

Joy gasped as the bookmaker handed her fifty-one pound notes in return for her winning ticket. With this as well as the prize money, it had certainly been a good day financially.

When she went down to the horse stalls to make sure Dreamer had pulled up well after the race, Jim Travers was standing in earnest conversation with a short, dapper man who was scowling as he rocked back and forth on his heels while speaking. His voice carried and Joy could not help but overhear his words as she approached.

"I tell you Travers, it's the end for me," he was saying, "I just can't afford to keep her any more, much as I'd like to. Business is bad at the moment, and now the wife has to have this flippin' operation that's going to cost me an arm and a leg. I was a bloody fool to think I could find the money by punting, and now I'm in deeper than ever. No, Bonnie Doon has to go, and quickly. D'you reckon you can find me a buyer?"

Travers frowned. "I'll try, but it's a shame you have to let her go. She has plenty of ability, but I'm afraid you won't get a good price if you're in a hurry." He paused before continuing. "However, if you're sure, I have a couple of owners who might be interested..." Travers broke off as he looked up and saw Joy. "Leave it with me, I'll be in touch," he said abruptly as he stepped forward to greet her.

"Ah, Mrs. Cavanagh, come to see your star, have you?" he asked Joy, all smiles as his companion walked off, obviously in no mood to stay and make polite conversation.

"Yes, is she all right?"

"Good as gold. Come and see for yourself."

Travers led the way to Dreamer's stall. She was standing quietly inside, but tossed her head and neighed as they approached.

Joy examined her carefully, happy to see she had taken no harm from her big effort, then turned to Travers, stroking Dreamer's muzzle as she spoke.

"Well, it's been a big day. You've done a wonderful job with her, and I'm looking forward to Gay Lass going into training as soon as the foal is weaned. I hope she'll be able to perform as well as this."

"Ah, looking forward to more winners, I see."

"Indeed I am. Apart from being such a thrill for me personally, it's good business for the stud."

"It is that. As Joy's Dream is still so young, I don't want to race her too much this season. We'll maybe give her a couple of more starts, see how she goes, and then spell her for a while." He looked at Joy reflectively. "Would you be interested in buying another filly? She's a three-year-old who's already won two races and shows a lot of promise. She has good blood lines, she'll make a good brood mare when the time comes, and I think I can get her for you at a good price."

Joy turned his words over in her mind. Was this the horse they had been discussing when she arrived? If so, the owner was anxious to sell and he would probably take what he could get for her. "A three-year-old, you say. Would I have heard of her?"

"I'll tell you her name, but if you decide not to go ahead, can I ask you not to repeat it?"

"Of course."

"She's called Bonnie Doon, and if you watch the racing results regularly you would have heard of her."

So it was the same horse they'd been discussing! It would make good sense to have another horse that was already in training. Especially if she could be bought cheaply.

"Are you training her now?"

"Yes."

"And you'd keep her on?"

"Yes. Would you like to see her?"

“Yes, I would.”

“Come on then. She’s down in the far stalls.”

Joy gave Dreamer a final rub to the ears and fell in step with Travers as he moved off.

“She hasn’t raced since last season,” he continued as they walked toward the far end of the row, “and I spelled her after her last win. She’s back in training now and I brought her along today to re-acquaint her with the bustle of race days. She’s entered in a race next month.”

“And you think she has a chance?”

“I do.” They reached the furthest stall and Travers went in and untied the horse inside and led her out. “Here she is.”

Joy ran her eyes over the filly and liked what she saw. A bay filly with a touch of white on her nose, she looked at Joy with bright, intelligent eyes as she tossed her head and stamped a hoof. She had a deep chest and solid hindquarters, and long straight legs.

Joy stepped up to her and patted her neck. Talking softly to her, she ran her hands along her back, then down each leg, picking up each hoof one at a time to check it carefully, then stood back and appraised her again. She had the right confirmation to be a winner, and, perhaps more importantly, a good temperament to go with it. Joy walked right around her, taking note that Bonnie Doon stood quite calmly throughout the inspection. Then she stood back again. Did she have that certain quality that made a winner? Did she have the will to win, the competitive spirit that kept a horse striving to be first past the post? The heart that would make her give that extra push to win? Only watching her race could tell that.

“I’m offering her to you first,” Travers told her, “because you came along just at that moment, and I think she’d suit you, but I do have another owner who’s asked me to look out for a good buy for him. I’m pretty sure she’s just what he’s after, almost certain to win more races, and good lines for breeding. I’ll be seeing him after the next race, when I’m saddling up his horse, so I need to know now what your thoughts are.”

“How much are they asking for her?”

He named a figure that was almost the same as what she had won today with the prize money and her winning bet, and which she knew was below market value. What would David think if she went ahead and bought her? Well, he might know more about bloodlines and such things but she knew horses. And she had learnt a lot about what goes into making a winner since those days at Ascot, when Grandfather had introduced her to the races, and she had a good feeling about Bonnie Doon. She made a sudden decision.

“I’ll take her.”

David was furious with her. “What do you mean, you’ve bought a horse?”

“Just that. I’ve bought a horse. A racehorse to be more precise. Bonnie Doon, a filly, three years old, who’s already won two races and who’s ready to win again. With good bloodlines and who’ll make a first rate brood mare when the time comes, and will be an asset to the business. And she was going for a very good price.”

“You must be mad. We’ve had no discussions about buying another horse. We’re breeders, not buyers. We need to plan these things.”

“But David, I had to make a snap decision. It was pure chance I happened to be there at just the moment she became available.” She told him about the conversation she had overheard. “And Travers was going to see someone else, so I had to decide then and there. Besides, the money I won on Dreamer and the prize money will pay for her.”

“I see.” He drew himself up stiffly. “Well, it’s your money. And Redwoods is your property, after all. You can do what you like with it.”

“You know it’s not like that at all. We’re partners, remember? And I know she’ll be an asset. Travers thinks she can win more races, and if she does it’s more prestige for the

stud, without having to wait for years. It's just good business." Joy swallowed against a tremor of apprehension. "I knew you'd be surprised, but I thought you'd be pleased."

David scowled. "Hmph. Let's just hope she lives up to your expectations."

And Joy knew it would be not only the horse that would be on trial when Bonnie Doon raced, but herself as well.

David refused to have anything to do with the matter, so later that afternoon Joy put her signature to the papers assigning Bonnie Doon to the Redwoods Stud, and confirmed she was happy with the future racing programme that Travers had mapped out for the filly. She was due to have her first start, back from a spell, in three weeks time.

"Now then," Travers told her, "there's also a race on that day that will suit Joy's Dream perfectly, so I think they'll both be racing on the same day. That'll be a bit of excitement for you, won't it?"

Joy was excited, but the atmosphere in the house over the next weeks dimmed her eagerness as David spent long hours working apart from her, and was studiously polite to her when they were together.

However, they all gathered again for the races at Randwick on the designated day. When Joy's Dream won her race they all shared in the triumph and David hugged her, his face glowing.

Joy was as tightly strung as a piano wire, with anticipation and anxiety, as the time for Bonnie Doon's race approached. She went off by herself and sat on a seat under the shade of a jacaranda tree, fanning herself and taking deep breaths to calm the fluttering inside her, lest she make a spectacle of herself by throwing up. When it was time to watch Bonnie Doon saddle up Joy couldn't find David anywhere, and it took all her self-control to go to the parade ring, alone, and pretend she wasn't worried.

When the Redwoods colours flashed past the post in first place she felt a rush of adrenalin course through her body and shouted in triumph, but when she turned to David, he had turned his back to her. As Joy stood watching him accept the plaudits from those around him she felt as if he'd slapped her. Kitty pulled her into the little knot gathered around, making her feel part of the group, and she accepted the congratulations showered on her, and was able to force herself to smile.

Rufe praised her for her acumen in buying a winner, and David put his arm around her shoulders then.

"Yes, she is a clever girl, isn't she?" he agreed.

And once more Joy felt like throwing up, but she took a deep breath, and accepted a glass of champagne instead, and the afternoon ended with them all drinking champagne and toasting the future success of the Redwoods colours.