

#1 *New York Times*  
bestselling author of  
*Me Before You* and  
*After You*

# Jojo Moyes



# The Horse Dancer



A NOVEL



Dear Reader,

I've loved horses since I was a small girl, raised in the city. I was so obsessive about them that on one birthday I convinced my mother to fill my bedroom with hay (to her credit, she did). I was fourteen when I bought my first horse, without telling my parents, using the proceeds of a succession of cleaning jobs. I kept him in a tiny yard in the city, in an area where there were many such hidden stable yards and urban horses, run by gruff men in flat caps. I had not really thought about this until, on a visit to the United States, I read a piece about the Philadelphia Black Cowboys, who operate in the city and help give urban kids a focus. I read a story about a talented girl rider who should have escaped her past on horseback—but found it dragged her back down, and it got me thinking about my own history of urban horsemanship.

*The Horse Dancer* is the book that resulted—it's about escape, and hope, and love, and complicated human relationships.

I now live on twenty-two acres with my own horses, none of which is talented, in the way that Boo, the horse in my story is, and most of which are frankly ungrateful for their idyllic life. But I'm always grateful for what those years of city riding gave me—resilience, pleasure, love, and a means of escape.

I hope you enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a series of loops and a long, sweeping tail that ends in a small hook.

Jojo Moyes

## **Praise for *Me Before You***

“A hilarious, heartbreaking, riveting novel . . . I will stake my reputation on this book.”

—Anne Lamott, *People*

“Funny and moving but never predictable.”

—*USA Today* (four stars)

“Masterful . . . a heartbreaker in the best sense . . . *Me Before You* is achingly hard to read at moments, and yet such a joy.”

—*New York Daily News*

## **Praise for *After You***

“Jojo Moyes has a hit with *After You*.”

—*USA Today*

“The genius of Moyes . . . [is that she] peers deftly into class issues, social mores, and complicated relationships that raise as many questions as they answer. And yet, there is always resolution. It’s not always easy, it’s not always perfect, it’s sometimes messy and not completely satisfying. But sometimes it is.”

—Bobbi Dumas, NPR.org

“Expect tears and belly laughs from *Me Before You*’s much anticipated sequel.”

—*Cosmopolitan*

“Moyes is at her most charming here, writing with a sense of humorous affection about family dynamics among working-class Brits. . . . A Maeve Binchy for the twenty-first century.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“[A] heart-tugger.”

—*Good Housekeeping*

“Like its predecessor [*Me Before You*], *After You* is a comic and breezy novel that also tackles bigger, more difficult subjects, in this case grief and

moving on. . . . We all lose what we love at some point, but in her poignant, funny way, Moyes reminds us that even if it's not always happy, there is an ever after."

—*The Miami Herald*

"Once again, Moyes delivers a heart-wrenching and relatable book about love and loss that will stay with you long after you've finished."

—InStyle.com

"*After You* is an immersive experience, inviting readers back into the homes of the characters they fell in love with in *Me Before You*. They'll experience the mourning that follows a devastating loss and the glimmers of hope that propel the brokenhearted forward."

—*BookPage*

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE HORSE DANCER

Jojo Moyes is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Me Before You* (now a major motion picture), *After You*, *The Horse Dancer*, *Paris for One and Other Stories*, *One Plus One*, *The Girl You Left Behind*, *The Last Letter from Your Lover*, *Silver Bay*, and *The Ship of Brides*. She lives with her husband and three children in Essex, England.

BY JOJO MOYES

*Paris for One and Other Stories*

*After You*

*One Plus One*

*The Girl You Left Behind*

*Me Before You*

*The Last Letter from Your Lover*

*The Horse Dancer*

*Silver Bay*

*The Ship of Brides*

JOJO MOYES



The Horse  
Dancer



PENGUIN BOOKS





PENGUIN BOOKS  
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, New York 10014  
[penguin.com](http://penguin.com)

First published in Great Britain by Hodder & Stoughton, an imprint of Hachette UK, 2009  
Published in Penguin Books 2017

Copyright © 2009 by Jojo's Mojo Limited  
Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Moyes, Jojo, 1969– author.

Title: The horse dancer / Jojo Moyes.

Description: New York, New York : Penguin Books, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016034218 (print) | LCCN 2016040337 (ebook) | ISBN  
9780143130628 (paperback) | ISBN 9781524704445 (ebook) |

Classification: LCC PR6113.O94 H67 2017 (print) | LCC PR6113.O94 (ebook) |  
DDC 823/.92—dc23

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover design: Roberto de Vicq de Cumplich

Version\_3

**TO C, S, H AND L  
AND TO MECCA HARRIS**

# Contents

[\*Author's Note\*](#)

[\*Praise for Jojo Moyes\*](#)

[\*About the Author\*](#)

[\*By Jojo Moyes\*](#)

[\*Title Page\*](#)

[\*Copyright\*](#)

[\*Dedication\*](#)

[\*Epigraph\*](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[\*Acknowledgments\*](#)

[\*Excerpt from Me Before You\*](#)

[\*Excerpt from After You\*](#)

*Show me your horse and I will tell you what you are.*  
**OLD ENGLISH PROVERB**

# Prologue

He saw her yellow dress before he saw her, glowing in the fading light; a beacon at the far end of the stables. He stopped for a moment, unsure that he could trust his eyes. Then her pale arm reached up, Gerontius's elegant head dipping over the door to take whatever treat she offered, and he was walking briskly, half running, the metal tips of his boots clicking on the wet cobbles.

"You are here!"

"Henri!"

His arms were around her as she turned; he kissed her, dipped his head to inhale the glorious scent of her hair. The breath that escaped him seemed to come from somewhere in his boots.

"We got here this afternoon," she said, into his shoulder. "I've barely had time to change. I must look awful . . . but I was in the audience and glimpsed you through the curtain. I had to come to wish you luck."

Her words had become jumbled, but he could barely hear her anyway. He was shocked by the girl's sheer presence; the feel of her in his arms after so many months' absence. "And just look at you!" She took a step back, allowing her gaze to travel from his black peaked cap all the way down his immaculate uniform, then reached up to brush an imaginary fleck from one of his gold epaulettes. He noted, with gratitude, the reluctance with which she withdrew her fingers. There was no awkwardness, he marveled, even after so many months. No coquettishness. She was utterly guileless; the girl of his imagination made flesh again.

"You look wonderful," she said.

"I . . . cannot stay," he said. "We ride in ten minutes."

"I know . . . Le Carrousel is so exciting. We've been watching the motorcyclists, and the parade of tanks," she said. "But you, Henri, you

and the horses are definitely the big draw.” She glanced behind her toward the arena. “I think the whole of France is here to see you.”

“You . . . get *les billets*?”

They frowned at each other. Language was still a problem, despite their best efforts.

“*Billets* . . .” He shook his head, irritated with himself. “Ticket. Tickets. Best tickets.”

She beamed, and his brief dissatisfaction evaporated. “Oh, yes. Edith, her mother and I are in the front row. They simply can’t wait to see you ride. I’ve told them everything about you. We’re staying at the Château de Verrières.” Her voice dropped to a whisper, even though no one was near. “It’s very grand. The Wilkinsons have an *awful* lot of money. Much more than we have. It was very kind of them to bring me.”

He watched her talk—distracted by the Cupid’s bow of her upper lip. She was here. His hands, in their white kid gloves, cradled her face. “Florence . . .” He breathed, kissing her again. The scent of the sun infused her skin, even though dusk had fallen. It was intoxicating, as if she had been created to radiate warmth. “Every day I miss you. Before, there is nothing but Le Cadre Noir. Now . . . nothing is good without you.”

“Henri . . .” She stroked his cheek, her body against his. He felt almost giddy.

“Lachapelle!”

He whipped round. Didier Picart stood at the head of his horse, a groom at his side preparing his saddle. He was pulling on his gloves. “Perhaps if you think about your riding as much as your English where we can achieve something, eh?”

Florence did not know enough French to understand but she caught the look that flickered across Picart’s face, and Henri saw she had guessed that whatever the other Frenchman had said it was not complimentary.

The familiar anger rose, and he set his jaw against it. He shook his head at Florence, trying to convey to her Picart’s stupidity, his irrelevance. Picart had been like this—insulting, provocative—since the trip to England when she and Henri had met. English girls had no class, Picart had exclaimed, in the mess afterward; Henri knew that it had been aimed directly at him. They did not know how to dress. They ate like pigs at a trough. They would lie down with anyone for a few francs, or the equivalent of a pint of that foul beer.

It had taken him weeks to work out that Picart's bile had little to do with Florence, and everything to do with his fury at having been usurped within Le Cadre Noir, jostled aside by the son of a farmer. Not that that made it easier to hear it.

Picart's voice echoed down the yard: "I hear there are rooms near the quai Lucien Gautier. A little more fitting than a stableyard, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Henri's hand tightened around Florence's. He tried to keep his voice calm as he spoke: "You could be the last man on earth and she would be too good for you, Picart."

"Don't you know, farmer boy, that any whore will have you if the price is right?" Picart smirked, placed a perfectly polished boot in his stirrup and vaulted onto his horse.

Henri made to step forward, but Florence stopped him. "Darling . . . look, I'd better get to my seat," she said, backing away. "You need to prepare." She hesitated, then reached up and kissed him again, her slim white hand pulling the back of his neck toward her. He knew what she was trying to do: tug his thoughts from Picart's poison. And she was right; it was impossible to feel anything but joy when Florence's lips were on his own. She smiled. "Bonne chance, écuyer."

"Écuyer!" he repeated, momentarily diverted, touched that in his absence she had discovered the correct word for "horseman."

"I'm learning!" She blew a kiss, her eyes filled with mischief, with promise, and then she was gone, his English girl, running back down the long stables, her heels clicking on the cobbles.



Le Carrousel, the annual military festival, traditionally marked the end of a year of training for the young cavalry officers of Saumur. As usual, the July weekend was thick with visitors to the medieval town, keen not just to witness the passing out of the young cavalymen but the traditional displays of cavalry riding, motorbike acrobatics and the parade of tanks, their great hulls still scarred from the war.

It was 1960. The old guard was teetering in the face of an onslaught of popular culture, of shifting attitudes and Johnny Hallyday, but in Saumur there was little appetite for change. The annual performance of the twenty-two elite French horsemen, some military, some civilian, who comprised Le Cadre Noir, the highlight of Le Carrousel weekend, was always enough to guarantee that the tickets were sold out within days—



to the local community, to those who were imbued with a sense of France's heritage, and, on a less cerebral level, to those intrigued by posters all over the Loire region promising "Majesty, Mystery, Horses that Defy Gravity."

Le Cadre Noir had been born almost 250 years earlier, after the decimation of the French cavalry in the Napoleonic Wars. In an attempt to rebuild what had once been considered a crack band of horsemen, a school was created in Saumur, a town which had housed an equestrian academy since the 16th century. Here, a corps of instructors had been gathered from the finest riding schools at Versailles, the Tuileries and Saint Germain, to pass on the high traditions of academic riding to a new generation of officers, and had continued to do so ever since.

With the advent of tanks and mechanized warfare, Le Cadre Noir faced questions as to the usefulness of such an arcane organization. But for decades no government had felt able to disband what had, by then, become part of France's heritage: the horsemen in their black uniforms were iconic, and France, with its traditions of L'Académie Française, haute cuisine and couture, understood the importance of the tradition. The horsemen themselves, perhaps recognizing that the best way to ensure survival was to create a new role, widened their remit: as well as teaching cavalrymen, the school opened its doors to reveal its rarefied skills and magnificent horses at public performances in France and abroad.

This was the Le Cadre Noir in which Henri Lachapelle now found himself, and that night's performance was the most symbolically important of the year, in the home of Le Cadre Noir, a chance to demonstrate hard-won skills to friends and family. The air smelled of caramel, wine and firecrackers, and the heat of thousands of gently moving bodies. Around the place du Chardonnet, in the heart of the École de Cavalerie, its elegant, honeyed buildings, the crowds were already swelling. The carnival atmosphere was amplified by the July heat, the still evening, an inflating air of expectation. Children ran to and fro with balloons or sticks of candy floss, their parents lost in crowds that surveyed stalls selling paper windmills and sparkling wine, or merely walking in laughing groups across the great bridge to the pavement cafés of the north side. All the while a low hum of excitement emanated from those who had already taken their seats around the Grand Manège, the vast sand arena of the public performance, and now sat impatiently, fanning themselves and perspiring in the dimming light.

“Attends!”

Henri, hearing the cry to attention, checked his saddle and bridle, asked the *dresseur* for the fifteenth time whether his uniform was straight, then rubbed the nose of Gerontius, his horse, admiring the minute ribboned plaits that the groom had sewn across his gleaming neck, muttering words of praise and encouragement into his elegantly trimmed ears. Gerontius was seventeen, elderly in terms of the academy, and would soon be retired. He had been Henri’s horse since he had arrived at Le Cadre Noir three years previously, and an instant, passionate bond had formed between them. Here, within the confines of the school’s ancient walls, it was not unusual to see young men kissing their horses’ noses, muttering endearments they would have been embarrassed to bestow on a woman.

“Vous êtes prêt?” Le Grand Dieu, the master horseman, was striding down the center of the preparatory arena, followed by a coterie of *écuyers*, his gilded uniform and three-cornered cap marking him out as the most senior of the school’s practitioners. He stood in front of the young horsemen and their fidgeting horses. “This, as you know, is the highlight of our year. The ceremony dates back more than a hundred and thirty years, and the traditions of our school from many years before that, back to Xenophon and the age of the Greeks.

“So much in our world today seems to be about the need for change, of throwing out the old ways in pursuit of what is free or easy. Le Cadre Noir believes there is still a place for an elite, for the pursuit of excellence above all else. Tonight you are ambassadors, showing that true grace, true beauty can only be the result of discipline, of patience, of sympathy and self-denial.”

He gazed around him. “Ours is an art that dies the moment it is created. Let us make the people of Saumur feel privileged to witness such a spectacle.”

There was a murmur of approval, then the men began to mount their horses, some fiddling with their caps, rubbing at nonexistent marks on their boots, little gestures to dispel the anxiety that was creeping in.

“You’re ready, Lachapelle? Not too nervous?”

“No, sir.” Henri stood straight, feeling the older man’s eyes travel swiftly over his uniform, checking for chinks in perfection. He was conscious that his studied calm was betrayed by the sweat trickling from his temples to his stiff mandarin collar.

“It’s no shame to feel a little adrenaline at one’s first Carrousel,” he said, stroking Gerontius’s neck. “This old hand will see you through. So, you perform Capriole in the second team performance. Then, riding Phantasme, La Croupade. *D’accord?*”

“Yes, sir.”

He knew the *maîtres écuyers* had been split over whether he should be granted such a visible role in the annual performance, given his history over these past months, the arguments, his perceived and catastrophic lack of discipline . . . His groom had passed on to him the talk in the tack room: that his rebelliousness had nearly cost him his place in Le Cadre Noir altogether.

He had not attempted to defend himself. How could he have explained to them the seismic shift that had taken place within him? How could he tell them that, to a man who had never heard a word of affection, or felt a gentle touch, her voice, her kindness, her breasts, her scent and hair had proven not just a distraction but an obsession far more powerful than an intellectual treatise on the finer points of horsemanship?

Henri Lachapelle’s childhood had been a world of chaos and disorder, dominated by his father. Refinement was a two-franc bottle of wine, and any attempt at learning derided. Joining the cavalry had provided him with a lifeline, and his progression through the ranks until he was recommended for one of the rare positions at Le Cadre Noir had seemed the summit of what any man could expect in life. At twenty-five he had believed himself at home for the first time.

He was prodigiously talented. His years on the farm had given him a rare capacity for hard work. He had an aptitude for dealing with difficult horses. There was talk that he might eventually prove a *maître écuyer*—even, in more fanciful moments, another Grand Dieu. He had been sure that the rigor, the discipline, the sheer pleasure and reward of learning would be enough for the rest of his days.

And then Florence Jacobs from Clerkenwell, who hadn’t even liked horses but had taken up a free ticket to the French riding-school performance in England, had destroyed it all—his peace of mind, his resolve, his patience. Later in life, with the kind of perspective that comes only with experience, he might have told his younger self that such passion was only to be expected with a first love, that such cataclysmic feelings would ease and perhaps fade. But Henri—a solitary man with few friends who might have offered such sage advice—knew only that, from the moment he had noticed the dark-haired girl who had

watched, wide-eyed, from the side of the arena for three nights running, she was all he could think about. He had introduced himself, not even sure why he had sought her out after his performance, and every minute spent without her since felt like an irritation or, worse, an endless, meaningless abyss. And where did that leave everything else?

His concentration disappeared almost overnight. On his return to France he began to question the doctrine, became vexed by the tiny details he considered irrelevant. He accused Devaux, one of the senior *maîtres écuyers*, of being “stuck in the past.” It was only when he had missed the third training session in a row, and his groom had warned him he would be let go, that he realized he had to take a firm grip on himself. He studied Xenophon, bent himself to his travails. Kept his nose clean. He had felt reassured by Florence’s increasingly frequent letters, her promise that she would be over to see him that summer. And a few months on, perhaps as a reward, he had been given the key role in Le Carrousel: La Croupade—one of the most challenging movements a rider could attempt—displacing Picart and adding insult to whatever that privileged young man had already considered injurious.

The Grand Dieu mounted his horse, a robust Portuguese stallion, and took two elegant steps close to him. “Don’t let me down, Lachapelle. Let us treat this evening as a new start.”

Henri nodded, a sudden attack of nerves silencing him. He mounted, gathered his reins, checked that the black peaked cap was straight on his shorn head. He could hear the murmur of the crowd, the expectant hush as the orchestra played a few exploratory notes, the kind of dense silence that can only come from a thousand people watching intently. He was dimly aware of a murmured “Good luck” among his fellows, and then he was guiding Gerontius into his place, halfway along the militarily exact line of gleaming, beribboned horses. His mount was eagerly awaiting his first instruction as the heavy red curtain was pulled back, beckoning them into the floodlit arena.



Despite the calm, orderly appearance of its twenty-two horsemen, the graceful nature of their public performances, life at Le Cadre Noir was physically and intellectually testing. Day after day Henri Lachapelle had found himself exhausted, almost reduced to tears of frustration by the endless corrections of the *maîtres écuyers*, his apparent inability to

persuade the huge, highly strung horses to perform the “airs above the ground” to their exacting standards. He had felt, even if he could not prove, a perceived prejudice against those who had entered the elite school from the military, as he had, rather than from the civilian riding competitions, those upper-class members of French society who had always had the twin luxuries of fine horses and time with which to build their skills. In theory, all were equal in Le Cadre Noir, separated only by their skills on horseback. Henri was conscious that egalitarianism ran no deeper than their serge uniforms.

Yet slowly, steadily, working from six in the morning until late into the evening, the farmhand from Tours had built a reputation for hard work and his skill in communicating with the most difficult horses. Henri Lachapelle, the *maîtres écuyers* would observe, from under their black caps, had a “quiet seat.” He was *sympathique*. It was the reason that, alongside his beloved Gerontius, he had been allocated Phantasme, the explosive young iron gray gelding, who needed only the slightest excuse for catastrophic behavior. He had been quietly anxious about the decision to put Phantasme in such a role all week. But now, with the eyes of the crowd upon him, the musical beauty of the strings filling his ears, the even tempo of Gerontius’s paces beneath him, he felt, suddenly, in Xenophon’s words, that he was indeed a “man on wings.” He felt Florence’s admiring eyes upon him and knew that later his lips would meet her skin, and rode more deeply, more elegantly, with a lightness of touch that had the veteran horse showing off, his neat ears flicking forward with pleasure. This is what I am made for, he thought, with gratitude. Everything I need is here. He saw the flames of the torches flickering on the walls of the ancient pillars, heard the rhythmic thud of the horses’ hooves as they dovetailed neatly in and out of each other around him. He cantered in formation around the great manège, lost in the moment, conscious only of the horse that moved so beautifully beneath him, flicking out his hooves in a way that made Henri want to laugh. The old horse was showing off.

“Sit straight, Lachapelle. You’re riding like a peasant.”

He blinked, glimpsed Picart as he rode up alongside him, passed him shoulder to shoulder.

“Why do you fidget so? Did your whore give you the itch?” he hissed, under his breath.

Henri made as if to speak, but broke off as Le Grand Dieu shouted, “Levade!” and in a row, the riders raised their horses onto their back

legs, to a burst of clapping.

As the horses' front feet hit the ground again, Picart turned away. His voice, however, was still clearly audible. "Does she fuck like a peasant too?"

Henri bit the inside of his lip, forcing himself to keep his cool, not to let his anger travel down the reins to infect his sweet-natured horse. He could hear the announcer explaining the technicalities of the riders' movements, and tried to corral his thoughts, to let the words flow through him. Under his breath, he repeated the words of Xenophon: "Anger undermines effective communication with your horse." He would not let Picart destroy this night. "*Mesdames et messieurs*, now in the center of the arena you will see Monsieur de Cordon performing levade. See how the horse balances on his hind legs at an angle of exactly forty-five degrees." Henri was dimly aware of the black horse rearing somewhere behind him, the sudden breaking-out of applause. He forced himself to focus, to hold Gerontius's attention. But he kept thinking of Florence's face when Picart had yelled his obscenities near her, the anxiety that had passed across her features. What if she knew more French than she had let on?

"And now, you will see Gerontius, one of our older horses, performing capriole. This is one of the most demanding moves, for both horse and rider. The horse leaps into the air, kicking out behind him while all four feet are off the ground."

Henri slowed Gerontius, teaming the resistance of his hands with a swift request from his spurs. He felt the horse begin to rock beneath him, the *terre à terre*, the stationary rocking-horse motion that would build power beneath him. I will show them, he thought, and then: I will show him.

Everything else disappeared. It was just him and the brave old horse, the growing power beneath him. And then with a shout of "*Derrière!*" he brought his whip hand toward the horse's rear, his spurs to the horse's belly, and Gerontius was leaping upward, into the air, his back legs shooting out horizontally behind him. Henri was aware of a sudden blinding bank of camera flashes, a great stereophonic *whooo* of delight, applause, and then he was cantering toward the red curtain, taking with him a glimpse of Florence, who had stood to applaud him, her face wreathed in proud smiles.

"Bon! C'était bon!" He was already sliding off Gerontius, his hand rubbing the horse's shoulder, the *dresseur* leading him away. He was

dimly aware of some exclamations of approval, then a change in tempo of the music in the arena, a glimpse through the red curtain of two other *écuyers* performing their own display on foot, their horses controlled by two long reins.

“Phantasme is very nervous.” The groom had appeared beside him, his thick black brows knotted with concern. He chastised the gray horse, which wheeled around them. “Watch him, Henri.”

“He will be fine,” Henri said absently, lifting his hat to wipe the sweat from his brow. The groom handed the reins to the waiting horsemen beside him then turned to Henri and carefully removed his cap. This movement was performed bareheaded to prevent the distraction of a sliding cap, but it always made Henri feel strangely vulnerable.

He watched the gunmetal gray horse prance into the arena in front of him, its neck already dark with sweat, a man at each shoulder.

“Go. Now. Go.” The *dresseur* brushed the back of his jacket briskly, then shoved him into the arena. Three *écuyers* surrounded the horse, one at each side of his head, another at the rear.

He strode out under the lights, wishing suddenly that, like them, he had the anchoring presence of a horse to hold onto.

“Bonne chance!” He heard his groom’s voice before it was swallowed by applause.

“*Mesdames et messieurs, voilà La Croupade*, which originated in the cavalry of the seventeen hundreds when it was considered a test of a cavalryman’s ability to stay in the saddle. Such movements may take four or five years to master. Monsieur Lachapelle will be riding Phantasme without reins or stirrups. This movement, which dates back to Greek times, is even more testing for rider than horse. It is a more elegant version of the rodeo, if you like.”

There was a ripple of laughter. Henri, half blinded by the floodlights, glanced at Phantasme, whose whitened eye was rolling with a mixture of nerves and barely suppressed fury. A naturally acrobatic horse, he disliked being held so firmly at his head, and the noise, sounds and smells of Le Carrousel seemed to have exacerbated his already bad temper.

Henri touched the horse’s tense shoulder. “Sssh,” he murmured. “It’s okay. It’s okay.” He glimpsed the quick smiles of Duchamp and Varjus, the two men at Phantasme’s head. They were both effective horsemen, quick to respond to a horse’s mercurial change in mood.

“Sit deep, eh?” Varjus said, grinning, as he gave him a leg up. “Un, deux, trois . . . hup.”

The horse was radiating tension. This is good, Henri told himself, as he straightened in the saddle. The adrenaline will give him greater height. It will look better for the crowd, for Le Grand Dieu. He forced himself to breathe deeply. It was then, as he folded his hands at the small of his back in the traditional passive position that always reminded him uncomfortably of a captive, that Henri looked down to the near side and realized who had been stationed at Phantasme’s rear.

“Shall we see what kind of rider you really are, Lachapelle?” Picart said.

He had no time to respond. He lengthened his legs as far as possible, clasped his gloved hands behind him. He heard the announcer say something else, and felt the expectant hush in the arena.

“*Attends.*”

Varjus glanced behind him. The terre à terre was building beneath him. “Un, deux, derrière!”

He felt the horse building in impulsion, heard the sudden *thwack* as Picart’s whip met its quarters. Phantasme bucked, rear end shooting up, and Henri was pitched forward, whiplashed so that he only just managed to maintain the clasp of his hands behind him. The horse steadied, and there was a burst of applause.

“Not bad, Lachapelle,” he heard Varjus mutter, braced against Phantasme’s chest.

And then, suddenly, before he had time to prepare, there was another cry of “*Derrière!*” Phantasme’s back legs were shooting him up and forward so that this time Henri’s arms flew out to the sides as he tried to maintain his balance.

“Not so soon, Picart. You’re unseating him.”

Disoriented, Henri heard Varjus’s irritated voice, the horse’s barely contained squeal as his back braced beneath him. “Two seconds. Give me two seconds,” he muttered, trying to right himself. But before he could do so he heard another *thwack*. It came down hard from above, and this time the horse’s buck was huge; he felt himself pitched forward again, the abrupt, disconcerting distance between his seat and the saddle.

Phantasme threw himself sideways now, furious, and the men struggled to hold the horse’s head. Varjus hissed something Henri could not hear. They were near the red curtain. He glimpsed Florence in her



yellow dress, could see her confusion and concern. And then: “*Enfin! Derrière!*” Before he could reposition himself there was another loud smack behind him. He was thrown forward again, his back twisting, and Phantasme, infuriated by this injudicious use of the whip, leaped forward and sideways just at the point that Henri finally lost his balance. He was on the horse’s plaited poll, he was upside down, reaching for Phantasme’s neck as the horse bucked again, before—with an audible *ouf*—he hit the floor.

Henri lay there, dimly aware of the commotion in the arena: Varjus swearing, Picart protesting, the announcer laughing. As he lifted his head from the sand, he could just make out the words: “And there you go. A very hard movement to sit. Better luck next year, Monsieur Lachapelle, eh? You see, *mesdames et messieurs*, sometimes it takes many years of practice to reach the very high standards of the *maîtres écuyers*.”

He heard the *un, deux, trois* and Varjus was at his side, hissing at him to *remount, remount*. He glanced down, realizing that his immaculate black uniform was covered with sand. Then he was up on the horse, hands at his legs, his feet, and they were walking out of the arena to sympathetic applause. It was the most painful sound he had ever heard.

He was numb with shock. Ahead, he was aware of a low argument between Varjus and Picart, but he could barely hear it above the roaring of the blood in his ears.

“What was that?” Varjus was shaking his head. “Nobody has ever fallen off during La Croupade. You made us look stupid.” It was a moment before Henri grasped that Varjus was addressing Picart.

“It’s not my fault if the only thing Lachapelle can ride is an English whore.”

Henri slid off the horse and walked up to Picart, his ears ringing. He was not even aware of the first punch, just of the loud crack as his knuckles met the man’s teeth, an almost satisfying give within the sound, a physical knowledge that something had been broken, long before pain raised the possibility that it might have been his hand. Horses shrieked and leaped apart. Men shouted. Picart was splayed on the sand, his hand pressed to his face, eyes wide with shock. Then he scrambled to his feet, launched himself at Henri and head-butted him in the chest, winding him. It was a move that might have felled a bigger man, and Henri was only five feet eight, but he had had the benefit of a childhood in which beatings were commonplace, and six years in the National

Guard. Within seconds he was atop Picart, his fists flying into the younger man's face, cheeks and chest, with all the rage of the past few months.

His knuckles met something hard and splintered. His left eye closed as a vicious blow met it. There was sand in his mouth. And then hands were dragging him off, batting at him, voices scolding, raised in disbelief.

"Picart! Lachapelle!"

As his vision blurred and righted, as he stood, spitting and swaying, the hands gripping his arms, his ears still filled with the string adagio from beyond the curtain, Le Grand Dieu was standing in front of him, his face bright with rage. "*What. On earth. Is this?*"

Henri shook his head, noting the spray of blood as he did so. "Sir . . ." He was panting, only now becoming aware of the magnitude of his mistake.

"Le Carrousel!" Le Grand Dieu hissed. "The epitome of grace and dignity. *Of discipline.* Where is your self-control? You two have brought shame on us. Get back to the stables. I have a performance to finish."

He mounted his horse as Picart staggered past, a handkerchief pressed to his ashen face. Henri watched him go. Slowly it dawned on him that the arena beyond the curtain was strangely quiet. They had seen, he realized with horror. They knew.

"Two paths." Le Grand Dieu looked down at him from the Portuguese stallion. "Two paths, Lachapelle. I told you the last time. It was your choice."

"I cannot—" he began.

But Le Grand Dieu had already ridden out into the floodlights.

# 1

*The horse rearing thus is such a thing of wonder as to fix  
the eyes of all beholders, young or old.*

**XENOPHON, ON HORSEMANSHIP, c. 350 BC**

## **AUGUST**

The six forty-seven to Liverpool Street was heaving. It seemed ridiculous that a train should be this busy so early in the morning. Natasha Macauley sat down, already overheated despite the cool of early morning, muttering an apology to a woman who had to move her jacket out of the way. The besuited man who had got on behind her forced himself into a gap between the passengers opposite, and promptly unfolded his newspaper, oblivious to the woman whose paperback he partially obscured.

It was an unusual route for her to take to work: she had spent the night at a hotel in Cambridge after a legal seminar. A satisfying number of business cards from solicitors and barristers lay in her jacket pocket; they had congratulated her on her speech, then suggested future meetings and possible work. But the cheap white wine that had flowed so freely now caused her stomach to gripe and she wished, briefly, that she had found time for breakfast. She did not normally drink, and it was hard to keep track of her consumption at events when her glass was perpetually topped up while she was distracted by conversation.

Natasha clutched her scalding polystyrene cup of coffee and glanced down at her diary, promising herself that at some point today she would

carve out a space longer than half an hour in which to clear her head. Her diary would contain an hour in the gym. She would take an hour for lunch. She would, as her mother admonished, *take care of herself*.

But for now it read:

- \* 9 a.m. LA vs Santos, Court 7
- \* Persey divorce. Child psych evaluation?
- \* Fees! Check with Linda re legal aid situation
- \* Fielding—where is witness statement? MUST FAX TODAY

Every page, for at least a fortnight ahead, was a relentless, endlessly reworked series of lists. Her colleagues at Davison Briscoe had largely switched to electronic devices—handheld jotters and BlackBerrys—with which to navigate their lives, but she preferred the simplicity of pen and paper, even though Linda complained that her schedules were unreadable.

Natasha sipped her coffee, noticed the date and winced. She added

- \* Flowers/apols re Mum's birthday

The train rumbled toward London, the flatlands of Cambridgeshire segueing into the gray, industrial outskirts of the city. Natasha stared at her paperwork, struggling to focus. She was facing a woman who seemed to think it was okay to eat a hamburger with extra cheese for breakfast, and a teenager whose blank expression was curiously at odds with the thumping emanating from his earphones. It was going to be an unforgivingly hot day: the heat seeped into the packed carriage, transferred and amplified by the bodies.

She closed her eyes, wishing she could sleep on trains, then opened them at the sound of her mobile phone. She rummaged in her bag, locating it between her makeup and her wallet. A text message flashed up:

Local authority in Watson case rolled over. Not needed in court 9 a.m. Ben

For the past four years Natasha had been Davison Briscoe's sole solicitor advocate, a solicitor-barrister hybrid that had proved useful when it came to her specialty, representing children. They were less fazed to appear in court beside the woman in whose office they had already explained themselves. For her part, Natasha liked being able to build relationships with her clients and still enjoy the more adversarial elements of advocacy.

Thanks. Will be in office in half an hour

she texted back, with a sigh of relief. Then she cursed silently; she needn't have missed breakfast after all.

She was about to put her phone away when it rang again. Ben, her trainee: "Just wanted to remind you that we—ah—rescheduled that Pakistani girl for ten thirty."

"The one whose parents are fighting care proceedings?" Beside her, a woman coughed pointedly. Natasha glanced up, saw "No Mobile Telephones" etched on the window, dipped her head and rifled through her diary. "We've also got the parents from the child-abduction case in at two. Can you dig out the relevant paperwork?" She murmured.

"Done it. And I got some croissants," Ben added. "I'm assuming you won't have had anything."

She never had. If Davison Briscoe ever abandoned the trainee system she suspected she would starve to death.

"They're almond. Your favorite."

"Slavish crawling, Ben, will get you a long way."

Natasha closed the phone, and then her case. She had just pulled the girl's paperwork from her briefcase when her phone rang again.

This time there was audible tutting. She mumbled an apology, without looking anyone in the eye. "Natasha Macauley."

"Linda. Just had a call from Michael Harrington. He's agreed to act for you in the Persey divorce."

"Great." It was a big-money divorce, with complicated custody issues. She had needed a heavyweight barrister to take the financial side.

"He wants to discuss a few matters with you this afternoon. You free at two?"

She was considering this when she became aware that the woman beside her was muttering, her tone unfriendly.

"I'm pretty sure that's okay." She remembered her diary was back in her briefcase. "Oh. No. I've got someone in."

The woman tapped her on the shoulder. Natasha placed her hand over the receiver. "I'll be two seconds," she said, more brusquely than she had intended. "I know this is a non-mobile carriage and I'm sorry, but I do need to finish this call."

She stuck the phone between ear and shoulder, struggled to find her diary, then spun round in exasperation when the woman tapped her again.

“I said I’ll only—”

“Your coffee is on my jacket.”

She glanced down. Saw the cup balanced precariously on the hem of the cream jacket. “Ah. Sorry.” She picked it up. “Linda, can we switch this afternoon around? I must have a gap somewhere.”

“Hah!”

Her secretary’s cackle rang in her ears after she had snapped shut her phone. She crossed out the court appearance in her diary, added the meeting and was about to put it back in her bag when something in the newspaper headline opposite caught her eye.

She leaned forward, checking that she had read the name in the first paragraph correctly. She leaned so far forward that the man holding the newspaper lowered it and frowned at her. “I’m sorry,” she said, still transfixed by the story. “Could I—could I have a very quick look at your paper?”

He was too taken aback to refuse. She took the newspaper, flipped it over and read the story twice, the color draining from her face, then handed it back. “Thank you,” she said weakly. The teenager beside her was smirking, as though he could hardly believe the breach of passenger etiquette that had taken place in front of him.



Sarah cut the second square of sandwiches twice diagonally, then wrapped both sets carefully in greaseproof paper. One she placed in the fridge, the other she tucked carefully into her bag with two apples. She wiped the work surface with a damp cloth, then scanned the little kitchen for crumbs before she turned off the radio. Papa hated crumbs.

Far below, the distant whine of the milk float signaled its departure from the courtyard. The milkman wouldn’t deliver up the stairs anymore, not since someone had driven off with his float while he was on the fifth floor. He still put out bottles for the old ladies in the sheltered housing opposite, but everyone else had to go to the supermarket, then lug their liter cartons back on overcrowded buses or haul them on foot in bulging shopping bags. If she made it down there, he’d let her buy one; most mornings she made it.

She checked her watch, then the filter paper to see whether the dark brown liquid had drained through. She told Papa every week that the real stuff cost loads more than instant, but he just shrugged and said that

some savings were a false economy. She wiped the bottom of the mug, then walked into the narrow hallway and stood outside his room.

“Papa?” He had long since stopped being Grandpapa.

She pushed the door with her shoulder. The little room was glowing with the morning sunlight and for a minute you could pretend outside was somewhere lovely, a beach or a country garden, instead of a tired 1960s public housing project in East London. On the other side of his bed a small bureau gleamed, his hair and clothes brushes neatly lined up below the photograph of Nana. He had not had a double bed since she’d died; there was more space in his room with a single, he said. She knew he couldn’t face the emptiness of a large bed without her grandmother in it.

“Coffee.”

The old man pushed himself up from the pillow and scrabbled on the bedside table for his glasses. “You’re going now? What’s the time?”

“Just after six.”

He picked up his watch and squinted at it. He looked curiously vulnerable in his pajamas, this man who wore his clothes as if they were a uniform. Papa was always properly dressed. “Will you catch the ten past?”

“If I run. Your sandwiches are in the fridge.”

“Tell the mad cowboy I will pay him this afternoon.”

“I told him yesterday, Papa. He’s fine.”

“And get him to put some eggs by. We’ll have them tomorrow.”

She made the bus, but only because it was a minute late. Puffing, she hurled herself on board, her bag swinging wildly behind her. She showed her pass, then sat down, nodding to the Indian woman who sat in the same spot opposite every morning, her mop and bucket still in her hand. “Beautiful,” the woman said, as the bus pulled past the betting shop.

Sarah glanced behind her, at the grimy streets illuminated in the watery morning light. “Going to be,” she conceded.

“You will be hot in those boots,” the woman said.

Sarah patted her bag. “Got my school shoes in here,” she said. They smiled awkwardly at each other, as if, after months of silence, they were embarrassed to have said so much. Sarah settled back in her seat and turned to the window.

