

PATHWAY TO STARDOM

CHAPTER 18: The memorable 1993 Arc Day

When the time came to set out for Longchamp, I refused to accompany David and Christopher saying that I was so nervous that I would be better staying at home and watching the race on television.



Modern Cinderella Story

If I could even bear to do that much. David was calmness itself, he said. As proof he showed Christopher the front page of that day's newspaper. It had a picture of a horse passing the winning post in front, in yellow colours. Auspicious, he said.



YELLOW by Hubert de Watrigant



a winning horse wearing yellow silk in Arc day's newspaper

Our Longchamp expeditionary force comprised my husband and my son, M. Lesbordes and Clement, together with longtime family friends Charles and Christina de Bavier. By this time, Christopher regarded himself as a Longchamp veteran, well used to going there to watch our horses run, sometimes successfully, but not always.



My son regarded himself as a Longchamp Veteran



Christopher was in Longchamp on Arc day

Unlike David, Christopher had gotten used to dealing with Triumph and Disaster, even if he did not always treat Rudyard Kipling's two 'imposters' equally. To my son, it was all about winning. It still is.



Napoleon's greatest triumph was the battle of the three Emperors



Napoleon's Waterloo defeat : Who can treat the 2 imposters equally?

What my heir had not expected was the extraordinary atmosphere that Arc day engenders in Longchamp. There is a thrill, a 'frisson' in the air that is almost palpable. Gone the languid lengthiness of other days at Longchamp.



Arc day in Longchamp



Beautiful accessories of ladies in racing meetings



Arc day height of fashion

This was comparable to Roland Garros and centre court on finals day.



Roland Garros Tennis Court



The finals day at Roland Garros

All anyone wanted to talk about and in most animated fashion was the outcome of the Arc. Surely there were people present to whom the other races were of significance but their voices, hopes and fears were mostly unheard.



Fears



Emotions unheard

Adding to the tension was the huge size of the field for the Arc – 23 runners, 15 of them Group 1 winners. The only significant absentee in a star-studded line-up was Commander In Chief, hero of the Epsom and Irish Derbys. Hernando – 'Cash' Asmussen's mount – seemed most people's choice of the likely winner.



Cash Asmussen - The most sought after jockey



TENSION

Unusually, half of the runners were fillies, even though no filly had won the Arc since All Along ten years previously.



Welcome To The Group

welcome to the group of women

If a female was to win, the betting market suggested that it would be the English filly User Friendly. But she would still have to beat Intrepidity, Wemyss Bight and Shemaka. As for our filly, she had never won a Group 1 which is why she was 37/1 on the Pari-mutuel (French Tote).



David against Goliath

An hour before the great race, the heavens opened, drenching the racecourse. M. Lesbordes was ecstatic.



rain is coming



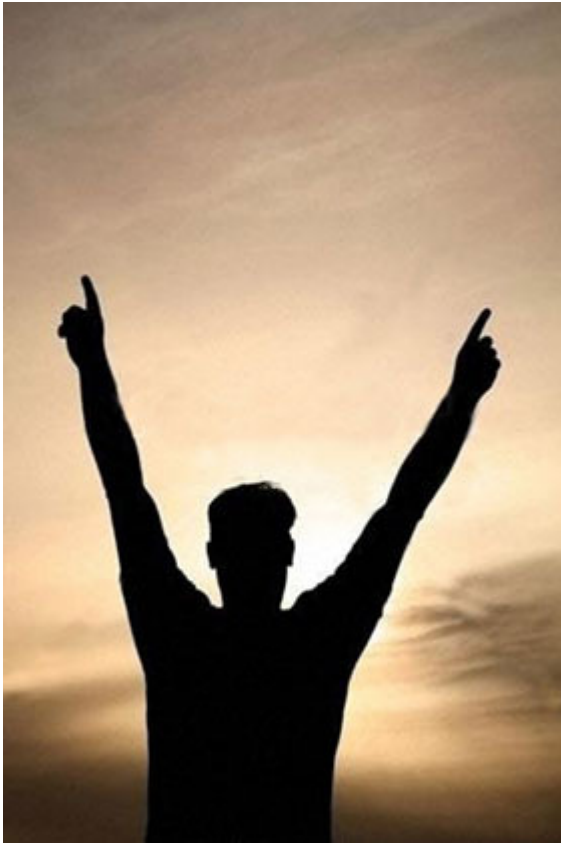
My angel now is ready to prepare her archery

Longchamp, he declared, changes very quickly after heavy rainfall. Urban Sea would have her ground. His appearance said it all. The Arc was his for the taking. He had already climbed his Mount Everest.



Mount Everest

He had his hands on the Holy Grail. He must have convinced Urban Sea that victory was hers. This is the way I see it because as the runners broke away from the parade to canter to the start, she half reared and then sprang into action, very eager to show just what she could do, would do.



Victory is mine



the Holy Grail

My team watched the race - for all that they could see -from box 128. Urban Sea was wearing the number 12 as Sea The Stars' number at Epsom Derby. Reports claimed it was a very rough affair. I simply do not know. But what I do know and will never forget is that as a whole mob of horses charged towards the winning post, a yellow jacket eased through on the far rail and was still ahead as it passed the post. Urban Sea had won the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

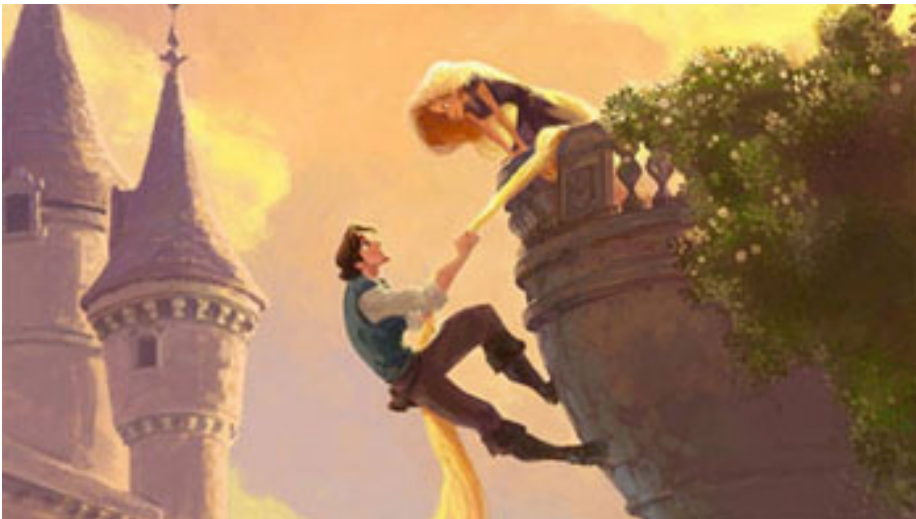


Urban Sea wearing the number 12 at the Arc 1993



16 years later, Sea The Stars wearing the number 12 at the Epsom Derby

David did not actually witness that magic moment. He was too engrossed in trying to ensure that Clement did not throw himself off the balcony, so excited had he become towards the finish. His shouts of "Allez Eric!" were clearly audible on the video that we would replay time and time again. David saved Clement from falling off the balcony with his bare hands comparably to Rapunzel saving her prince.



Rapunzel using her braid as a rope to pull her prince up



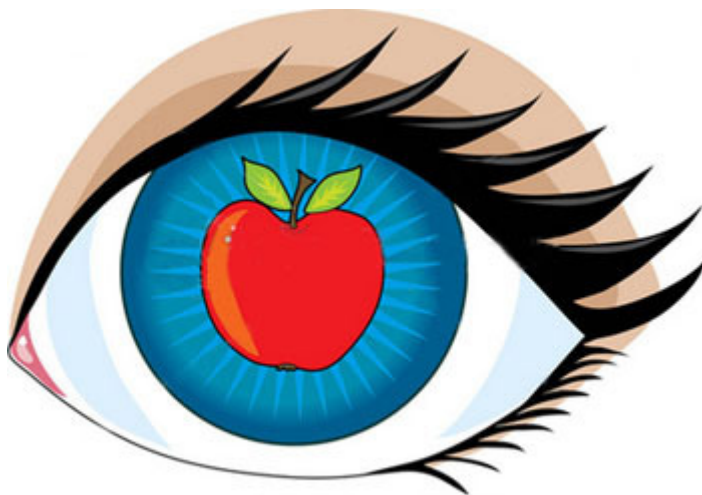
Clement's shouts of "Allez Eric"

M. Lesbordes and Clement dashed off to lead their heroine back to the winner's enclosure. David and the de Baviere whipped off to the bar because he needed a whiskey to avert what he feared was a heart attack!



a whiskey can be of so much help in crucial moments of our lives!!!

David arrived to the winner's enclosure, shaking hands with the exciting and emotional connections who were all in tears. It was crazy. David did not even notice that he had left the apple of my eye, my heir and my numero uno in the owner's box.



Apple of my eye photo



Numero Uno

As you could imagine an eleven-year-old Chinese boy, struggling to fight his way to the

winner's enclosure. A friend of mine recognized him and shepherded him safely through the post-race melee to that magic circle. I had nightmares after watching the film Home Alone in 1990 by Macaulay Culkin and I could not believe something similar could happen to my heir!!



Home Alone 1990 acting by Macaulay Culkin

My son witnessed that on the racecourse the horse is king, or queen, as the case may be. And the day people cease to appreciate that will be a sad day for the Sport of Kings.



Queen Elizabeth II Strokes her horse during the Royal Windsor



Royals at the Epsom Day



HH the Aga Khan received the Trophy from Her Majesty the Queen



Queen Elizabeth II at Epsom Day with Sheikh Mohammed and HRH the Princess Haya

He was so moved to see such a spectacle that it was the day which marked his young life for so many reasons. He approached the heroine of the hour-Urban Sea-and kissed her nose.



Christopher in admiration of his heroine, Urban Sea

Urban Sea was the only calm character of the crowd. She seemed quite regal amidst the hubbub. After all, had she not simply done what everybody around her had told her time and time again that it was her destiny to do?



The real Cinderella story



The Fairy had already told her that it was her destiny

So, Urban Sea had fulfilled her destiny, realising all my hopes and dreams of her, granting M. Lesbordes his lifetime's ambition. I have seen it written in the press that the 1993 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe was the little people's Arc.



Doctor Stanley Ho, Macao Casino tycoon, Ling Tsui and Mr. Romanet, CEO France Galop (Oct. 1993)



Little people

That was as may be, but our unconsidered mare had had to repel White Muzzle, Opera House, Intrepidity and Only Royale as they finished in that order. That was no 'Mickey Mouse' performance and who could foresee that these "little people "would win Arc again 16 years later with Urban Sea's son Sea the Stars," a horse of a life time "at the envy of Kings and Queens? Today, Urban Sea's progeny dominate the European racing and breeding industry.



Urban Sea's progeny dominate the European racing and breeding industry

We celebrated for days, well, weeks actually. And if I told you back then that my heir would not set foot on a racecourse for all of ten years, you would have looked into my eyes, blinking in utter disbelief. But it was to be so.



We celebrated for days and months



Christopher's next venture: GOLF

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