

## Moneyspinner

by Martin Bourne

Entering the breeding yard in Wexford, I sensed the depressed atmosphere and the unmistakable odour of manure and hay. The owner, Mr Levine walked toward me. A small weathered man wearing check shirt, padded jerkin, tweed trousers and boots. Horses were whinnying from the stables and steam drifted up from the dung heap.

“Good morning to you. You’ll be the man from London I’m supposin’. The man to tell me if we are going to get our money. Well now, I’m not interested in the money. I want to tell you it’s an absolute tragedy. No worse than that, it is the end of a wonderful thing. Heaven sent so he was and there is nothing, no amount of money that can compensate for his loss. Now, what do you say?”

“Before I can say anything, you need to tell me how the horse died?”

“You’ll have your ways I’m sure, but I’m a simple horse man and you’ll not be trying to confuse me with your slick talk. His lad found him in the morning. Flat out in his box, cold as ice. He’d been dead for hours and that’s what he was insured for. Death.”

“I know the policy is for mortality, but first I must find out why he died?”

“Well to be sure the vet will tell you. A growth he had, no doubt about it and no one knew and it killed him.”

“I’m not so sure the growth came as a surprise. Certainly the vet would have known about it when the horse went down with colic four weeks ago, because he operated and opened his gut and that is where the growth was.”

“Let me tell you, the horse was loved and well cared for and vets can be encouraged to say anything. You’ll be well aware of his value. Do you think we would have taken chances?”

“I’m sure your vet would be surprised that you feel he could be persuaded to give a false account.”

“No, no you’ll not be putting words into my mouth. I’m saying they don’t always get it right, but what you must understand is that our lad was rock solid. He won the Derby in fantastic style. He was a once in a lifetime horse and guaranteed our future financial security. He was the grand son of the great Nijinsky, and that horse is still alive, so there’s no doubt in my mind this growth came out of the blue. You know how much his siring fee was? No well I’ll tell you, it was half a million, plus the earnings if the progeny went onto win races.”

This conversation was taking place just inside the entrance exactly where Levine had met me.

“You didn't give me a chance to answer. The stud fee is written into the policy, so I am well aware of the value, but why don't we go and sit in your office and look through the documentation.”

Levine sat behind a battered oak desk strewn with papers and offered me the only other seat, which was an uncomfortable straight-backed dining chair. Studying the vet report in greater detail I realised the significance of the date on which the colic and subsequent operation had occurred.

“Well, there it is, in black and white, full details of the growth and the policy only just renewed.”

“Yes, this is a concern. You see the operation was carried out 16th September, the policy renewed 1st October and the horse died 14th October. You agree these dates are correct?”

“They seem to be. What is your point?”

“The point is this. The insurance broker confirmed there had been no instances of illness with the horse at the time the policy renewed. His assurance on this point would have followed a conversation with you and with the owner, and both of you would have known that the horse had colic and had undergone an operation. In failing to disclose this information a misrepresentation has occurred and this will give insurers grounds to decline the claim.”

Mr Levine asked me to leave.