

THE STAR AND I
CHAPTER 4: The Poignant Truth

I was getting ready to leave Orlando, packing all my belongings. That house was full of memories of my 5 years spent earning my PGA and also the time I spent with dad which I cherished so much. I felt that this period of my life which was about to end would be remembered and missed.



Father and son golfing



I will always cherish the time spent with Dad in Orlando

When my mother got in touch, asking me to bring forward my date of departure so as to attend the Epsom races on 4 June 2004, I asked myself "horse racing? why me?" To be honest, since Clement Lesbordes had been so tragically killed, I had blanked horses and horse racing out of my mind. It simply brought back too many poignant, upsetting memories. Golf had become my life but now that chapter had come to an end too.



My PGA venture had come to end too

I still remember the moment I learned about the tragic news. During my Orlando days, mother did not speak about horses when she came to visit us. I asked her to give me some news of M. Lesbordes and Clement. She said M. Lesbordes had retired and had sold his stable. I was puzzled because Clement was meant to take over his stable not only because he was so talented but especially because he loved horses more than his own life.



Clement with Urban Sea in Deauville



Clement and Urban Sea in Hong Kong Invitation Cup, 1992

Mother kept her silence for a while. In Chinese, there is an expression which says that paradise is the world of happiness. In traditional Mahayana Buddhist Countries, Sukhavati translates to Land of Bliss. In Chinese it is called "Jile", Ultimate Bliss and everyone will be there, some sooner and some later. Mother said laconically that Clement had reached 'the world of happiness' sooner than expected.



Sukhavati is the equivalent of Ultimate Bliss



Land of Bliss

I could not believe my ears. I was shaken and started to shiver although the temperature was actually quite hot on that 'doom's day' as I would recall it later. I asked when and how it happened as this was all I could think of to ask. Christine and I were shocked by the news of Clement's death. Both of us were torn with grief and anger as to how mother could have kept silent about it for 3 years.



I was shivering although the temperature was high



We were shocked, distressed and sad

Now that I think back, I knew it was the only way for her to protect us. She did not want our innocent hearts to be tainted by the cruelty of the world. She then reminded us of what Mr. Lesbordes had told us in Paris: Clement had gotten a heart disease since he was 2 years old and doctors had told Mr. & Mrs. Lesbordes that he would not live long. However, each time, he had overcome his heart condition even though he had to be rushed many times to the hospital. Clement had lived until the age of 24 which was already more than what the doctors had predicted in their diagnosis. He had gained years of happiness thanks to horses and especially Urban Sea.



Clement gained years of happiness with Urban Sea



Clement & Jean Lesbordes, Eric & Yves Saint Martin after winning the Arc



The staff welcome Urban Sea and Clement home after winning the Arc



Clement was also a Jumping horse Jockey

We slowly recovered after shedding many tears.



A mixture of inexplicable anger and sorrow



Too many poignant and upsetting memories

We believed for many years that he had died of a cardiac arrest until I found out recently reading old newspaper articles that he had been knocked over by a truck (conflict of cultures, in the European culture we want to tell the truth to our loved ones no matter how harsh it is but in the Chinese culture, we always try to lessen tragic events through mythology or philosophy). Chinese Mythology is rich in gods and animals with supernatural powers. I was fond of Monkey King who is the main character in Chinese Epic novel "Journey to the West". The story is about a monkey born from a stone who acquires supernatural powers through Taoist Practices. After rebelling against heaven and being imprisoned under a mountain by the Buddha, he later accompanies The Monk Xuanzang to retrieve Buddhist Sutras from India.



Sun Wukong, Monkey King



Dragon possesses supernatural powers too

Down the intervening years, Urban Sea's offspring seemed to have lost all connection with my family, even if Urban Sea was still a family member, living now in the Irish National Stud.



Urban Sea in Irish National Stud with her 2002 filly by Giant's Causeway

To come back to my mother's phone call as to why she wanted me to attend the Epsom Oaks, she explained her purpose. All Too Beautiful, a daughter of Urban Sea by Sadler's Wells, was running in the Epsom Oaks that day. I should be there to see her in the flesh, watch her run and report back. Mother did add that All Too Beautiful might find Lord Derby's Ouija Board a tough nut to crack. She advised me to couple both fillies in a quinella.



All Too Beautiful

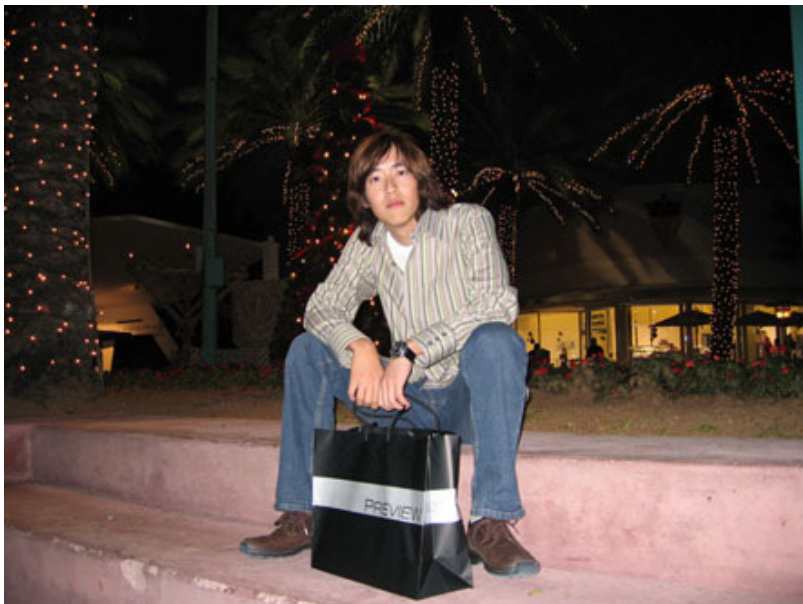


Ouija Board

Oaks day 2004 was my first time to set foot on a racecourse since my glorious days with Urban Sea. It felt so strange to be there since I was about to start my new academy goal in London in the coming months. I felt like an outcast in Epsom. Also, it was my first introduction to the Tipperary team, who had been boarding Urban Sea since my mother had initially sent her beloved mare to Ireland.



My glorious day in 1992 with Urban Sea



My style had nothing to do with horseracing, the sport of Kings

All the best stallions were in Ireland, she had said. And who could say she had not proven right, once again. To the famous Sadler's Wells, Urban Sea had already produced Group 1 winners in Galileo and Black Sam Bellamy. All Too Beautiful was a full-sister to both those champions.



Sadler's Wells



Urban Sea



Galileo

mate the Best to the Best and get the Best

The Tipperary people reminded me of M. Lesbordes all those years ago, focused, serious, imparting the impression that life and death came a poor second to the business of winning big races to boost the value of their horses' breeding potential. Their trainer looked about the age poor Clement should have been. However, I could never imagine Clement with a mobile phone glued to each ear, all the time.



Life and death come a poor second to horseracing business



A modern style horse trainer has a mobile phone glued to his ear

Invited to join All too Beautiful's connection in the parade ring, I was immediately struck by the extraordinary grace and elegance of All Too Beautiful. She really did live up to her name but she was brown (bay, actually), not chestnut like Urban Sea. The experts explained that Sadler's Wells never sired chestnut foals no matter what coloured mare he mated with. More than ever, I wished my starlet mother were there with me. No, I really wished she were there instead of me. She always knew how to deal with every situation in a graceful way. Anyway, there I was and I duly bet GB£100 on All Too Beautiful, together with a quinella coupling her and Ouija Board.



Is she my Mother or Madame Butterfly?



She could deal in an all-male milieu. (left) Mr. Henry Martre, former Chairman of French Aerospatiale,(right) Mr. Liang Shoupan Guided Missile Professor, PRC

After such a long absence from the racecourse where fortunes can change so quickly, I found it hard to breathe as All Too Beautiful hit the front, heading for more reflected glory on her marvellous mother. Then the assassin struck: Ouija Board mowed 'my' filly down like a thistle. Oh yes, we were second but seven lengths behind Lord Derby's new star. It was crushing until I realised what a lot of money I had to collect, once again thanks to my mother's shrewd advice.



The money I won thanks to mother's
shrewd advice

Finishing second was not too bad after all, I thought, until I noticed the expressions of the Tipperary team. Their world seemed to have fallen in as one remarked "Who will ever remember the second?"



Who would remember White Muzzle? He was second to Urban
Sea in the Arc, 1993

Back home in Hong Kong, I could not stop talking about Ouija Board. "What a filly!" I told my mother who would say I was suffering from OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) but she still ordered a CD rom with all Ouija Board's races, watching them over and over again. She then did the same with Cape Cross, the sire of Ouija Board.



Cape Cross, Sire of Ouija Board

Weeks later, my mother took me by surprise. She asked "My son, what would you think if I sent Urban Sea to be covered by Cape Cross next breeding season (2005) and get a Ouija Board for you?". I knew nothing about pedigrees or breeding so I simply replied: "If that will get me an Emperor Wu Han's thousand- mile horse more powerful than Ouija Board, a 'ling' horse from your wonderful Urban Sea, please do just that!"



General Lu Bu's (Late Han dynasty) fabulous red sweat horse in sculpture