


ROBERT GRAVES

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Occupation:
writer

Wherein the erudite Mr. Graves holds forth on such Varied Subjects
as the Lost Art of Swearing · Imperial Incest · the History of Humour
Garbage Afloat on the Thames · Charity · the Original Thomas Atkins
and his Surrender at Yorktown · the Ancestors of Colonel Blimp · the Profession
of Writing & cetera. And in which he Includes a Selected Number of
Theatrical Pieces · Short Stories & other Elegant Trifles calculated to
Delight the most Discriminating of Ladies & Gentlemen.

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 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 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. It's 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?

B.S. Well — Sandy, if you *must* know.

LILY. I like 'Sandy.' Blundell Sands is a place, isn't it? Were 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 the profession. I'm a riding pony — hacking and a little hunting. My name's Lily: I belong to a girl with pigtails 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 . . . Oh, look here, Lily — I'm sorry I was so cross. I'm in such a nervous state tonight. That long train journey here and . . .

'Horses': A Play for Children

(1939)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HORSES:	LILY: a black riding mare.
	BLUNDELL SANDS: a chestnut race horse.
	THE FAVOURITE: a dapple-grey race horse.
	CRIPPLEGATE: a brown, three-legged race horse.
PEOPLE:	ANNA: a girl.
	HIPPO: a racingman.
	BILL: a stableman.
	THE FAVOURITE'S OWNER
	JOCKEY
	LAD WITH TRUMPET
	TWO STABLEBOYS
	PAGEBOY
RATS:	MOTHER RAT
	THREE LITTLE RATS

(SCENE: A stable 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 a wooden beam runs right across the back of the scene, broad enough to walk on. Between boxes 2 and 3 there is a space, filled with hay; hanging

LILY. Yes — and the Race tomorrow. 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. I can't think of a thing! Honest, I can't.

B.S. You must be able to think of *something*. You're just making me crosser than ever — how can I ever race tomorrow? (*Rubs his neck nervously against a post.*)

LILY. 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. (*Sniffs.*) I can smell rain, I think. When the track is wet I feel as though I had cannon balls glued to my hooves. (*Rubs against the post again.*)

LILY. Nonsense. 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 scales and shakes his head gloomily, saying:*)

B.S. Lost nine pounds since yesterday.

LILY. Now listen! Every horse feels like you do about a wet track. Horses aren't cows with split hooves especially made for mud. Naturally it's harder for them to run in the wet. 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 or to the starting post. If he's out of sorts he 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 gnashing his teeth.

B.S. Gnashing his teeth? I never heard a horse do that.

(*They return to their loose-boxes.*)

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

(*B.S. bursts out laughing.*)

LILY. 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 rubbing yourself like that — you haven't the itch, have you?

(*B.S. stops rubbing himself for a moment, but has to resume.*)

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

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

(*B.S. stops rubbing.*)

B.S. (*shyly*). You're so sensible, Lily. I never met anyone so sensible as you.

(*A little RAT comes running along a beam and sings:*)

I had a little mare
And her name was Puff.
I sent her to the stores
For a half yard of stuff,
But she bought ice cream
And an ermine muff —
I never had a mare
Who had sense enough.

B.S. Oh, these rats — they give me the jumps.

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

(*RAT runs home.*)

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

B.S. You really think I will?

LILY. I know it. I promise you.

B.S. I do *hate* races. I wish I hunted like you. I have an uncle down in Leicestershire—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.)

B.S. 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, then jump down on the hay, helping each other with their tails, and run towards the stableman.)

MOTHER *(as they go)*. Come on, my little dears, keep in line, help one another, don't dillydally. 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?

FIRST LITTLE RAT. Does it taste as good as mouldy bread?

MOTHER. Oh, *far* nicer.

SECOND LITTLE RAT. Does it taste as good as rotten eggs?

MOTHER. Oh, *far* nicer.

THIRD 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, pigtails, red hair ribbons, white socks, black shoes.)

ANNA. Oh, my doll, my doll, my best doll—where can she be? I *know* I had her yesterday evening when I came in from

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 head 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, baggy check 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 horseshoe pin in his yellow tie. As he speaks to ANNA he picks bits of hay from 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.)* Oh, 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. Oh . . . 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 back 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 music 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 at one gulp.)

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 a sixpence from a drunken sailor.

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. Oh, 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 deer-stalker 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. LILY whinnies and disappears. HIPPO pretends not to notice. He walks over to the scales and weighs himself.)

HIPPO. Good Heavens! I've lost a stone.

ANNA. Out of your nice tiepin? Can I find it for you?

HIPPO. No, not a stone from my pin. I mean fourteen pounds of solid muscle—look!

(ANNA comes and looks, standing on the scales.)

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

(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 *(mysteriously produces another glass and drinks it)*, but that isn't worth forty million sixpences, nor half a million, neither.

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

HIPPO. Nothing.

ANNA. That's telling fibs. You mustn'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 tomorrow. 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 on and so forth—*then* he says to himself: 'The Favourite will win after all, and I'll lose all the 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 too. He says to him: 'Alf, can you and me 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), your share of this little business is: the pony, the monkey, one thou-

sand 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 deer-stalker 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 scales, 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:)

BILL. 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 sixpences and I picked 'em all up, as I'm doing now; and I put 'em all in my red handkercher, as I'm doing now; and I says to myself, as I'm doing now: 'Bill, you're going to bet this whole boiling lot on Blundell Sands, to win the Diamond Cup.' And then off I goes to place my bet — as I'm doing now!

(LILY's head disappears. BILL is going out, but stops short at the sight of HIPPO's foot. Jerks 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.

HIPPO. All right. Well, I was pondering ways and means to nobble the Favourite. This seemed a nice quiet kind of 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. Oh, only 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 racingmen. 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 little 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 the door, and there you are, you just *nobbles* him, when nobody's looking.

HIPPO. Oh, I see! Thank you very much, much obliged, to be sure. Er — by the way — what exactly do you nobble him *with*?

BILL. Well . . . of course, that's left 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*) and 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 hydrochlorotoluotipic-waxahide—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 mean.

HIPPO. Too right, he is. My dear Miss Anna, go up to the 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. 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 he won't.

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. Out 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. Oh, 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 one another'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 whiskers 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 a lovely sleep. I dreamed that you and I were hunting foxes together over a wide 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 noble, so that he won't be able to run?

LILY. Yes, isn't it wicked? Isn't it unsporting? 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.

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 spoilt . . .

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, that would be the decent thing to do. I like a good, clean race. If the Favourite were 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.)

(Re-enter BILL, cured, driving LILY and BLUNDELL SANDS before him; they back unwillingly.)

BILL. Here, back you go, Blundell Sands, sir; back, Lily, old girl! Can't have you straying all over the place like this, as if you was cattle. What for did you want to go out, eh? Wanted to have a squint 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 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 LAD in morning coat and bowler hat with trumpet; STABLEBOY with velvet cushion and sugar bowl; another with a golden dish containing apples; a third with a suitcase marked THE FAVOURITE and three hatboxes; 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 tall, elegant, supercilious, and looks like a rocking horse — grey with black dapples. He wears a sunbonnet and a red, gold, and green saddlecloth decorated with golden palms. Behind him comes a PAGEBOY, scattering roses out of a florist's carton.)

BILL *(To PAGEBOY as the TRUMPETER pauses to drain the trumpet of saliva.)* Oughtn't them roses to be scattered in front of the nag, not behind?

PAGEBOY. 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.

(CRIPPLEGATE, the FAVOURITE's stablemate, comes slowly in by himself, treading delicately among the roses. He is a sad, dirty-brown horse with only one foreleg, 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 in the bank. *(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 impertinent clown — I'll trouble you to leave this stable!

BILL. Hark at him! Leave my stable, indeed! You want to noble my horse, that's your little game, you crooked racingman! 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 I call the police?
BILL. You can call 'em if you like — it's all the same to me.

(*There is a fight, BILL using his besom, the OWNER using his umbrella, the STABLEBOYS throwing sugar and apples, the JOCKEY creeping up timorously behind the OWNER and pushing him forward, the LAD 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 off stage with his besom, and disappears with whoops of triumph. The four horses are left alone.*)

THE FAVOURITE (*in a lackadaisical voice*). Oh, my poor nerves! Oh, 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 noble 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. Oh, you! That's different. You fought in the War. I'm 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*). Oh, Favourite, take care, take care! He's going to noble you!

(FAVOURITE *shudders terribly.*)

B.S. Be carefull!

(HIPPO *tiptoes 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). Oh, 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*). Oh, 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-its-name paxwixahide drops! I'm so absent-minded, it isn't credible. (*Feels through his pockets.*) Here, Favourite, have a pear drop. Sticky, but good.

(FAVOURITE *turns away and begins to bite his crib.*)

— Oh, I expect *your* mother warned you, too, against accepting sweets from racingmen.

(*All the horses nod their heads.*)

— Anna, I'm sunk!

ANNA. Poor Hippo — don't worry — 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 gets awful rheumatism.

HIPPO. I have awful rheumatism, already.

ANNA. Then come along for the lemonade.

(*Exeunt.*)

THE FAVOURITE. Honestly: I ought not to run in this race. I couldn't do myself justice. I'll have myself scratched, I think. I feel so 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 yell.*)

LILY (*gently*). How long is a piece of string?

THE FAVOURITE. Twice as long again.

B.S. (*tartly*). Tie it round your neck until you choke!

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 that 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.*)

MOTHER RAT. 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.*)

— Oh, so sleepy, you want to go to sleep,

Hush now! Little rats watch about you keep.

Hushaby, 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 hindlegs, off to sleep you go!

B.S. Stop, you rats — it's unsporting. I won't have it! Stop it, I say!

MOTHER RAT. Too late, he's going off fast, he's swaying on his feet. Oh, so sleepy, beautifully sleepy lovely sleepy-peepy-sleep! Bump! There he goes!

(*FAVOURITE slumps down and snores loudly.*)

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

(*Re-enter OWNER, JOCKEY, LAD with trumpet, STABLEBOYS 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! Time for the race!

(*FAVOURITE snores. He is lying with all four legs in the air.*)

OWNER shakes him; no response.)

OWNER. Here, you lad with the trumpet! Perform. Blow the reveille!

(*He blows the reveille. FAVOURITE does not stir. They shout, bang cans, blow the trumpet, whistle, drag him out, jump on him. Re-enter HIPPO and ANNA, right.*)

OWNER. Oh, 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 hand.*)

HIPPO (*aside, in glee*). Miss Anna, Miss 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 bank notes, and my little house in the country — damp but snug — 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 boxes, pause to bow to the audience, and exeunt left. CRIPPLEGATE hobbles after them.)

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

(*Exit with his crowd. Long snores from the FAVOURITE. The RATS come in and dance round him. 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.*)

THE FAVOURITE. Where's everyone? Isn't it time for the race yet? I took a nap.

CRIPPLEGATE. The race is over.

THE FAVOURITE. Over? Over, you say? And nobody thought of waking me up? Words fail me! I cannot understand . . .

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

THE FAVOURITE (*in a tearful voice*). It's shocking. I'm disgraced for ever. Oversleeping on the day of the Diamond Cup! Oh, dear! Oh, my dear! So of course that ugly brute Blundell Sands won?

CRIPPLEGATE. No.

THE FAVOURITE (*astounded*). No what?

CRIPPLEGATE (*humbly*). No, sir!

THE FAVOURITE. Well, if he didn't, who on earth did?

CRIPPLEGATE. I did. I was the fastest three-legged horse on the field. They gave me these. (*Looks at garland and crown happily.*) Our Owner got the Cup.

THE FAVOURITE. You beat Blundell Sands?

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

THE 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.

THE 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. Oh, 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 down in a place called Leicestershire. Well, he and that pretty little black mare have gone off together to the uncle. He's taken the stableman with him as a rider, and she's taken Anna. I wish them all the best.

THE FAVOURITE. And so do I. (*Cheers.*)

(*Re-enter everyone. All cheer.*)

CURTAIN

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, ^(c)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 hp