



IT WAS NO NEED FOR studying and dreaming. Often in the past if Medicine Ed need to know about a horse, he could sit over a hand made of tail and mane hairs of the horse and tied with a red string, and a hoof shaving, and one green corner-bit of his lucky money, push them around in hot candle-sperm with a hoof pick under the light of the same white candle, and dream until the answer came to him. But today was no need, no time. Soon as he heard the name of the horse Zeno was running, he knew what he must do. He must ride his lucky money on Mr Boll Weevil, who had beckoned to him—and somehow he felt he had to touch his lucky money just then. *They it is, nemmind if it look strange*—he stumbled into the trailer.

It was a fifty Zeno give him last year when they stole a nice little race in the Poconos with Small Town Doc. He kept it pressed flat and neat between the lid and the waxed-cardboard seal of a pickle jar of hedge-beech leaf. The bill was evenly folded four times so Ulysses S. Grant looked up thoughtful at you out of the lower left-hand corner. It was no use wishing it was a hundred, or a couple of hundreds. He'd seen better years than them with Zeno, and worse years. Thing of it was, he had lucky money, like the boll weevil he was looking for a home, and here was Mr Boll Weevil in the four slot in the fourth race, beckoning to him.

It was not a harming goofer that Medicine Ed knew the

makings of. This ghost gray powder had never been meant to undo a horse. It was a rootwork of strong encouragement, of reaching deep into the lost harmony and milking up one drop of what was needed at the last. The gray rolled leaf which stuck to itself like cobweb came from a hedge-beech in the old Salters family plot hard by New Life Baptist churchyard in Cambray, South Carolina. The tree grew sideways out of the grave of his grandfather, Eduardo Salters, greatest jockey ever known in South Carolina, born in slavery, killed in a match race in 1888. It sprung out of the grave dirt twisted in the shape of a man riding, with one straight limb shooting out of it like a whip, and its leaves must be collected at dark of moon from that limb only. This jar was dried heartleaf, this one was horse mushroom, this here was boneset. The fine graygold sugar with specks of black peat in it was sand and shatters from the infield of Major Longstreet Park, in that little arc of elderberry bush where Cannonball was buried. And finally he had needed blood of great speed, and what he got musta was good enough. This was the blood of Platonic, who he had rubbed for Whirligig Farm, and who give him his own bleeding ulcer. Platonic had scratched his fetlock in the gate the day he won the Seashell, and Ed had scrooched down before he let the horse have his bath and scraped every black flake into this little bottle here.

And that, once he mixed it to his recipe, was Medicine Ed's horse-goofer dust. But he had give up doctoring. Come to find out if you asked by powerful means for more than the animal had to give, you could not manage the results. Every time he had cast the powder the horse had won, but won for the last time. Some way that was the last race of the horse, at least the last he ever saw. Either he was all done like Willie W, who was nerved and hooked a front sticker on his behind foot and ripped out his frog and had

to be put down; or Scraggly Lake, who bled for the third time and was banned and auctioned and he never saw him again; or Broomstick, the onliest horse Medicine Ed ever loved, who win for him at Hollywood Park and snapped her cannon bone in the van on the short drive home. And which was why he had let the medicine go, all except his name, which nobody up here was wise to where it come from. And that was a good thing.

Fact was, after that first time with Willie W, he had had to need the money extremely bad. At Santa Anita he bought himself a change of address fast, behind what-was-her-name, Estelle, whose pachuco boyfriend come looking for him with a knife. After Broomstick he vowed never to touch the horse-goofer again. This was in 19 and 55.

But now the peculiar harmony of Mr Boll Weevil running in the fourth race had beckoned to him. He was seventy-two years old and tired. He never paid no mind to horses' names, disremembered most of em. This one sneaked up on him: *He's looking for a home. He's looking for a ho-ome.* Must be some kind of home out there looking for him, Medicine Ed.

He had done for horses all his life. If he had spent his working days in one place, with just one stable, like Charles Philpott, maybe they would give him a tack room in the end, or even a room to himself over the track kitchen and let him fade. He would turn into one of them old pops who get up at four in the morning to the day they die and limp to the track and run errands for folks, get ice and coffee and such. But as a young man he'd been restless. If somebody's girlfriend caught his eye, he was heedless. In the old days he'd get to drinking, get to fighting. Then worry over Platonic give him that ulcer which put him in Sinai Hospital and damn near killed him. Afraid to make a mistake, afraid something gone happen to the horse before he get him to his race, *study and*

*worry all the time and after I win the Seashell what they give me? They it is—a damn gold watch.* He was bad sick when he worked on Platonic. It was only that jealous pachuco boyfriend with a knife who got him out of that, the time he used the goofer with Broomstick. He cashed his bet and went down to Tijuana for two years, got him a room over a dentist shop and didn't miss no racetrack either, unh-unh, not one bit. Except for what happened to his filly, he used to think sometimes he ought to find that crazy Mexican and thank him.

Down Tijuana, that was when he got his teeth. He had plenty of time to get fitted downstairs for a nice set of teeth until his cash run down. Bad teeth could kill you, slowly poison your blood, ruin the other organs. Now he had the good teeth and no home. Maybe if he hadn't got his teeth, but he had.

If he could know death would snatch him quick, like it took Charles Philpott. But last time he seen the doc—it was for a tetanus shot after some horse shipped up from Florida jumped out the stall and bit him, and Zeno made him go—the doc said his heart and lungs were twenty years younger than he was. If he hadn't give up drinking after that ulcer, but after he got out the hospital he couldn't look at the stuff no more. And then he forgot about drinking, found he grew ponderful in the evenings on his own anymore, didn't need no likka, no nothing. He had deep thoughts. He had no learning, no way to write his thoughts, but this was his own fault. If he hadn't run away to his Uncle Wilbur at the races at the age of eight, so his other family was lost to him—on his father's side, a good many of them was educated, teachers and barbers and such. After his mother died he could have gone to her people in Arkansas, but they were Christian path folk who farmed cotton on shares and didn't want nothing to do with racehorses.

Looking for a home at the age of seventy-two! It was his own damn fault. He could feel bitter about certain things—after he win the Seashell Stakes, a 225,000 dollar race, a gold watch that stopped the first year—but some way he was lucky. He could see something in the whirling dust, the shadows. The harmony showed itself to him. It made strong suggestions to him, as to why things were the way they were. But this was the onliest time it had told him in words what to do. Mr Boll Weevil.

He put the fifty back for now and screwed the lid on tight, and as he walked out of the trailer to collect his abandoned horse from the frizzly hair girl and the blacksmith, he caught his brown sunken face under its pad of white hair in the shaving mirror over the kitchen sink. Even in his hurlyment it stopped him—how it seemed to quiver and heave and then all at once to crack open, not like a death mask, but like a woman's beauty mask which a newborn face is just coming out of. In the same moment he remembered to reach in the glass on the counter and slip in his teeth. Outside it was a young lady present. This was always a good sign.