

PATHWAY TO STARDOM

CHAPTER 16: Adieu au Roi, the Excalibur

Adieu au Roi was a curiously coloured roan son of Kenmare and a very nervous creature. He had the power of the Excalibur in mythological times but his mood swings prevented him from ever reaching his full potential. He won a little race at Maisons-Lafitte. M. Lesbordes considered that Adieu au Roi was capable of winning a much better race, le Prix Hocquart, a Group 2 event at Longchamp for seriously good horses.



Adieu au Roi by Hubert de Watrigant 1992

M. Lesbordes and Clement collected me at midday, on Sunday, the 10th of May 1992 and took me to the races. M. Lesbordes was unusually tense on that occasion because it was to be my first time to attend in person when one of my horses was running. My reason for departing from my normal absentee role was a visit by my best friend, Liu Ting Ting, a bright lady. M. Lesbordes became even more agitated when introduced to Liu Ting Ting as the daughter of Liu Shao Qi, Chairman of the People's Republic of China from 1959 until 1968.



Communist leaders from right to left, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai and Mao Zedong (1950)

I came to meet Ting Ting Liu through a mutual friend, Xu Wenlien, a son of Marshall Xu Xianqian of the People's Republic of China. (years of service 1924-1959)

Wenlien had set up his high tech company in San Francisco and is also close friends with my brother Dr Patrick S.L. Wong, a top US scientist, who won the Inventor of the Year Award in 2005 for his Advanced Drug Delivery System. Fond of science myself, I often spent hours on the telephone quizzing my brother on his Advanced Drug Delivery System. Wenlien likewise consulted frequently with my brother.



Pat was preparing his Post-Doctorate Degree in Imperial College, London



Advanced Drug Delivery System

I was delighted when Wenlien introduced me to Ting Ting as one of the future stars of Modern China. She became my key to understanding the period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the history of the 'Gang of Four', who held power from 1966 to 1976. As I had been in Europe during that time my understanding had been limited to what I read in the western press.



Chinese Cultural revolution (1966-1976)

Ting Ting's father, Liu Shaoqi - had been arrested by the 'Gang of Four' in 1967. Labelled a 'traitor' and 'biggest capitalist roader' he had been ill-treated in prison until his death in 1969. Ting Ting herself had also been imprisoned during the Chinese Cultural Revolution period.



Gang of Four



Gang of Four during 1981 Public Show Trial

Ting Ting's background, her prison ordeal and her achievement in getting her MBA from Harvard Business School en route to becoming a brilliant business woman in Modern China made her one of the most interesting people I have met. As a representative of many multi-national companies in China, she was a frequent visitor to Paris for business meetings.



Jennifer, my niece, Liu Ting Ting and Ling Tsui in Longchamp

Mathieu Boutin usually rode our horses, so we were somewhat surprised when M. Lesbordes revealed that he had booked Walter Swinburn, the English jockey, to ride Adieu au Roi in the Hocquart Group 2 race. However, as Swinburn had shot to fame as the rider of Shergar, having won the Epsom Derby and the Irish Derby while still a teenager, this arrangement could only be auspicious. In any case, as far as M. Lesbordes was concerned, my role was to pay the bills and my heir Christopher's to collect the trophies. Simple!



Swinburn rider of Shergar, wearing HH the Aga Khan's famous silk

To M. Lesbordes' visible relief and to our raucous delight, Adieu au Roi won in style. Christopher went down with the Lesbordes to lead our winner in, while I, Christine and Liu Ting Ting awaited them in the winner's enclosure.



Adieu au Roi won le prix Hocquart: From left to right, Walter Swinburn, ling Tsui, Christine, Christopher and David Tsui

In her excitement Liu Ting Ting declared M. Lesbordes "Bole" (the constellation that watches over Pegasus in the heaven of Chinese mythology) and Adieu au Roi the "Thousand-mile horse" (the dream speed horse of Chinese Emperors). Both I and Liu Ting Ting were straightaway convinced that Adieu au Roi would prove himself to be a great stallion.



Pegasus



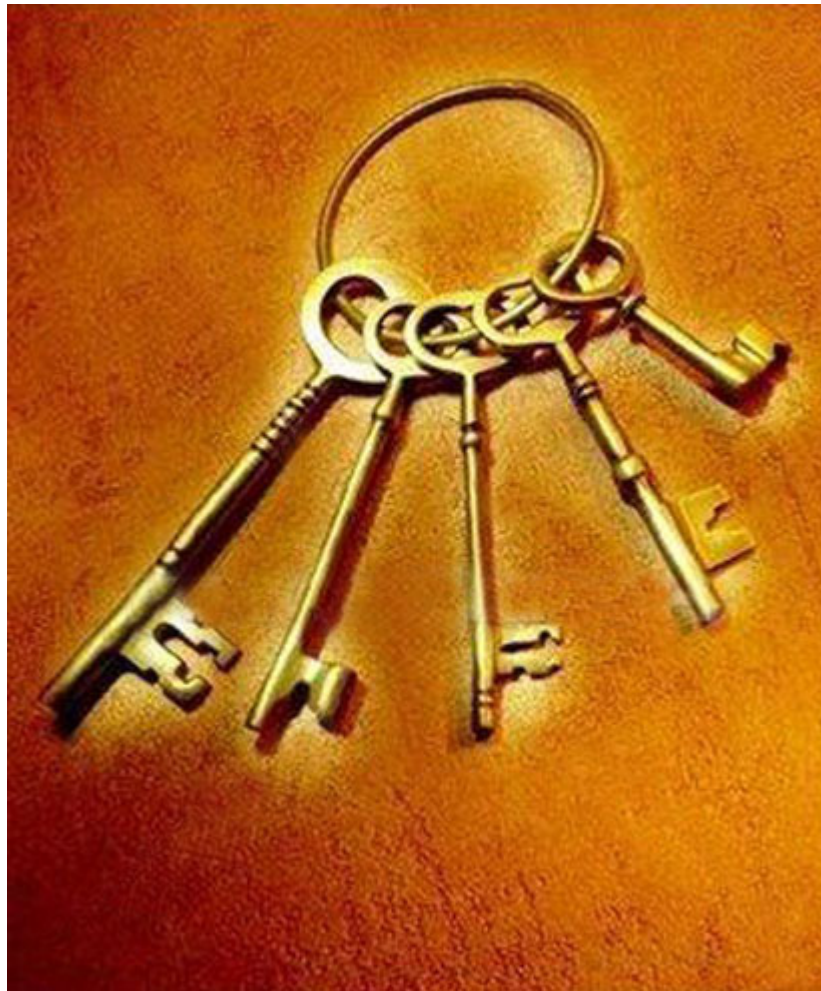
Emperor Kangxi hunting on his thousand mile horse by Giuseppe Castiglione (1661-1722)

Our sky-high expectations for our new champion took a bit of a dive when he could finish only eighth in the Prix du Jockey-Club and a never-threatening fourth in the Grand Prix de Paris. Thinking that a race away from his familiar surroundings might rekindle Adieu au Roi's appetite for racing, M. Lesbordes took him to the big Deauville meeting in August. To our dismay he refused to jump off with the other runners when the gates opened. M. Lesbordes took him down to Pau, Southwest of France where he had runners during the winter season, determined to cure his wayward habits.



Gate sour horse

The moment of truth came on the 4th of April 1993, in the Group 2 Prix d'Harcourt assured that M. Lesbordes had discovered the key to this quirky customer.



Which one would be the right key?

We turned out in all our finery, Christopher sporting his 'lucky' red suit. Adieu au Roi did indeed jump out with the rest of the field. But that was it. He dug in his toes, refusing even to pursue the others at a walk. We were humiliated in front of all Parisien racing society.



laughters



Losing face

The very next morning, I went out to M. Lesbordes' stable where I met Madame Courreges, of the famous fashion design house. She suggested we entrust Adieu au Roi to the renowned American 'horse whisperer' Monty Roberts.



Courreges famous fashion designer in the 80's

Despite M. Lesbordes' scepticism, I agreed. The horse was flown to Flag Is Up Farm near Santa Barbara, in company with a horse belonging to Queen Elizabeth of England. To cut a long story short, the experiment was a failure. Two years later I brought Adieu au Roi back to France to stand as a stallion. But his reputation was now such that no breeder was willing to patronise him. I put many mares to him, getting beautiful foals, which nobody would buy. In the end I gave him away.



Adieu au Roi with Monty Roberts



Adieu au Roi at Flag is Up Farm near Santa Barbara



Adieu au Roi under "Psychological" treatment with his whisperer

Take Risks was another to carry my husband's imperial yellow colours successfully in 1992, winning the Group 3 Prix de la Jonchere at Saint-Cloud and a second Group 3, le Prix Messidor at Maisons-Laffitte. This smart grey went on to gain further Group 3 honours in 1993, winning le Prix Edmond Blanc at Saint-Cloud by 7 lengths.



Take Risks winning le Prix Edmond Blanc by 7 lengths

However, my husband was becoming increasingly disenchanted with this racing venture believing that it was giving me far too many sleepless nights. On my side of the story, I had faith in Urban Sea and knew she would make all my worries worthwhile. My mare carried all my hopes and dreams. Urban Sea would never let me down. My heir shared my belief together with Clement and M. Lesbordes. Our critics would live to eat their words.

* M. Lesbordes = Monsieur Lesbordes in French
Monsieur = Mister