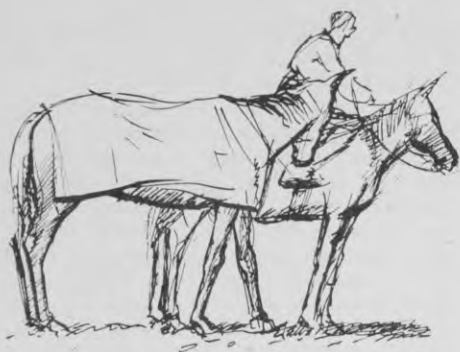




Before six o'clock in the morning. November springtime; it's cold, and racing men seem worse than fishermen for their most un-Christian like hours of starting their day. In the car on the way to the course we passed three of the horses walking with long, easy strides, no jiggle-joggle. They didn't even look sleepy. Stooge and Ray, shouting and laughing and singing, seemed as cheerful as the red glow of sun to the east. They waved. But Royal Victor, Silvio, and Gigli didn't even turn a head, dip a forelock, or roll an eyeball: you'd think at least they'd say some sort of good morning to the boss. They were warm in their rugs.

Rufus jiggled, toes dancing, eyes flashing as Stooge tried once, twice, three times to back him into the stall at the course. In he goes; he's not satisfied until he's smacked the back wall with a flying hoof. For which bad manners his soft warm nose is tapped firmly with the back of Stooge's hand. We can't have that sort of thing. Nose twitching, Rufus decides to be good. Off comes his rug, the girth of his saddle is tightened, the stirrup leathers adjusted. In the next stall is Silvio; Ted is anxiously feeling a near foreleg for heat. That leg had been giving trouble, training had had to be advanced carefully, there was still chance of more serious trouble.

Royal Victor and Silvio were to work together—Stooge on Rufus, Ray on Froggy. They were led dancing from the stalls, head high, tails held, shining brighter than the morning. Instructions were given to the lads: keep abreast, no following each other for the forming of

bad raceday habits; half a round to warm up trained muscles, a round of half-pace, a half at full—"and full pace doesn't mean a canter; ride him Stooge; no need for a threshing, but use your stick." The lads yes-bossed and no-bossed.

Tuesday before Saturday; Saturday at a country meeting with races to be run. A horse train on Thursday left only this morning and Wednesday for final work-outs. They're working on the plough, the inner track which is used for training to preserve the grass course proper from the ripping, tearing, and biting of those flashing steel feet. First half slowly, dirt flying; second round faster, dirt flying faster. We stand close to the rail. Eyes tight to that bunch; stop-watches set.

They burst into full gallop. It was the difference of still water caught by wind into flying dashing spray; a fire kicked into showers of sparks. Faster into pounding speed. Neck to neck, riders crouched, like paper parcels, they raced round the back turn. Stopwatches ticked. Into the entrance to the straight. Another furlong, faster for . . .

Then it happened. There were shouts. Ray, rider of Silvio, pitched forward, like an athlete sent floundering by a push. Silvio, with legs splayed, was staggering over the track. Royal Victor galloped on. On past us, but we weren't watching. Something had happened to Silvio. Ray had slipped from the saddle to the ground. His horse was on three legs, wildly waving the fourth. We ran down the track.

