

H O R S E S

A Play in One Act

by

Robert Graves

1939

Dramatis Personae.

Horses: Lily: a black Riding-Mare.
 Blundell Sands: A chestnut Racehorse.
 The Favourite: A dapple-grey Race-Horse.
 Cripplegate: A brown three-legged Race-horse.

People: Anna: A girl.
 Hippo: A racing-man.
 Bill: A stable -man.
 The Favourite's Owner.
 Jockey.
 (Lead with trumpet.
 Two Stable-boys.
 Page boy.

Rats: Mother Rat.
 Three little Rats.

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A stable ~~box~~ with eight loose boxes, numbered from left to right, illuminated by a hanging-lamp over box 6 and one almost in the wings over Box 1. Above the cribs runs a beam right across the back of the scene, broad enough for walking on. Between boxes 2 and 3 there is a space, filled with hay; hanging saddles and riding boots; a corn bin, a medicine chest. All boxes are open, with the doors caught back, except boxes 5 and 6. ^{From} In the far right hand corner the bandy legs of a sleeping stableman, Bill, protrude. He is lying on a heap of straw. Two horses look over the tops of boxes 5 and 6. In Box 6 is Blundell Sands, a tall nervous chestnut with a white blaze; in 5 is Lily, a black cob with a kind face. Other objects in the stable include a weighing-machine and water buckets. There is a heap of hay in Box 7.

Lily:

Horse?

Blundell Sands:

Umph?

Lily:

Not asleep yet, horse?

B.S.:

Not a wink. But look at that stableman fellow! He's been asleep for hours. And they pay him to keep awake and guard me. Its scandalous.

Lily:

What's your name, horse? It seems so awkward, just to call you 'horse'.

B.S.:

My name? Blundell Sands is the name I race under.

Lily:

What do they call you in your own stable?
Well —
Sandy, if you must know.

B.S.:

Lily:

I like 'Sandy'. Blundell Sands is a place, isn't it? Where you foaled there?

B.S.:

No. (Pause). It's where my owner, the Duke, first met his Duchess, if you must know. What's your racing name?

Lily:

I'm not in your profession. I'm a riding pony — for hacking and a little hunting. I'm Lily: I belong to a girl with pig-tails called Anna.

B.S. crossly:

But why Lily? Lilies aren't black.

Lily, quietly:

I am.

B.S., more crossly: Yes, but you aren't a Lily.

Lily:

I didn't say I was. I said that I was black. I am.

B.S.:

Well? I didn't deny that.

Lily:

And I'm Lily, that's all.

B.S.:

You make me tired.

Lily:

Let's both go to sleep. I'm tired too.

B.S.:

That's all very well.... O, look here, Lily — I'm sorry I was so cross. I'm in such a nervous state to-night. That long train journey here and....

Lily:

^{Yes —} And the Race to-morrow. I know. That's why they put you in here with me — to have someone to talk to if you couldn't sleep.

B.S.:

I like black mares — they're so kind and so quiet. My mother was a black mare.... Tell me something, anything, to take my mind off that race, do, Lily!

Lily:

Well.... My little girl's little brother was given a tortoise yesterday for his birthday. And guess what he called it!

B.S.:

O, I hate guessing games. Must I guess?
And besides I never saw either your little
girl or your little girl's little brother
or your little girl's little brother's
tortoise.

Lily:

Well, if you won't guess I won't tell you.

B.S.:

I don't want to know. You're just making
me crosser than ever — how can I ever race
to-morrow? Scratches his neck nervously
against a post.

Lily:

O, do stop thinking about that race! It's
absurd. You know you'll win it. The
others haven't a chance. Bill over there
says they only have three legs apiece —
except the Favourite — and he's got four
legs but no heart.

B.S., pleased:

Yes, they're no earthly use, the others.
But I don't really feel that I can beat the
Favourite even on a good day — and if it
rains.... It's sure to rain before
morning. Snuffs. I can smell rain, I
think. When the track is wet I feel as
though I had cannon-balls glued to my
hoofs. Scratches against the post again.

Lily:

Nonsense. Now, forget it, and come out
for a little walk with me. Just up and
down. It will do you good. They come
out and walk slowly up and down. Blundell
Sands weighs himself on the weighing
machine and shakes his head gloomily
saying: "Lost nine pounds since yesterday."
Now listen! Every horse feels like you do
about a wet race-track. Horses aren't
cows with split hooves, especially made for

Lily:

mud. Of course it's harder to run for them in the wet. So don't worry. It's the same for all. You'll win. There's nothing wrong with your legs, is there? They stop to have a look at them. He shakes them, one by one. No, of course not. And listen again. I've seen the Favourite Gallop. He's fast in a way, but oh! such a trouble to his jockey! The least thing puts him out. He'll shy like mad at a little piece of silver paper, and run straight back to his stable to the starting post. If he's net out of sorts he stands and sighs and sulks just like a mother's darling. I bet he's not asleep yet — he's standing and listening for the sound of rain on the roof. And worrying his head off, and literally gnashing his teeth. Gnashing his teeth? I never heard a horse do that. They return to their loose boxes.

B.S.:

Lily:

Well, you see he was a crib-biter once. He used to bite large pieces of wood out of his hay-crib and gnaw them. The vet. said that this was giving him stomach ache. So they put him in a stainless steel stable with chromium fittings. He can't bite steel — now he just gnashes his teeth.

B.S.:

Lily:

Bursts out laughing. It's sad, not funny — like children at school with difficult sums who gnaw the tops of their pencils. They don't really enjoy it. Just as you don't really enjoy scratching yourself like that — You have

the itch, have you?

B.S.stops scratching for a moment, but has to resume.

B.S.:

Sometimes I don't even know I'm doing it. Sorry it worries you.

Lily:

It doesn't worry me exactly. But it's such a pity — you have such a nice glossy coat — you oughtn't to rub it away like that. B.S.stops scratching.

B.S., shyly:

Lily: I'm sorry I said that just now about not wanting to guess the tortoise's name. May I guess now?

Lily:

Yes.

B.S.:

Was it Shell-back?

Lily:

No.

B.S.:

(Pause). Horny-head?

Lily:

No.

B.S.:

I know.... Show-toes?

Lily:

No. Do you give up?

B.S.:

Yes.

Lily:

He called it Fluff.

B.S.:

Fluff?

Lily:

Yes.

B.S.:

F.L.U. double F?

Lily:

Correct.

B.S.:

But you said it was a tortoise.

Lily:

Yes, one of those yellow and brown tortoises you buy in the street off hand-barrows.

B.S.:

Then why in the world did he call it Fluff?

Lily:

He must have loved it, I suppose.

A little rat comes running along the beam and sings:

I had a little tortoise

And his name was Fluff,

I sent it to Whiteleys
 For a half-yard of stuff,
 But he bought ice-cream
 And an ermine muff --
 I never had a tortoise
 Who had sense enough.

S.B.:

O these rats -- they give me the jumps.

Lily:

Run home, little creature, or I'll call the cat.

Rat runs home.

Got to sleep now, Blundell Sands dear.
 There's several hours still to go. You'll win the race in a walk, you know, if you go to sleep now.

S.B.:

You really think I will?

Lily:

I know it. I promise you.

S.B.:

I do hate races. I do wish I hunted like you. I have an uncle down in Leicester-shire -- he hunts three times a week. Foxes, you know. I think sometimes of throwing up my career and joining him.

Lily:

Dear Sandy! They nuzzle noses.

S.B.:

Good night, Lily.

Lily:

Sleep well, Sandy.

Their heads disappear.

There is a pause, and a squeaking sound. Enter, left, the mother rat and three little ones. They run along the beam until they come to the space between boxes 2 and 3, they jump down on the hay, helping each other with their tails, then run towards the stableman.

Mother, as they go: Come, on, my little dears, keep in line, help one another, don't delay. There's a delicious pair of nicely greased leather gaiters on the floor in the saddle room.

All little rats: Does it taste good, Mother?

1st little rat: Does it taste as good as mouldy bread?

Mother: O far nicer.

2nd little rat: Does it taste as good as rotten eggs?

Mother: O far nicer.

3rd little rat: Does it taste as good as really dead rabbit?

Mother: Well.... almost. But it's better for your teeth.

She climbs over the sleeping stableman and they follow-my-leader through a rat-hole in the wall behind him and disappear. The stableman groans in his sleep.

Dawn.

Enter Anna, left, dancing anxiously from loose-box to loose-box; looking into buckets, the corn bin, the hay, the medicine chest, the boots, under the weighing machine. She wears a white jersey, tartan skirt, pig-tails, red hair ribbons, white socks, black shoes.

Anna: O my doll, my doll, my best doll — where can she be? I know I had her yesterday evening when I came in ~~with~~ my ride with Lily. Oh, I couldn't bear to lose her. I've had her all my life. I think I should die without her.

(pauses). Or is that really true? Anna, is that true?

(pauses). Perhaps not, after all, Anna.

Smiles a little, pauses. Still....

She looks into the hay in Box 7 and pulls out her hand with a scream.

Oh, oh! Who are you?

Thick sleepy voice from loose-box: Me. It's only me.

Anna: But I don't know your 'me'. Come out and let me see you.

There is a scuffle, yawns, grunts and out comes a very stout man with white-and-tan shoes, check baggy trousers and Norfolk jacket with large pearl buttons, a cricket belt and a large deer-stalker cap. He is dressing as he comes out, adjusting the belt and cap, pulling up his socks, straightening the huge diamond pin in his tie. ^{yellow} As he speaks to Anna he picks pieces of hay out of his clothes.

Anna stands back, her legs apart, and looks curiously at him.

Anna: I'm Anna. Who are you?

Hippo: Whatever they call me.

Anna: What do they call you?

Hippo: Names. Mostly bad ones. I'm not popular.

Anna: I'm sorry. What shall I call you?

Hippo: You? Looks at her narrowly. O you can call me Hippo.

Anna: Is that short for Hippopotamus?

Hippo: Where's Hippopotamus?

Anna: Do you mean "what's Hippopotamus?"

Hippo: No, stupid, I asked where.

Anna: O.... At the Zoo, isn't he?

Hippo: That's right. Go up top of the class.... Now, what may I have the pleasure of doing for you, my dear?

Anna: You can find my doll. She's lost.

Hippo: Certainly.

He goes over to the still sleeping stableman, lifts him up into a sitting posture, searches him, lets him fall again, searches the straw, puts his arm down the rat hole and pulls it in with a little squeak as if he'd been bitten. Then he goes through his own pockets and yanks out a variety of objects — two apples, a pair of braces, a musical box which begins to play and which he has difficulty in stopping, and finally from his hip-pocket a tall glass of beer which he drinks off.

Hippo: Sorry, my dear! I can't find her anywhere.

Anna: She was my best doll. If I lose her, I don't know what I'll do.

Hippo: Are you sure she's somewhere in this stable?

Anna: Yes. AND I BELIEVE YOU'VE STOLEN HER!

Hippo: Me?

Anna: Yes, you! I saw you looking in your pockets for her.

Hippo: Me? I wouldn't steal sixpence from a drunken man.

Anna: My doll's worth far more than sixpence. She's worth at least a million pounds.

Hippo: How many sixpences is that?

Anna: Six into twelve goes two, multiply by twenty, multiply by one million. Answer: forty million sixpences.

Hippo: You're top of the class already. Up you go into the next. He lifts her up playfully onto the gate of Blundell Sands' box. I don't believe there are forty million sixpences in the world — do you? It's a terrible lot of sixpences.

Anna: O yes. A million isn't so much really. It's only a hundred times a hundred times a hundred. And a hundred's nothing. It's only ten times ten.

Lily looks over the top of her box, gets one leg over, reaches forward and extracts the doll from the flap of Hippo's deerstalker cap with her teeth. She hands it to Anna, who thanks her, hugs her muzzle and gives her an apple which has rolled on the floor, after first polishing it on her skirt. Lily ginnies and disappears. Hippo pretends not to notice. He walks over to the weighing scales and weighs himself.

Hippo: Good Heavens! I've lost a stone.

Anna: Out of your nice tie-pin? Can I find it

for you?

Hippo:

No, not a stone from my pin. I mean fourteen pounds of ^{weight} ~~weight~~. Look!

Anna comes and looks, standing on the scales.

Hippo:

Ah, that's better. Now I've gained two stones.

Anna shows him the doll as they get off the scales together.

Anna:

Her eyes don't open and shut, you see. But they look at you.

Hippo:

That's nothing. A cat can look at a King. A King can look at a cat. A man can look at a glass of beer — mysterious-ly produces another glass and drinks it up — but that isn't worth forty million sixpences, nor half a million.

Anna:

But my doll is. (Pause). Hippo, what are you doing here in my father's stable?

Hippo:

Nothing.

Anna:

That's telling fibs. Don't tell fibs.

Hippo:

Well: nothing much.

Anna:

Well, what?

Hippo:

The fact is, my dear Anna; speaking to you as a woman of the world: I have a friend (or rather he's only a sort of a friend of a very sort of a friend of mine). And this bloke has bet a lot of money that a horse called Blundell Sands will win the Diamond Cup race to-morrow. Got that so far. Anna nods. So when this bloke (the sort of a friend of my very sort of a friend) hears that this Blundell Sands is worn out by his long train journey, and off his feed, and can't sleep and so forth — then he says to himself: "The Favourite will win after all, and I'll lose all +"

money I've bet."

Anna:

How much had he bet?

Hippo. counts on his fingers: Let me see. There was ten

thousand guineas, and one thousand pounds, and a monkey, and a pony — that's all.

I mean: all that. So he calls this very sort of friend of mine, who was his sort of friend. He says to him: "Alf, can you and I do business."

Alf says: "That's all right between sorts of friends."

So the bloke says: "Do you know a stout fellow who will nobble the Favourite? If you do, and he does that nobbling fair and square, so that Blundell Sands wins the race — (I expect you know, Anna, the other nags have only three legs apiece) — why, he says (this bloke says) your share of this little business is: the pony, the monkey, one thousand pounds and a little house in the country — that's very snug but a little damp. All that."

Anna:

And so you're the stout fellow?

Hippo sweeps off his deerstalker cap in a grand gesture and out drop dozens of sixpences.

Hippo:

Sixpences. I collect them.

The stableman Bill, who has red hair and a red face wakes up at the chink of money. Hippo is alarmed and after vainly trying to hide under the weighing-machine goes into the space between boxes 2 and 3 and hides under the hay. Anna hides with him.

Bill yawning and stretching: Long sleep I've had — long sleep and rum dreams.

He picks up a besom and begins to sweep the stable. He knocks at the door of number 6.

Bill:

Good morning, Sir. Time to get up, Sir.
Fine day for the race, Sir. Knocks at
number 5. Good morning, Miss. Nice
morning, Miss.

Lily's head appears, followed by Blundell Sands: B.S. yawns and
disappears. Suddenly Bill stops sweeping and looking down says:

Horses above! Look at 'em. About forty
million sixpences, more or less. It
wasn't a dream after all. I dreamed about
forty million sixpences. Someone said it.

Lily tilts her head ^{as if} in enquiry.

Bill:

Yes, I dreamed it rained forty million six-
pences and I picked 'em all up, as I do now;
and I ~~says to myself~~ put 'em all in my red
handkercher, as I do now; and I says to
myself, as I do now: "Bill, you're going
to bet this whole boiling on Blundell
Sands, to win the Diamond Cup." And then
off I goes to place my bet — as I do now!

Lily's head disappears. Bill is going out, but stops short at
the sight of Hippo's foot. ^{Jerks} ~~yanks~~ him out.

Bill:

Here, what are you doing here, you fat man
with the wrong sort of shoes?

Hippo:

Nothing, Mister. Nothing at all.

Bill:

Nothing at all?

Hippo:

Well, hardly anything at all.

Bill:

For instance?

Hippo:

Well, to be honest....

Bill:

You can't be honest, not with them clothes.
Tell the truth.

Hippo:

All right. Well, I was pondering ways and
means to nobble the Favourite. This
seemed a nice quiet place to do my
pondering.

Bill:

Sure you was only pondering?

- Hippo: Well, musing a little, and taking a little thought. Do you know Anna? Friend of mine. Pulls her out.
- Bill: Now, whatever are you doing in that hay, Miss Anna?
- Anna: O, just hide and seek, Bill.
- Bill: Are you helping him to nobble the Favourite, Miss Anna? Of course, if you are, that makes all the difference.
- Hippo: Of course she is — we're all friends here. Clever head on her shoulders, Miss Anna has, knows all about geography and mathematics and what not. Tell me, Anna, how exactly does one nobble? Here, have a pear drop before you answer. Sticky, but good.
- Anna: I'm not allowed to accept sweets from racing men. Mother said so particularly. Bill.... you tell him how to nobble — I've forgotten.
- Bill: I won't. It's against my conscience.
- Hippo: Then give me back my sixpences!
- Anna: Go on, Bill. Give them back! They're his.
- Hippo: Tell me, and you can keep them all.
- Bill, in a confidential whisper, shaking hands on the bargain:
- Well, if it is really the Favourite as you want to nobble, and not good old Blundell Sands here — well then maybe I'll give you a hint or two. First you picks the right stable, then you sneaks in, just the same as ^{you}sneaked in here — that's your secret how you done it — then you tiptoes up to the Favourite and you coughs gently. He turns round and puts his head over +

door, and there you are, you just nobbles him, when nobody's looking.

Hippo: O, I see! Thank you so much, much obliged, I'm sure. Er — by the way — what exactly do you nobble him with?

Bill: Well.... of course, that's deft to taste and choice and discretion and convenience, if you know what I mean. There's some use a hypodermic syringe (takes one out of the medicine cupboard) such as this here, filled with California Syrup of Figs; and there's some uses a lump of sugar with three drops on it of hydrochlorotoluentic-piwaxahide — you buys it at any good chemist at twopence a drop; and there's some, of course, uses hypnotism.

Hippo, to Anna: What's hypnotism, my dear?

Anna: Hypnotism? Well, it's a sort of magic. Suppose you want to make someone believe something that isn't true.

Hippo: You mean telling fibs? Cramming someone? That's easy.

Anna: No, not that. But suppose I want to make a man believe that he's a horse, when he's really a man — come here, Bill — now watch, Hippo! — I fix him with my eye like this — don't move, Bill! — and I make passes with my hands like this, slowly and slowly (goes on making passes) and at last I say to him solemnly like this: "Abracadabra, you're a horse!"

Bill reacts at once to the hypnotism, he goes down on all fours, whinnies, moves into loose-box 7 and is soon rubbing muzzles with Blundell Sands.

Anna: And he is. Isn't he? In a way, I m

Hippo:

Too right, he is. My dear Anna, go up to the very top of Standard One. It's a miracle, it's marvellous, it's lovely! What shall we make the Favourite be? A snail?

Anna:

No, a crab.

Hippo:

But crabs run fast. I've seen them at Blackpool on the beach. I've seen crabs that would beat a lot of horses I've seen.

Anna:

Yes, but they run sideways. The Favourite will never reach the winning post, not running sideways.

Hippo:

You're right. You're right as usual. You're always dead right. Come along quick and we'll do it.

Hurries her out, right. She breaks free and runs back. Lily and Blundell Sands have both reappeared. She gives them sugar in her palm, and then a lump to Bill. He sweeps it into his mouth with his tongue. Magnified noise of crunching.

Anna :

Good horse, poor old fellow, then! Like Sugar? Opens the gate for him. Time for your morning gallop, Bill. Cut you come, old boy.

He comes out prancing and exit left, followed by Anna.

A pause.

Mother Rat and her three little ones re-enter out of the rat-hole. The little rats are noticeably fatter,

Mother Rat:

Now, children, keep in file, and help one another over the stile. We're all going to the pond to wash our faces.

Little rat:

O need we, Mother? The water's so cold at the pond.

Mother Rat:

Your whiskers are greasy.

Little Rat:

I like them greasy, Mother.

Mother Rat:

I don't.

Little Rat:

I'll lick them clean, Mother.

Mother Rat:

Don't argue, child. To the pond!

They climb up by each ^{one or} other's tails, the way they climbed down before.

Song:

Now then children, keep in file,
 Help one another over the stile!
 One little rat in a velvet hat
 His whisker's sticky with bacon fat,
 Another little rat in little rubber shoes
 His whiskers sticky with tomato juice,
 Another little rat, in scarlet and white
 His whiskers sticky with Turkish delight
 Over the stile and the rail and the pail
 And help one another up by the tail!

Exeunt.Lily:

Sandy darling, are you awake yet?

B.S.:

Good morning, Lily. I've had such a lovely sleep. I dreamed that you and I were hunting foxes together over a long meadow full of daisies and buttercups. I wonder what that means!

Lily:

And the race?

B.S.:

I could run the Favourite to Scotland and back and give him a week's start.

Lily:

That's the way to talk.... You didn't hear what those people were saying, did you?

B.S.:

No — who?

Lily:

The big rogue in the check-suit is going to nobble the Favourite. Bill the stableman, and Anna, who rides me, have told him how.

B.S.:

No, not really! Not really nobble him with a proper nobble, so that he won't be able to run?

Lily:

Yes, isn't it wicked? Isn't it

unsportsmanlike? And all because someone has been betting monkeys and ponies and things on you and now he thinks you can't win.

B.S.: It's not only wicked and unsporting — it's an insult to me. I'm surprised at your little Anna behaving so.

Lily: I never liked her mixing with the racing crowd. I'd like to take her right away from this place. She's so easily spoiled..

B.S.: If only we could tell someone in time!

Lily: Let's go and tell the Favourite himself — warn him to be on his guard.

B.S.: Yes, why not? It would be the decent thing to do. I like a good, clean race. If the Favourite ^{was} ~~was~~ nobbled and I only had three-legged horses to run against, it would quite spoil the race for me. I want a good hard race. I want to win it for your sake. They nuzzle affectionately.

Lily: Let's go at once.

They go out, left, together, as they are going B.S. says:

What was the name your little boy gave to his pet tortoise?

Lily: Fluff.

B.S.: O yes, Fluff — ha-ha, very comic, very funny, very laughable, indeed. Fluff! Ha-ha! I've just seen it.

Pause. Re-enter Bill, cured, driving Lily and Blundell Bands before him; they back unwillingly.

Bill: Here, back you go, Blundell Sands, Sir; back, Lily, old girl! Can't have you straying about the place like this, just as if you was cattle. What for did you want to go out, eh? Wanted to have a squir'

at the old Favourite? Blundell Sands ^{half}
nods. Well, then all you has to do is to
 stay put. The Favourite's being taken
 here for safety. The Owner's got a
 warning as how his horse is going to be
 nobbled. Favourite's coming here with
 Cripple-gate, that's his stable companion
 what fought in the Great War.

They exchange looks and quietly return to their stalls, pausing
 only for a long drink from two water-buckets. A trumpet sounds.

Bill: Here they come, quite a parade too!

Enter: small scraggy ^{cad} ~~man~~ in morning-coat and bowler hat with
 trumpet, stable-boy with velvet cushion and sugar bowl, another with
 a golden dish containing apples; a third with a suitcase marked THE
 FAVOURITE and three hat-boxes; the tall, florid Owner in frock-coat,
 grey top-hat, golden watch-chain, spats, rolled umbrella, a haggard
 jockey, in red, gold and green, leading the Favourite. The
 Favourite is a tall, elegant, supercilious-looking horse coloured
 like a rocking-horse — grey with black dapples: he wears a sun hat
 and a red, gold, green saddle-cloth decorated with golden palms.
 Behind him comes a page-boy, scattering roses out of a florist's
 carton.

Bill, to page-boy as the trumpeter pauses to drain the trumpet

of saliva: Oughtn't them roses to be
 scattered in front of the nag, not behind?

Page-boy:

We tried that: it made him plunge like
 mad. (He don't even like the trumpet.)
 So old Cripple-gate, ^{here} he gets the real
 benefit of them. See? Come on, Cripple-
 gate, old fellow.

Cripple-gate, the Favourite's stable-companion, comes slowly in
 by himself, treading delicately among the roses. He is a sad
 dirty-brown horse with only one fore-leg, a patch over one eye, and
 a crutch. He hobbles into box 8. The Favourite meanwhile stops
 and inspects boxes 3 and 4, turns away with a sniff, ignores the

horses in boxes 5 and 6, examines boxes 7 and 8, finally goes back to box 4. Hippo sneaks into the stable and hides in the hay again.

Owner: Well, he's safe enough here, I suppose. They won't nobble him here. We'll bolt the door and bar the windows and our money's safe. To Bill, pointing to Blundell Sands: Hi, you fellow! Is this the animal that thinks he's running against my Favourite?

Bill: Sure. That's Blundell Sands, that is.

Owner: Well, I don't like his looks.

Bill: You'll like them still less when the race is over.

Owner: You are an impertinent clown — I'll trouble you to leave this stable.

Bill: Hark at him! Leave my stable, indeed! You want to nobble my horse, that's your little game, you crooked racing-man! But Blundell Sands isn't going to be nobbled, no, not if I has to fight for it. Picks up besom.

Owner: Threatening me, are you? Suppose that I call the Police?

Bill: You can call 'em what you like — it's all the same to me.

There is a fight, Bill using his besom, the Owner using his umbrella, the stable-boys throwing sugar and apples, the jockey creeping up timorously behind the Owner and pushing him forward, the ^(can) man with the trumpet trumpeting madly. Bill is getting the worst of it when Lily pushes open the door and comes out to the rescue, kicking backwards, until the Owner goes down in a heap, the jockey under him. Bill sweeps them all off-stage with his besom, and disappears with whoops of triumph. The four horses are left alone.

The Favourite, in a lackdaisical voice: O my poor nerves!

O what I suffer! Shudders. First, I

can't sleep a wink, thinking about the rain, and then they wake me up, hours before my time, because someone wants to nobble me (shudders) and then they bring me to this wretched shed and blow trumpets in my ear, and fight. How can I run today, I ask you!

Cripplegate:

You shouldn't be so sensitive, old man, I keep on telling you. Just pull up your socks and snap right out of it. I've stood for all you have, and more, and it didn't trouble me in the least.

The Favourite:

O you. That's different. You fought in the War. I'm very highly strung, and thousands of pounds have been bet on me for this race — I feel the responsibilities like a load of bricks on my back.

Hippo crawls out of the hay.

Lily, screams:

O Favourite, take care, take care! He's going to nobble you!

Favourite shudders terribly.

E.S.:

Be careful!

Hippo comes tiptoeing triumphantly forward. He rolls up his sleeves, prepares to hypnotize the Favourite. Enter Anna from the rat-hole and lies on the straw, leaning on her elbows and laughing.

Hippo, coughs:

Now, what was it that that clever little girl said I had to do, to magic him into a crab? First I fix him with my eye. Does so. Then slowly, slowly I make passes in front of his face. Then (one moment, if you please) o dear me, what was the solemn magic, what did she say? (Pause).

Brightly:

I know — still making passes:

"Abracadabra — you're a horse!"

Anna, bursts out laughing: O Hippo, you idiot — you got it

all wrong. You should have said: "Abracadabra, you're a crab!"

Hippo:

But you said 'Horse'.

Anna:

I meant 'horse'. You meant 'crab'.

Hippo:

Why didn't you explain better? Makes more passes. "Abracadabra: you're a crab."

Anna:

It's too late now: he thinks he's a horse.

Hippo:

Well, here's the syringe. (Gets it).

This'll do.

Anna:

Haven't you forgotten the California Syrup of figs.

Hippo:

Too true, I have. And the what's-his-name paxwixahide drops! I'm so absent-minded, it isn't funny. Feels through his pockets. Here, Favourite, have a pear-drop. Sticky, but good. Favourite turns away and begins to bite his crib. O, I expect your mother warned you, too, against accepting sweets from racing-men. All the horses nod their heads. To Anna: Anna, I'm sunk!

Anna:

Poor Hippo — forget it — come with me and I'll take you along to the biggest tent on the course and buy you an enormous glass of lemonade.

Hippo, blubbing:

But think of it, Anna — think what I've lost — a monkey, a pony, one thousand pounds, and a nice little house in the country.

Anna:

"Snug but damp", remember?

Hippo, blubbing:

No, "damp but snug".

Anna:

You told me "snug but damp". If one says "snug but damp" one takes good care; but if one says "damp but snug" one forgets the dampness because of the smugness.

Then one gets awful rheumatism.

Hippo:

I have awful rheumatism, already.

Anna:

Then come along for your lemonade.

Exeunt.

The Favourite:

Honestly: I ought not to run in this race.

I couldn't do myself justice. I shall scratch, I think. I feel too bad. No, no, I won't. I'm a horse, not a coward. I'll run just to beat you, you ugly chestnut thing over there! I hate you. I'll run you off your legs! I'll beat you by twenty lengths and a piece of string! His voice rises to a bellow.

Lily, gently:

How long is a piece of string?

The Favourite:

Twice as long again.

B.S., tartly:

Then go and tie it round your neck until you choke, you unmannerly creature.

Lily:

Don't lose your temper, Sandy! Take it easy! What's wrong with you?

B.S.: *after a pause*

I'm just feeling a little hurt, to be honest

Lily:

Hurt? Why on earth are you hurt?

B.S.:

Well, nobody tries to nobble me.

Lily:

They'd better not, precious!

Re-enter Mother Rat and little ones, left. She jumps on the beam which runs behind the loose-boxes and the little ones follow her, humming a little tune, the words of which are spoken by the Mother, and taken up by the little ones:

Little ones all together,
Our money's on Blundell Sands!
We're going to nobble the Favour-ite
Do just as I do with your hands!

They surround the Favourite who turns round and round in his box, trying to avoid their rhythmically waving paws. But they go on with their hypnotic waving and the melody changes:

O so sleepy, you want to go to sleep,
Hush now! Little rats watch about your
keep.

Hushabye, lullaby, pretty dapple-grey,
You haven't had a wink of sleep since
yesterday

Baloo then, laloo then, shoheen and sho lo!
Down drop your hind-legs, off to sleep
you go!

B.S.:

Stop, you rats — it's unsportsmanlike. I
won't have it! Stop it, I say!

Mother Rat:

Too late, he's going off fast, he's
swaying on his feet, o so sleepy, beauti-
fully sleepy lovely sleepy-peepy-sleep!
Bump! Off he goes! Favourite slumps
down and loud snores begin.

Cries off

All horses ready for the Diamond Cup! All
horses take their place at the starting
post — at once!

Re-enter Owner, Jockey, ^(can)man with trumpet, stable-boys with
saddle, a cup-of-tea, a whip, a bottle of smelling salts etc.

Owner:

Excellent, excellent! He's snatching
forty winks. Just what he needs to help
him win. Hi, Favourite, wake up now.
Time for the Race!

Favourite snores. He is lying with all four legs in the air.
Owner shakes him; no response.

Owner:

Here, you cad with the trumpet! Perform.
Blow the Revally!

He blows the revally. Favourite does not stir. They shout,
bang cans, blow the trumpet, whistle, drag him out, jump on him.
Re-enter Hippo and Anne, right.

Owner:

O great Steeds Below! — I believe he's
dead! Let me listen to his breathing.

Uses a stethoscope. A tremendous snore jars it out of his

Hippo, aside, in glee: O Anna — I've done it, after all —
I've done it after all!

Anna: What, Hippo?

Hippo: Can't you see, I've nobbled him! Now I'll
get the monkey and the pony and the
thousand pounds in crisp banknotes, and my
little home in the country — damp but
damp — I mean snug but snug. And I'll
live happily ever after. Come and keep
house for me, Anna.

Anna: No. But I'll see you off at the station
if you like.

Exeunt; the Owner left in despair.

More cries: Come on now — no time to waste — all
horses out for the race!

Blundell Sands and Lily emerge from their box^{es}, pause to bow to
the audience and exeunt left. Cripplegate hobbles after them.

The Owner: I'm going to lodge a protest. This race is
is foul, foul I say! They have nobbled
the Favourite — my Favourite! Come along
with me, boys. I won't stand this!

Exit with his crowd. Long snores from the Favourite. The rats
come in and dance around him wordlessly. Distant cheering. At
last the door opens and they scurry away. Re-enter Cripplegate,
wearing a garland around his neck and a crown round his head. The
Favourite gives a terrific snore and wakes up, scrambles to his feet.

Favourite: Where's everyone? Isn't it time for the
Race yet? I took a nap.

Cripplegate: The Race is over.

Favourite: Over? Over, you say? And nobody thought
of waking me up! Words fail me! I can't
understand....

Cripplegate: They did their best.... You were in such a
sweet, deep sleep.

Favourite, in a tearful voice: It's shocking. I'm disgrac-

for ever. Oversleeping on the day of the Diamond Cup! O dear! O dear! So of course that ugly brute Blundell Sands won? No.

unded: No what?

mbly: No sir!

Well, if he didn't, who on earth did? I did. I was the fastest three-legged horse on the field. They gave me these. looks at garland happily. Our Owner got the cup.

Favourite:

You beat Blundell Sands?

Cripplegate:

He didn't run. He said that it was unsporting to run, after you'd been nobbled.

Favourite:

Nobbled, was I? That accounts for it.

That makes me feel better. So Blundell sands refused to run? Is that true?

Cripplegate:

Of course it's true.

Favourite:

That was grand, that was white, that was English! What a splendid fellow he must be! I had no notion. I misjudged him, I wronged him. I'm proud to have met him. Where is he now? Fetch him at once. I want to rub muzzles with him.

Cripplegate:

O, he's far away by now, over the moors. He has an uncle who hunts — you know, jumps gates and fences in search of foxes — somewhere (in a down) place called Leicestershire. Well, he and that pretty little black mare Lily have gone off together to the uncle. He's taken Bill the stableman with him as a rider, and she's taken Anna. I wish them all the best.

Favourite:

And so do I. Cheers.

Re-enter everyone, and does the same.

CURTAIN.