paused and sighed for his schooldays by the sea in England. And I paused and sighed for the distance it was across that sea. And Jasinsky paused and sighed, perhaps for the wings of Pegasus. And Frankie paused and sighed for the grass which was only just over there, see? But, hard on Frankie, we went on up the hill. An empty section here, a sloping paddock there set our tongues going on the old familiar topics—grazing rents, bus services, acreage. . . . A sad thing, to live in the city, love the country too much and not quite enough, and ride through it on a sharp, clear, sunshiny day on the first Sunday of summer.

Even North Otago in November does not look as green as the Howick country does now. A soft, continuing green under the rain; and a green broken with sudden colour under the sun. This weekend the may was full of blossom. . . . miles and miles of fences lace-edging the undulating patchwork of paddocks, market-gardens, orchards and farmyards. Isn't it a bit like England, less tidy, but something like it? I asked.

"Could easily be part of Wiltshire," the Major said. "Very easily. The hedges more neat, the patchwork more regular, smaller fields perhaps; yes, Wiltshire."

* * *

A MILE and a-half of side-road hedged with may heavily scented with the scent of nuts. And for half a mile on one side the may hedge matted with rambler rose, pink as tea rose, more brilliant than briar, filling the air with bees and sweetness. The road was metalled in reddish stone; in a paddock on one side a white bull carrying a chain by the ring in his nose wasn't interested; on the other side, walking to music on a thousand white daisies, a yearling grey filly with beautiful knees, followed us, tail up, head tossing. Frankie swung onwards, Jasinsky danced onwards on the side of the road, clipping off the heads of brilliant buttercups, bruising wild mint to give a tang to the air, ringing a bell from an occasional stone, and so home into the sun on a summer's afternoon.

—J.

Poster Competition

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Each entry should bear an identifying name (not being the name of the competitor), and be forwarded together with a sealed envelope bearing the identifying name, and enclosing competitor's name and address.

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