1939 Los Angeles & the Untold Story of a Horse Racing Fix

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John Christgau

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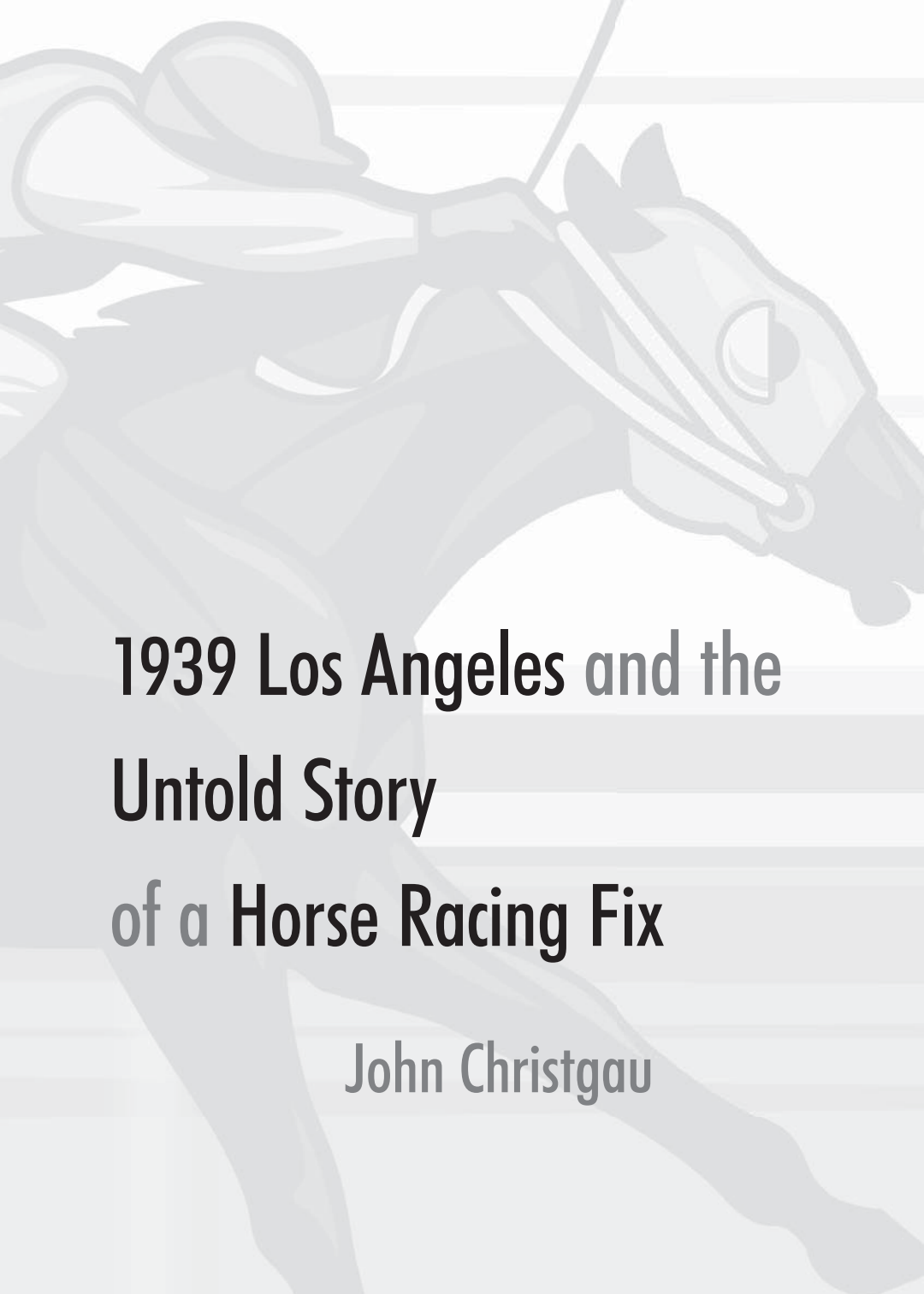

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For Dion

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Following page 106

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Years ago, while driving through Russia, my friend Dion Dubois told me the riveting story of a horse-racing fix involving his father and four other jockeys at the Elko County Fair in Nevada in 1947. In search of that story, I stumbled across this one. This book is dedicated to Dion, the best storyteller I know.

Several people served as co-tellers of this story: Freda and Margie Siler spent a half day telling me Albert Siler's story; George Siler and the late Jim Siler carefully took me through Siler family history; Robin Rae Adair made the arrangements for me to interview her father, Raymond Adair, who provided clear memories of his friendship with Albert Siler; although I am twice his size, Junior Nicholson's vivid stories helped me to imagine what it must have been like to be a tiny bug boy from the Great Plains in search of racing stardom; Ted and Ursula Potter's pictures of Lowden helped me visualize that setting.

Biff Lowry provided helpful leads. Pete Pedersen shared racing history with me, then shifted gears dramatically and took me up to the stewards' crow's nest at Hollywood Park, where his colleagues George Slender and Tom Ward let me watch them work. Steve Gehre and John DeFelice introduced me in the 1960s

to the exciting world of horse racing. They taught me to look for "eight checkers" and "big grays with iodine."

I was assisted by numerous librarians, archivists, and media specialists along the way: Sonja Moss, the San Mateo Library; Liz Carson, the Dayton Memorial Library; Martha Pyle, Bend Public Library; Mollie Coffey, Spokane Public Library; Myra Gohl, Missoula Public Library; Brian Shovers, Montana Historical Society; Debby Schoeningh, Baker City *Record-Courier*; Eugene Cameron, Los Angeles County Records Center; Genevieve Troka, California State Archives; Marlene Armas-Zermino, the Los Angeles Millennium Biltmore; the Los Angeles Conservancy, whose picture files helped me escape into the glamour and history of Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s; the Keeneland Library of racing history; Mike Weiss, Beulah Park racetrack; Kelly Haigh, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; and C. P. McBride of Del Mar racetrack.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my wife, Peggy, for her steady encouragement and her daily blessings.

THE GAMBLER AND THE BUG BOY

1. THE GAMBLER

He had an easy, cocksure smile that drew other gamblers to him as if he had a secret. Even when he was motionless, he seemed to be bouncing subtly like a bandleader keeping time for "One O'Clock Jump" or "In the Mood." He had earned the nickname "Big" Mooney not because of his size—he wasn't all that big—but because he liked to sweep into fancy nightclubs and set up the house with drinks—especially champagne, if he was flush from a big winning bet. He described himself as a "gambler of consequence," even if, at that moment, he happened to be "tapped out" and looking for somebody to float him a brief loan until he could get back on his financial feet. Games of chance, he said, were his life's work. He had learned to spot somebody working the crimp in a card game before he had even learned to drive. He would bet on anything—football, baseball, racing, dice, cards, roulette, perhaps even two flies crawling up a wall if the odds were right.

His past was sketchy, and the two names he went by—Barney Mooney or Bernard Einstoss—left people wondering whether he was a bibulous, young Irishman or a cocky German. But no matter what name he used, the minute he walked into a book-

making joint, he moved quickly around the room, shaking hands with those who knew him. To those who didn't, he introduced himself simply as "Mooney!" in a strong voice. Even if you didn't know him, the point was, you were supposed to.

His father was a Jewish grocer, and his family had moved to Los Angeles in 1921, when he was eight-years-old. He had an older brother named Willie with whom he worked in his father's store. They both hated the work, and as a ten-year-old still in short pants, Bernard Einstoss began flipping coins in the schoolyard and gambling for chocolates, peanuts, money, or marbles. By the time he was in high school, he was betting on racing, prize fights, and even elections. Then he began cutting school to sit in the box seats with professional gamblers at Wrigley Park in Los Angeles, betting hundreds of dollars on the next pitch or strikeout.

He was sixteen when the stock market crashed in 1929. The lesson he learned from the crash was that hard work and enterprise only led to economic ruin, and he quit school. He took the professional gambling name of "Mooney" and spent months at Saratoga racetrack in New York, playing the horses. His extraordinary good looks might have made him seem inaccessible if he hadn't sprinkled his speech with the grammatical misconstructions appropriate for the warmhearted and earthy son of a neighborhood grocer. He wore fancy suits and a fedora with the front brim curled down just slightly, but he was half the age of the frustrated gamblers who envied his self-assurance and sought out his company.

His friends noticed that he was nervous and jumpy all the time, as if he were electrified or supercharged. He argued that success at gambling depended on skill, not luck. Small bets were behind him. He had grown out of schoolyard marbles and coin flipping.

He was only interested in what he called "major action." It gave him a feeling of euphoria that he never felt in his father's store. It wasn't the exact moment that he won or lost that gave him an emotional rush. It was the *waiting*—that brief moment before the last card was dealt in a poker game, or the twenty minute wait for a race to be run—that excited him the most. It was even better than sex. When he did win, he was generous and reckless, tossing bills to friends and strangers as if they were Monopoly money. He was the "big shooter" who was unable to stop either the winning or the losing. If anybody had tried to pull him aside and warn him that gambling had taken possession of him, he wouldn't have listened.

He cultivated an air of supreme confidence, as if good looks *and* good luck were his birthright, but he suffered periods of bad luck and gambling losses that undermined his confidence. The longer each period lasted, the more flamboyant he became in his speech and dress, as if the only thing keeping him from selling apples on the street was the appearance of confidence and wealth. Still, if a losing streak continued, it eventually began to gnaw at him that he was a loser, just another one of those unlucky "squirrels," as he called them, who hung out in gambling parlors and at racetracks wearing long faces and begging for a loan from somebody to tide them over. Meanwhile, the frightening eruptions of anger that he periodically suffered over his gambling losses defied explanation. What reason did he have to get so angry? He had the world on a string.

In 1933, eager to find a steady income within the exciting world of gambling and bookmaking, he took a job with regular paychecks managing a bookmaking and gambling den in Las Vegas. The bright lights, the thick smoke, the smell of whiskey in the wood and the carpets, winners yelping like restless sled dogs—

just being around it all was enough to feed his irresistible craving for gambling action. Later that same year, he temporarily satisfied the craving by managing the gambling activities of the Cotton Club in Culver City. Then, to get what he called "walk-around money," which he needed for quick bets, and which he kept in safe-deposit boxes around Los Angeles, he began organizing seedy smokers for police and lawyers who gathered in private clubs to watch stripteasers jump out of cakes and then slither like voluptuous snakes around brass poles.

In 1934 Big Mooney met Benjamin "Benny" Chapman, who had jug ears, sad, dark eyes, and crinkly hair that was beginning to gray at the tips. He had a quiet gambling confidence that stood in sharp contrast to Mooney's flamboyance, and he looked old enough to be Mooney's father. He had built his initial gambling bankroll shooting craps with fellow doughboys coming home from the Great War. With no other professional training, Chapman's shipboard luck had been enough to convince him that gambling was the profession for him, and he had set up offices as a bookmaker in a luxury suite with special phone lines in the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. He boasted to his gambling friends that his markers were good all over the country and even in Cuba, and his room at the Biltmore, decorated with wood paneling and daily baskets of fresh flowers, became the meeting place for "gamblers of consequence" like the legendary Nick the Greek or his friend Big Mooney. On warm summer nights, when Mooney would come up to the room, dance music from the cavernous Biltmore Bowl, advertised as the world's largest nightclub and the site of the annual Academy Awards, drifted up and into the open hotel windows, suggesting a glamour and luxury that mere grocers would never know.

The only way to get rich on the horses, Benny Chapman told Big Mooney on such nights, was *not* to bet on them. Only suckers tried to beat the races. Only squirrels like Mooney, beguiled by occasional hot streaks and ignorant of the percentages in gambling, kept coming back to the roulette wheel or the dice table until they had lost everything. Instead, Chapman told Mooney, book the bets of other squirrels. He would soon find himself as rich as those bejeweled and wealthy dancers down in the Biltmore Bowl.

Tired of the vacillations of his own racetrack luck, Mooney was eager to follow Chapman's advice, and he opened up a betting parlor in Huntington Beach. Chapman warned him not to "play from the other side of the counter," but he couldn't resist making bets himself now and then, and the club soon folded. Then he went north with a bankroll of $450 that he borrowed from Chapman, and he set up shop as a "betting commissioner" at the Kingston Club on 111 Ellis Street in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, among three-story brick flophouses and dark bars with gaudy, neon signs. He liked to spend mornings at the club sitting as one of the numerous commissioners who took turns covering high-stakes wagers phoned in on football, baseball, or especially racing.

Despite Chapman's advice, horse racing continued to fascinate Mooney, because it was different. In racing he wasn't at the mercy of the mysterious laws that determined the turn of the roulette wheel or the roll of the dice. In racing there were handicapping percentages that he could control. In racing, if he was smart enough to remember how horses performed and patient enough to wait for the right opportunity, he was certain he could win big. All he had to do was stay away from the racetrack touts promoting foolish systems based on the Talmud or planetary alignments.

With a bankroll now to see him through losing streaks, Big Mooney began making calls from the Kingston Club in San Francisco to bookmakers in Los Angeles or back east who covered his horse racing bets. He boasted that on a good day, through booking bets as a commissioner and placing his own bets based on the handicapping percentages, he could win four or five thousand dollars, and he loved to hold court in the corner of the Kingston Club talking about how to beat the races. He said the first step was never to try to select the winner but instead to figure out which horses were going to *lose*. That changed the percentages, he explained. For him the percentages were the Holy Grail of gambling. "Percentage has got to win in the long run," he insisted.

They began comparing him to Pittsburgh Phil, the nearly mythic, turn-of-the-century horse player who was credited with having invented racing charts, on the basis of which he was said to have won over two million dollars. Sure, horse racing was chancy, Pittsburgh Phil had confessed. But the races could be beaten if a player had a big enough bankroll to absorb the losses. And that was precisely Big Mooney's approach. He had a bankroll now. His credit was good in any betting parlor in the United States. He was a big shot, a gambler of consequence who made huge bets, knew all the gambling angles, and possessed such personal charm and authority that even jockeys came to him seeking tips.

One night in October 1938, Big Mooney stood on the corner of Powell and O'Farrell in San Francisco, just around the corner from the Kingston Club. A cold, thick, San Francisco fog was settling over the city. Two gamblers of consequence stood with Big Mooney, both wearing heavy overcoats. Benny Chapman had

lost a fifteen thousand dollar bet that afternoon on the Stanford-Santa Clara football game, and he stood hunched against the cold as well as the misery of his loss. The other man with Big Mooney was the actor Lew Brice, brother of the film comedienne Fannie Brice. He wore a raked fedora and sported a thin mustache as finely groomed as eyebrows, and his face carried the same pasty, on-screen delicacy of his famous sister.

Two cops from the San Francisco vice squad approached and recognized Brice immediately. "Well, hello, Lew," one of them said.

The Powell Street cable car slid by, screeching in the fog, and Brice ignored the greeting.

The two cops explained to the three men that ever since a gambling crackdown in Los Angeles, San Francisco had been overrun with gamblers, con men, and vagrants. Now they were part of a police detail that was doing a citywide housecleaning, especially in the Tenderloin. It was all part of an effort to rid the beautiful city of what few blemishes it had, in preparation for the upcoming World's Fair.

"Lew," one of the cops said, "how would you and your buddies here like to take a walk with us."

It was an order, not an invitation, and the five men walked in the cold fog ten blocks across town to the city jail. In the light of the jailhouse, Big Mooney's good looks were striking, especially as he stood beside the still stooped-over Chapman and the delicate-looking Brice. But Big Mooney had been tapped out so often and had taken so many wrong turns—from petty larceny to auto theft to numerous bookmaking arrests—that his young face carried the look of both innocence and criminality.

What was *his* name? the police asked.

Barney Mooney.

How old was he?

Twenty-five.

What was he doing in the company of an old man like Chapman and a hopeless gambler like Brice?

Waiting for the Powell Street cable car.

To go where?

Back up the hill to his hotel.

Where had the three of them been?

A few clubs, that was all.

The men were booked on vagrancy charges. Brice posted $250 bail from a thick roll of bills. But Big Mooney and Benny Chapman spent a sleepless night in jail, listening to howling drunks and the laughter of their jailers.

The next morning in San Francisco Municipal Court, a judge offered to dismiss the vagrancy charges if the three men would promise to leave San Francisco immediately.

Big Mooney spoke for the three of them. Well, of course, Your Honor, he said. We'd be halfway back to Los Angeles already if your two cops hadn't stopped us in the fog last night.

2. THE BUG BOY

George Siler was a horse trader and tenant farmer who dragged his family back and forth across the country during the twenties and thirties, from Missouri to Oregon, then back to Missouri again, moving desperately from place to place like a dry-land sucker, expecting each new home to be Eden. His wife, Maggie, was a small, uncomplaining woman who prayed daily and who insisted to her irreligious husband that the Lord would one day bring relief from all the troubles of the world. At every new home, Maggie immediately tilled a vegetable garden to feed the family, then delivered another child, because even if it meant one more mouth to feed, adding to the family's labor force seemed like the only thing they could do for themselves to insure survival against dust bowls, ruined crops, and the disasters that seemed to stalk them.

In Missouri a premature explosion of dynamite that George had set in a lead mine left pieces of the ore in his arms, legs, and head. In Oregon he couldn't find any work, and back in Missouri he complained of being poisoned by grain elevator dust. Then all of the children came down with what the neighbors called "breakbone fever." It might have sounded like an indiscriminate

epidemic if it hadn't struck just George Siler's family and killed one of the baby boys. In Kansas George tried to sell bootleg beer, but there weren't many buyers. Then, in 1927 in Liberal, Kansas, he was carrying a sack of wheat across a plank high up in a grain elevator, his face pancaked with mill dust, when he fell down the shaft and landed on a crossbeam. He hung on the beam through the night, the elevator rumbling and moaning like an earsplitting quake that muffled his cries for help. He would have died up on the crossbeam like a chalky Christ if he hadn't managed to kick off one boot, which dropped down to a conveyor and finally brought rescuers. But the fall had broken his back, and a chiropractic quack who tried to fix it by "jump straddling" him only made things worse. He lay in bed for a year, unable to work. When he finally got back on his feet, hard work of any kind made him shake and tremble until he could hardly stand, and all those sons he had been sprinkling across the landscape like seedlings suddenly became his salvation.

They each were assigned chores that they accepted without complaint as the inescapable burden of helping their ailing father succeed at farming. "If you want something done," the neighbors began to say, "go get a Siler boy." By the 1930s there were five of them—all of them ropey and muscular but nearly as smallish as their mother, and none quite such a peanut of a boy as Albert, the second oldest, born in St. Louis shortly before the Christmas of 1920. Albert Siler was just as capable as his brothers of doing a hard day's work in the fields, but he was inclined now and then to lead them in horseplay and pranks, even if it meant a good beating by his father if they got caught. While the others were made to watch as they waited their turn, his father would whip them one by one with a willow switch or his razor strap, his face flushing redder and redder, his anger rising steadily from

exertion that aggravated the nerves of his broken back. Eventually, George Siler trembled and shook so badly that he had to be carried into the farmhouse by his sons.

Yes, the Siler boys were all hard working, the neighbors felt. But when George Siler fell into a fit of what they called the "nervous jimmies," they said he could "shake the dishes in a brick house." It wasn't just the occasional high jinks of one of his sons that set him off. It aggravated him that he seemed to be a special target for the dust bowls and droughts that followed him no matter where he went, and each new disaster shook him from head to toe with an electric bitterness.

Moving back and forth across the country, George Siler became a sucker for promises of relief in *this* world. And in the dust bowl of Kansas, the word was that western Colorado had the purest water and the most fertile soil on earth. It beckoned George like another Eden, this one of apple trees and honey, of peaches as big as softballs, of cherry trees and pears and meadows thick with alfalfa. It promised the most healthful climate in the world, with vast stretches of open rangeland; all a farmer had to do to grow abundant crops was clear the land of the chaparral and squawberry brush. In 1930 George Siler piled the family and what few belongings they had into an old Dodge truck and set out for western Colorado pulling a trailer jerry-rigged from a car frame and equipped with bunk beds for the boys to sleep in.

They picked beans along the way for money to keep going. West of Delta, Colorado, George traded the truck and trailer for a string of horses and a piece of open rangeland between the Gunnison River and a dry wash that everybody called Buttercrick. The land was littered with the fossilized bones of huge dinosaurs, and there were also rumors of caves in the area that

once sheltered prehistoric men over ten feet tall. It seemed like an odd place for a runt like Albert Siler to call home. But in the early evenings, after he had finished slopping the pigs and his chicken chores were done, Albert took off riding one of his father's horses bareback across the open range, maneuvering at top speed between occasional trees or field boulders. "He can't think of anything but horses!" his mother complained. But he insisted without apology to her or anybody else that his dream now was to be a famous thoroughbred jockey one day, just as good as the celebrated Tod Sloan or Willie Munden or Ted Atkinson, traveling a lush and celebrated world that was a far cry from the dry hardships of Buttercrick.

The school in Delta resembled a limestone prison with long, narrow windows as menacing as gun embrasures and a bell cupola that looked like a guard tower. It was no place for a free spirit like eleven-year-old Albert Siler, and with the growing independence that was the mark of his character, he said he wanted to quit school. They had nothing to teach him concerning the fine art of coaxing the last ounce of racing energy out of a tired horse, or about being brave enough to squeeze his horse at full speed between two trees, which he imagined to be the lead horses that he had been tucked in behind, patiently stalking them, waiting to shoot between them to racing victory.

All the Siler boys learned to ride bareback in Colorado, but the standing joke was that Albert was the only one who didn't look like a monkey on a football, hanging on for dear life. They would ride out to the high cliffs of the Gunnison River, then lower themselves perilously by rope down the side of the steep cliffs so that they could explore those caves that were said to have once sheltered giants. And when the five of them went to the county fair in Delta, the wild bareback race into town made

the eventual Tilt-a-Whirl or the wooden horses of the merry-go-round seem like tame entertainment.

The more exciting Albert Siler's dreams became, the more prosaic his life seemed, stuck doing pig and chicken chores in such a remote part of the world. It was to add some measure of excitement to his dull life that, just after supper one hot, summer evening in 1931, the dishes washed, the chores done, with nothing else to do but wait for it to get dark enough to go to bed, he turned his attention to the family's new truck. His father had spotted it just days earlier in the streets of Delta. A crudely lettered "for sale" sign taped in the back window betrayed an illiterate owner, his father said, who might be a "swap dope," and by late afternoon his father had traded one of his plug horses for the truck, which he gave stern warnings to his sons about. They were never to monkey with it, or worse, try to drive it.

Despite the warnings, Albert convinced two of his brothers to help him remove the spare tire from the truck. It was all part of a new game he had just thought up, he explained. They would roll the tire up to the tabletop of a small, nearby mesa. Then, each would take a turn aiming it carefully for the narrow opening between the farmhouse and the barn before they sent it rolling and bouncing downhill.

It was a harebrained scheme that was designed mainly as a test of Albert's abilities to thread any object, from a rolling truck tire to a galloping horse, through a narrow opening. But whatever reservations his brothers had about the idea, they said nothing and went along willingly, glad to have a new and exciting game to occupy them. Besides, their father was probably already sinking into that nightly coma of inarticulate, head-drooping exhaustion that preceded dragging himself up to bed. When they

were finished with the game, they could retrieve the tire, put it back on the truck, and nobody would be the wiser.

They removed the tire quickly and quietly and trotted up to the top of the mesa, the shadow of which lay over the farmyard down below and the small opening between the house and barn. In the quiet dusk, that distant opening seemed tiny now, just a narrow, doorway target that looked suddenly impossible to hit.

Albert was the first to try. "Here I go," he said and skipped beside the tire for ten yards, slapping it to get it rolling on what he hoped was a straight course.

He stopped at the edge of the tabletop mesa and watched the tire as it bounced a steady course downhill, straight for the opening, until it was racing across the level barnyard and heading straight for the house. When it hit the front wall, a crunch like the sound of bones breaking rose from the house. Then the tire bounced back, still spinning so wildly when it landed that it shot ahead again and seemed to be burning rubber as it climbed the shiplap siding of the house and tore through the eaves.

Albert and his brothers might have fallen to their knees with laughter if the house hadn't appeared to be shivering from the blow, which was followed by the sound of cupboard doors banging and dishes crashing. Their first thought was to run away, down the far side of the mesa, across open rangeland, across the Gunnison, just keep going, all the way to California if need be, or anywhere they wouldn't be caught by their crippled and bitter father, who would be shaking so badly now with the "nervous jimmies" that he would have to ask them to help him cut the willow switches from the banks of Buttercrick that he would use to administer what was sure to be the worst punishment of their lives.

It was almost dark by the time his father had the switches he wanted. His mother remained in the house during the ceremony

of howling and crying in a yard that was almost dark. It was as if by withdrawing behind windows softly lit by kerosene lamplight she was safe from the worldly trembling and the violence.

By the time George Siler got to his son Albert, whom he saved for last because he had been the instigator, he was shaking and staggering so badly that half of his blows missed. When he finished, he was on his hands and knees choking in the dust. Despite their own pain, Albert and his brothers picked him up and carried him into the house, his legs dragging behind him as limp as the willow switches he had used, his arms out like the yoke for carrying watering pails.

They put their father to bed, then climbed into bed themselves. Stricken with bitterness and pain because of the beating he had received, and yet gripped by a powerful sorrow for his father, Albert thrashed in bed for hours before he found a comfortable way to lie. When he finally fell asleep, the lesson he had learned was simple and stark: no disobedience was *ever* worth the risk of suffering punishment at the hands of someone so pathetically crippled by rage.

Albert Siler and his family stayed on the Buttercrick land for two years. It was no Eden after all, and one day after weeks of dust and defeat, his father announced that nothing would grow or prosper in a landscape of boulders and weeds. It was time to move again. In search of a new Eden, the family moved from Colorado to southeastern Washington. His father leased a farmhouse with acreage in a grassy valley outside the tiny town of Lowden, Washington, between the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The new home was as remote as Colorado had been, and Albert and his brothers would remain naïve country boys, untested in the ways of the world. Still, because of his riding abilities, Al-

bert found work with a neighbor for ten dollars a month breaking wild horses and thoroughbred colts by riding them bareback seven miles to a two-room, wooden schoolhouse with a bell cupola in tiny Lowden.

Once Albert managed to mount the wild colts, his method was to immediately get them moving, in order to give direction and purpose to their raw energy. He did that by quickly reaching behind himself, grabbing a fold of horsehide, and pinching it. The effect was instantaneous. Flying across the grasslands, he found that he could work the first signs of obedience into the fiery behavior of the colts.

Breaking the factious colts was dangerous work for a twelve-year-old. But one of his brothers had read somewhere that World War I pilots, wearing their dashing scarves and tight leather hats with goggles, had been indestructible.

"Wear this hat," his brother told him and gave him one with goggles, "and nothing can happen to you."

When his father saw him about to ride off to school the next day, he demanded to know what the odd aviator's hat and goggles were for.

Albert explained nervously that they were to guarantee his riding safety. Pilots who wore the tight leather hats and goggles in the First World War, he insisted, were seldom shot down.

His father knew another false promise now when he saw one, and he smiled and nodded. Okay," he said, "we're gonna test it."

He made Albert stand against the barn and then dropped a brick on his helmeted head from the hayloft door. It knocked Albert out cold. Instead of warning him against gullibility, the lesson stood mainly as an illustration of his father's stern discipline. But it didn't stop any of the boys, including Albert, from foolishly

trying to make parachutes out of porous gunnysacks and then jumping from the same hayloft door to crash landings.

In time there were less foolhardy and dangerous adventures for Albert. In 1932, for three days of racing at the Walla Walla Fair, he rode a neighbor's Shetland pony. It was elimination racing—once you won the five dollar prize for first place, you were eliminated from the meet. Albert was certain he could win on his neighbor's pony, but he quickly calculated that by holding his pony the first two days for second place money, then winning on the third day, he could double his cash award.

As he left the winner's circle that third day, counting his winnings, a wealthy Washington rancher and thoroughbred breeder named George Drumheller drove up in his chauffeured Cadillac. Drumheller owned a thousand acres of Walla Walla wheat land that rolled to the horizon like a gold ocean. He had been breeding thoroughbreds and dabbling in horse racing since the 1920s, and now he had eight horses running at the fair. The tall Drumheller Building in Walla Walla was a monument to his wealth and influence, and his chauffeur hurried around to open the back door of the Cadillac. Drumheller wore sunglasses and an oversized Stetson, and he had to duck his head to slip the hat crown beneath the doorframe as he stepped out of the car and steadied himself with a cane.

The cane especially caught Albert's eye, and he couldn't help wondering what it was that had crippled the imposing Drumheller. Whatever it was, it elicited from Albert the same pity he felt for his shaky father.

"Son," Drumheller finally said with a stern face, "you could have won those Shetland races every day."

"Yes, sir. I know."

"Well, why did you do that, hold your pony?"

Albert explained what he had figured out. "I got double what I would have," he said.

Drumheller tapped his cane in the dirt for a moment as he smiled and studied the tiny boy standing respectfully in front of him. Finally, he said, "You ever ride a racehorse?"

"Yes, sir, I have," Albert lied.

Drumheller then introduced Albert to his thirty-eight-year-old son Allen, who also wore a huge hat but bore a round face and an easy smile. "This is young Al Siler," Drumheller said. "He'll be riding for us."

But the next day in the paddock, just before the post parade, Albert stood beside the little gray horse that was his first mount for the day, waiting for somebody to lift him into the saddle.

Finally, Allen Drumheller smiled at him. "You've never been on a saddled racehorse, have you?"

Albert admitted sheepishly that he hadn't.

Drumheller slapped the small saddle he had just cinched. "Well, hell, can you keep from falling off?"

"Mr. Drumheller, I can ride any horse as fast as he'll run."

"Any horse" meant Shetland ponies and an occasional farm mule he raced across fields, or one of the colts he broke riding to school.

"This is gonna be different," Drumheller said, no longer smiling. "Now, let me explain how you mount a thoroughbred."

Drumheller patiently showed Albert how to lift his left leg and cock it, so that he could be boosted by one riding boot into the saddle. Then the twelve-year-old, baby-faced boy who had never even sat in a thoroughbred saddle went out and won five races that afternoon.

He rode low on each of his mounts, his legs bent sharply at the knees, his thighs folded tightly against his calves, his back

humped. It gave his body the shape of a number 2 that had been smashed from the top.

"Who taught you to ride a race horse?" Drumheller asked him at the end of the day.

He shrugged. "I just learned it . . . here and there." He did not bother to add that he had learned it that very afternoon.

Drumheller flashed more than his usual kindly smile and paid Albert in cash for his victories. That night Albert had money sticking out of every pocket as he rounded up his brothers and several school friends and offered to treat them to any carnival ride they wanted.

Unfortunately, just when they were heading down the carnival midway, weaving through the crowd like a pack of restless wolves, Albert's father stopped him.

"Wasn't that you I seen out there ridin' today?"

Albert admitted it was.

"Who told you you could ride?"

"Mr. Drumheller."

"—George Drumheller?"

Albert nodded. "His son Allen, too. They both said I know how to ride as good as anybody."

George Siler glanced at his son's pockets, which were stuffed with bills. "Where'd you get all that money?"

"It's what I won!"

"So where you goin' now with it all?"

"We're gonna take some carnival rides, is all."

"Well, that's way too damn much money for a kid to have at a carnival."

His father made him give him his winnings, in exchange for a quarter to spend at the carnival. The exchange would have embittered Albert if he hadn't been certain that there would be

much more racing money to come. He had broken into the world of horse racing like a thunderbolt. Now the old grooms and stable hands, many of them washed-up jockeys who slept in the barns and fell asleep drunk, were eager to share the wisdom of their failures, and they told him that the next step for anybody like him, on the road to the big time in racing, would be to race in the bush leagues—the half-mile "bull ring" tracks at small-town county fairs throughout the West.

But Albert's mother insisted he was still too young. He was just thirteen-years-old, with baby blue eyes, chubby cheeks, and tiny lips. Yet the *Walla Walla Union* carried stories of an even younger jockey, an eleven-year-old sensation who rode to victory wearing a flaming red vest. Albert insisted that compared to him he was practically a veteran, and his eyes sparkled with the excitement of his own baby-faced incompleteness and the mystery of what lay ahead in his horse racing life.

Eventually, he had his way and went on the road riding bush league tracks in Montana, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Canada. The success that those old grooms had predicted for him was slow to come, and for five years, he faced uncertainty and peril in the bush leagues. The horses were old and inclined to breakdowns, creating spectacular spills. The purses were small, and his share for booting home a winner was meager. There was often no place to sleep except in horse stalls with those old drunken grooms who fell asleep predicting greatness for him. And to make enough to eat, he had to exercise horses in the predawn hours for twenty-five cents a mount. He dreamt of hitting it big in racing, at Santa Anita or Hollywood Park, among the movie stars and celebrities draped with gold jewelry. He had seen pictures of jockeys in the Hollywood Park winner's circle with beautiful starlets. One day they would be surrounding him. He

would own a fancy car, one of those racing coupes he saw now and then raising dust on a country road. He would have one that was sleek and fast. He would wear smart clothes and buy anything he wanted. In support of the dream, he began smoking Old Gold cigarettes, which he carried in his back pocket like a snuff tin. And at nights on the bullring backstretches, thick with the smell of horse dung and animal liniments, he joined the grooms and stable hands who strummed guitars and sang, "When my blue moon turns to gold."

His ascension from galloping rank colts to racing's big time was taking longer than he thought, but he was more certain than ever that he would make it one day. It wasn't just that he was proving he could stay in the saddle and win occasionally. It was also that with each year, while those riders around him experienced growth spurts that made them suddenly gangling and awkward, he remained tiny and ropey, so snugly and perfectly fitted to the abbreviated saddle and graceful rhythms of a thoroughbred horse that those drunken grooms told him over and over that he was destined to become one of the greatest jockeys *ever*. He would be better than the legendary Willie Munden, they said. Better than Tod Sloan. Perhaps even better than young George Woolf, who was the new crown prince of racing.

In the early summer of 1938 he rode at county fairs in Waitsburg and Dayton, Washington. Not yet five feet tall, the local newspapers dubbed him the "Peewee from Lowden" and praised him as a homeboy headed for stardom. Then one bright Sunday in June he was assigned to ride a mediocre horse named Before in the Dayton Derby. The horse had faded to a distant third in a cheap, half-mile sprint race the previous day, and now handicappers wondered what Before was doing in the feature race of the fair,

with only one day's rest, trying to match his speed with some of the fastest horses in the Northwest over a mile-long course. Despite having a talented homeboy in the saddle, Before didn't have a "chinaman's chance," the handicappers insisted, and he went off the longest price on the board.

Albert won the race easily. It was his biggest victory yet, and he was cheered and celebrated. The fair queen draped him with flower garlands that threatened to drag his tiny frame to the ground. Smiling for his picture, he had to remind himself that he was still in the boondocks. He hadn't ridden a single horse yet, much less piloted one to victory, at any of the big-time tracks that would have been a true sign of stardom. Then on August 28, 1938, he had his first win at a major track, one in Spokane, Washington. It was a fluke victory, because the jockey on the lead horse, romping along with an eight-length lead in a mile race, mistook the half-mile pole for the finish line and pulled his horse up, convinced he had won. The mistake put Albert suddenly on the lead, which he held on to for an eventual victory. It meant that he was now officially an apprentice rider, a so-called "bug boy," because in the printed racing program his name had a black, bug-like asterisk beside it, indicating that he was entitled to a five-pound weight allowance as a rider.

At Portland Meadows racetrack a silver-haired judge who won by betting frequently on Albert's horses took a fatherly interest in the new bug boy. Although Albert was approaching his eighteenth birthday, he was still a baby-faced boy with peach fuzz and cherub cheeks, still a country innocent, inclined to fearful and childish obedience, a legacy of having again and again rescued his helpless father after receiving a whipping from him. He surely did not yet seem to possess the hardened temperament he would need to survive in the world of big-time horse racing.

But one day at lunch, the silver-haired judge told him there was nothing more he could learn about racing in the Pacific Northwest. It was time for him to head for the big-time California tracks, which had been flourishing since the resumption of parimutuel betting in California in 1933. It was the same thing the sad, drunken grooms had been telling him. But now he watched carefully as the judge opened a napkin on the table and began scribbling a farewell note to Albert, which he slid across the table when he was finished.Albert read it slowly. "To my little pal," the judge had written, "sure to be a great rider."

That night Albert Siler packed his bags and headed for California.

3. THE GOOSE GIRL

A new Goose Girl in wooden shoes and a bo-peep staff maneuvered her flat-bottomed boat among the geese on one of the infield lakes of Hollywood Park racetrack, carved in what had once been a bean field in Inglewood. It was Memorial Day, 1939, all the studios were closed, and numerous Hollywood stars turned out for opening day at the track: Dolores Del Rio, Randolph Scott, Dorothy Lamour in a tilted beret that cut across one eyebrow, and Marlene Dietrich wearing a pencil skirt and a flop hat, trying to look as doleful as she did on screen, as if the world was a dark and unpredictable place. Her look seemed especially out of place now in the jubilation of opening day at Hollywood Park.

The Los Angeles skies were sunny, and bright beds of cheerful marigolds bloomed in the Hollywood Park infield. Said to bring good luck because of their heavenly association with the Virgin Mary, the beds of marigolds encouraged fifty thousand fans to bet nearly a million dollars. The activity in betting parlors around Los Angeles was also brisk, especially at the "K-C Smokeshop" in the 500 block of West Fifth Street, directly across from the Biltmore Hotel, and cattycorner to Pershing Square. The smoke shop offered cigars, pipes, cigarettes, and

racks of magazines. The bookmaking and gambling den was in the back, with roulette, blackjack, dice tables, and colorful tout sheets hanging from the walls like flower sconces. "K-C" stood for Kivel and Chapman, the two managers of the smoke shop and betting parlor. I. W. Kivel, alias "Doc Kebo," wore frumpy shirts and small wire spectacles that suggested he was a bookkeeper, not a gambler. His partner was the same Benny Chapman who had been arrested for loitering with Big Mooney and Lew Brice outside the Kingston Club in San Francisco. Chapman's suite high up in the Biltmore provided the perfect vantage point from which he could oversee the operations of the K-C Smokeshop across the street and order a shutdown if a police raid seemed imminent. But the word around the Biltmore Garage was that all the cops knew what was going on, because a loudspeaker blared race results up and down Fifth Street so loudly that the garage attendants at the Biltmore knew exactly when it was time to hurry across the street and place their bets. The few police raids that did occur had been ceremonial affairs with gaudy bookings, newspaper headlines, and bail postings, after which the gamblers disappeared back into the world of smoke shops and racetracks.

Big Mooney had begun "making book" at the K-C Smokeshop after he had been told to leave San Francisco. His older brother Willie, unemployed and suffering various ailments that he blamed on meat cutting in the grocery business, became the gopher for Big Mooney's bookmaking business, running bets, making payoffs, collecting on markers, and making sure that there was always plenty of walk-around money available in his brother's safe-deposit boxes for quick bets in any of the city's numerous bookmaking dens.

That opening day at Hollywood Park, Big Mooney listened with mounting disappointment in the K-C Smokeshop as long

shots and untested horses raced to victory. The form players with their intricate handicapping systems lost big, and the tipsters who were conduits of inside information from stable hands and hot walkers also lost. Only two favorites even managed to finish in the money. Elsewhere, a fifty-to-one shot named Answer True broke dead last and then came from out of the blue in the stretch to win comfortably. In the feature race, a six-year-old horse named Don Mike, with an uneven record and little to recommend him beyond his ownership by Bing Crosby, drew out in the stretch and won handily. The favorite, Main Man, finished out of the money. And as if that wasn't enough, two horses who could have won were disqualified because they were all over the track, running in the stretch like gangly-legged yearlings.

The results all seemed to repudiate the sacred "percentages" that guided Big Mooney. Those percentages were best calculated, Mooney said, by mathematical whizzes like his friend Doc Kebo or the other handicappers who sat on stools in back of the K-C Smokeshop wearing green visors and blowsy shirts with black elastic armbands. The percentages weren't as certain as fate, but they at least helped make racing predictable. Yet there had been nothing predictable about opening day at Hollywood Park. Racing chaos and uncertainty had prevailed. True believers in the percentages, like Big Mooney, had been shaken right to their bones.

Too many horses that day, Mooney decided, had been "running for Sweeney." Nobody had been able to tell him exactly who "Sweeney" was. He was probably some criminal mastermind from long ago in gambling history who had rigged prizefights and loaded the dice. But in racing, it was clear what "running for Sweeney" meant: the fix was on. Oh, the jockey would make an effort to look good. But he wouldn't *really* be trying. Or he would deliberately break poorly or get boxed in or drift wide on

the turns until he had no chance of winning. Whatever jockeys did purposefully to lose was all cleverly disguised. Who among those fifty thousand people who had stormed the gates at Hollywood Park for opening day would have even bothered to bet if they had suspected that some of the horses were running for Sweeney? Who would have cheered and whooped during every stretch run if they had suspected that the world was as dark and unpredictable as Marlene Dietrich's movies made it look?

Opening day at Hollywood Park, with the new Goose Girl drifting wherever the wind took her, was the kind of day that spread doubt among the gamblers of consequence like Big Mooney, who was trying to live a gambling life based on predictability and the percentages. It was a day that awakened in him the conviction, always in restless slumber in every gambler and horse player, that he was a loser, a gambling "squirrel," that even if he used a fancy adding machine to expertly sort through the mathematics of each race, even if he tried to look as if good luck was his birthright, trying to pick winners in a horse race was as futile as Tantalus reaching up for bunches of elusive grapes.

The idea of bribing jockeys to eliminate the uncertainty was as old as racing itself, but the modern version of it seemed to have originated with Pittsburgh Phil at the turn of the century. "Some of your rides," he told the great jockey Tod Sloan, "were either incompetent, or you weren't trying." To insure that Sloan would *always* be trying to win, Pittsburgh Phil began paying the famous jockey five hundred dollars for every victory. It wasn't quite the same as fixing a race, but other gamblers, looking to improve their chances, understood what the advantages would be if they paid a jockey to *lose*. Meanwhile, Pittsburgh Phil advised all gamblers to learn to live soberly and spend sanely, "and don't bet simply because you're a loser."

The conviction that he was a loser was nagging at Big Mooney one day while he was standing in a betting line, studying the program, when a young stranger in a tweed sport coat approached him and said he had a tip.

The young man had narrow eyes and a scholarly face. Mooney thought he looked familiar, and his easy manner suggested the two men had met before.

"Do I know you?" Mooney asked.

"We haven't met," the stranger said, "but I've heard of you."

Mooney shrugged and returned to his program.

"Look," the young man persisted, "do you want the tip or not?"

Mooney pretended indifference as the stranger proceeded to give him the name of an eight-to-one shot that eventually won easily. After the race, as Mooney stood in line to cash his winning ticket, the stranger appeared again.

"My name is Whitey," the young man said.

Mooney recognized him then as the nineteen-year-old apprentice jockey named Elmer "Whitey" Phillips, who hailed from somewhere in Washington.

"The tip I gave you," Phillips said, "ought to be worth something."

Mooney gave Phillips one hundred dollars and thanked him for the tip. Then he gave Phillips his phone number and told him to call him if he had any more good information.

It was days before the call came. In the interim, Mooney had plotted his next move, and he wasted no time beating around the bush on the phone.

"Are you interested in fixing races?" he said.

There was no hesitation from Phillips. "Yes."

The two agreed then that for five hundred dollars in cash, which was subsequently delivered to Phillips, he would "pull" a favor-

ite he was scheduled to ride in a few days at Hollywood Park. He was also expected to use some of the money to entice other jockeys into the fix. But Phillips pocketed all the money, ignored the agreement, and won the race. Big Mooney had bet heavily to win on the horse that finished second, and he had spent the afternoon and early evening after the race angrily nursing the conviction that he couldn't even manage a simple crooked transaction. He had been taken in by Phillips's tweed coat and scholarly look. By the time he finally got Phillips on the phone, he erupted with a torrent of rage and profanity.

"You weren't supposed to win! I'm gonna *shoot* you!" he screamed at the young jockey. "I'm gonna throw your goddamn body in the ocean!"

Three days later, a terrified Whitey Phillips fled to Seattle.

The abortive affair should have served to warn Mooney that fixing horse races was delicate business. Instead, the idea that he had come so close to making a killing fed his criminal appetites like savory kitchen odors. What had defeated him in the affair had been his failure to read Phillips's devious character properly. But that failure was entirely within his control. All he needed to succeed now was to find a jockey less devious than Whitey Phillips, who had concealed his dishonesty behind a scholarly tweed coat.

His name was Otis Augustus Dye. He came from a truck farm outside of Boise, Idaho. If his name didn't betray his country innocence, his broad, guileless smile did. He had won his first race in 1938 in Vancouver, and twice since then he had made national racing news by winning five races in a single day. It was the kind of sensational news that made other jockeys strut like bantam roosters, but Dye's Idaho innocence was so deep and irrepressible that he dismissed it all as luck. And unlike his fellow jock-

eys, who lay every morning in the jockeys' room wrapped only in a towel and drinking "Pluto Water," the disgusting emetic that helped keep their weight down, Gus Dye refused to worry about his weight and went right on eating three huge meals a day, as if he were on an Idaho threshing crew instead of riding race horses.

Early one Saturday morning in 1939, after exercising several horses at dawn at Hollywood Park, Gus Dye was walking through the barn area, headed for a hearty breakfast, when a man in a loosely tailored, double-breasted suit stopped him.

"Call me Murphy," the man said. "J. J. Murphy."

His real name was Irving Sangbusch. He had a beak nose, and his heavily pomaded hair was plastered straight back from a widow's peak that made his entire face seem as drawn and pointy as a parrot's. His tie was loose, and the corners of his shirt collar, which were especially long and also pointy, lay on the lapels of his black suit like ivory fangs. He was a menacing, unforgettable figure, but Gus Dye had no idea who he was.

"I'm a friend of Big Mooney's," Sangbusch explained.

Dye didn't know him either. They talked only briefly before Sangbusch asked the Idaho jockey if he wanted to make some "easy money." Despite Dye's earlier successes as an apprentice, he hadn't had a single winner yet at Hollywood Park, and the invitation sounded interesting. Sangbusch drove Dye a short distance to the busy intersection at Manchester and Western in Inglewood. There, in a narrow alley off the intersection, Sangbusch introduced Dye to the studious Doc Kebo and an exuberant Big Mooney, who smiled and patted Dye repeatedly on the shoulder as he spoke. He and Doc Kebo and Sangbusch, he explained, along with Benny Chapman and the actor Lew Brice, he added—as if Brice's name would give a measure of Hollywood

glamour to the group—they were *all* good friends. They had met the night before at the Brown Derby Café in Beverly Hills. Over a late dinner, Mooney had laid out to the group his plan for fixing the races by recruiting jockeys who he was certain would cooperate. He and his friends, he told Dye, had worked their way through a list of Hollywood Park jockeys, focusing especially on apprentices who might be facing tough riding competition. His first choice, he said, had been Whitey Phillips, who had been given five hundred dollars for his cooperation, half of which he had been directed to give to Gus Dye to enlist him in the fix. But Whitey had been stupid, Mooney said, and let him down.

Dye tried not to look stunned by the news that he had already been singled out for "cooperation."

"I know Whitey didn't give you the money," Mooney went on. "He made a mistake."

There had been discussion in the jockeys' room about why Whitey Phillips had suddenly fled Los Angeles. Mooney's vague explanation now seemed ominous, and Dye listened carefully as he was told to "pull" a horse named Rodney Pan in a cheap claiming race that afternoon.

Dye had ridden Rodney Pan almost a dozen times, and he knew the horse as well as any he had ever ridden. He was a horse who would run only if you kept the reins tight.

"If I try to pull Rodney Pan," he objected, "he'll run like a flash."

Dye's objections sounded as if they were meant to escape being drawn into the plot, and Mooney would have none of it. He wanted the horse kept out of the money, he insisted. If Dye had to "give Rodney Pan his head"—track slang for keeping the reins loose—in order for the horse to lose, then he was to do it.

Dye continued to object. "He'll stumble if I let him have his head."

Mooney smiled. That was fine by him, he said, and he took a thick roll of one hundred dollar bills from his suit coat pocket and peeled two off for Dye.

"Use your head," he said as he handed the money to Dye. "Don't make no mistakes."

He did not have to explain again that Whitey Phillips had made a *serious* mistake. Nor did he have to explain that such a serious mistake would have serious consequences.

Before they parted, Mooney wanted one more thing: did Dye know any other jockeys who would be inclined to cooperate?

He wasn't sure, he answered.

But Mooney pressed him. The more jockeys involved in the fixes, the better, and he wanted Gus Dye to bring them in. They would all be generously paid. Especially Dye. It would be his reward for being the connection to the other jockeys.

Then Mooney pulled out the list of jockeys he and his friends had pored over the night before at the Brown Derby. "There's a bug boy we're interested in," he said and kept his finger on the list. He was a promising apprentice, Mooney explained. He was tiny, not even a hundred pounds yet. They had noticed that, despite his size, the bug boy had a talent for fearless riding. But around adults, especially demanding ones, he was overly polite and showed the fawning obedience of a child.

Dye knew immediately who Mooney was talking about: Albert Siler. They were good friends. They had first met the previous fall, when the two of them had battled it out for the honor of leading rider at Spokane, which Dye had eventually won.

Mooney noticed Dye's smile of recognition. "You know who I'm talking about?"

"Sure I know. Albert Siler. Around the jockeys' room, we call him 'Prince Albert.'"

"Well, he's the boy we want you to talk to."

4. SYNOD

Irving Sangbusch left the alley off Manchester and found Albert Siler in a nearby drugstore. “You have to see the big shots,” he told Albert, those shirt fangs giving his words special menace.

Sangbusch explained that they were supposed to meet Mooney at a bookmaking parlor that had been set up in a swank, two-story home behind a thick screen of eucalyptus and cypress trees on Sherbourne Drive in West Hollywood. The home had been rented from the movie star Connie Bennett, who had eloped at fifteen and been married three times. Her most recent marriage, a tempestuous affair with an international swain named Henry de la Falaise de la Coudraye, put her in the gossip column news off and on and added a layer of Hollywood glamour to Sangbusch’s proposal.

Despite the Hollywood connections, Albert balked. “Sir,” he told Sangbusch, “I’ll do what you say.” But he had a mount in the first race, he explained, and he didn’t have time for a long drive to West Hollywood.

So he agreed to meet Mooney halfway, and Sangbusch drove him from the drugstore into the Los Angeles hills, where they parked on a lonely road and waited a half hour before Mooney

arrived, parked his car behind them, then slipped in the back seat with Albert.

They were a sharp contrast, the one a city boy, slick and streetwise and wearing a flashy felt hat with a bent brim, the other a hatless, naïve farm boy, inclined to humility and deference; the one was relaxed and confident, the other was sitting as stiff as a board. All that connected them was their boyish looks. For Big Mooney, that boyishness served as the disarming mask of a confidence man. For Albert Siler, it was a window to his vulnerable soul.

Mooney was carrying a rolled copy of the *Daily Racing Form*. He introduced himself quickly and offered Albert a cigarette.

"No thank you, sir." He had his own, he said. Old Golds. He patted his shirt pocket.

Mooney lit a cigarette. "You've got seven mounts this afternoon."

"Yes, sir," he said. And post time for the first race wasn't far off, he reminded Mooney.

Mooney smiled at the odd politeness. After all, he was only a few years older than Albert. But it was clear that there was a nearly reflexive obedience in the ninety-pound bug boy whose feet hardly reached the floor of the car.

Mooney went straight to the point. "We're lining up some boys to 'run for Sweeney,'" he said. Albert's friend Gus Dye was one of them, Mooney explained.

Albert had no idea who "Sweeney" was. For a moment he sat wondering if Mr. Sweeney was another big shot he was supposed to meet on a lonely road somewhere—perhaps a trainer, or an influential and rich Hollywood producer. They were always hovering around promising bug boys, flashing their fat wallets, starlets hanging on both arms.

"I haven't met Mister Sweeney," Albert said.

Mooney smiled and explained what "running for Sweeney" meant. Surely Albert had been a party to such things in the bush leagues.

Albert shook his head. He'd heard *talk* of it, he said. But that was all.

Mooney nodded. Usually they left the bug boys alone, he explained. Often just older riders ran for Sweeney, because they were over the hill and had nothing to lose. But Mooney and his friends considered Siler one of the most dependable riders at Hollywood Park. Dependable! It was a catchword for obedience, and he went on to explain that for pulling horses as directed, Siler would get one hundred dollars for long shots and two hundred for favorites.

Now it was clear to Albert what he was being told to do. "I shan't pull favorites," Albert said.

Mooney almost broke out laughing at the flowery language, and for the moment, he chose not to argue with the tiny bug boy. "You're on three horses this afternoon that I want pulled," he said.

Mooney opened the copy of the *Racing Form* and began studying it. While Albert waited for Mooney to explain which three mounts he was being told to pull that afternoon, he stared out the window of the car. In the distance, the tangle of streets and the endless scatter of bungalows looked hopelessly confusing and utterly unlike the sweeping, uncluttered landscapes of eastern Washington, which had made life, and especially horse racing, seem so simple and so amenable to mastery. But racing had turned complicated for him after he had gone off to California, bearing only the best wishes of a fatherly and admiring judge, inscribed to him on a restaurant napkin. Still, the words had

been enough to send him rocketing into the San Francisco Bay Area on a brand new motorcycle. His bush league reputation for success and daring had preceded him, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote that among the outstanding jockeys who would be riding at Bay Meadows that fall would be Albert Siler, "who had been well-seasoned in the bushes."

He had been an immediate sensation, but not for his riding. Bursting with confidence, he introduced himself to every track official he saw. "How do you do," he greeted them. "I hope you are feeling well today." In the jockeys' room, he used "shan't" and "dasn't" as if he were a dwarf prancing on a Shakespearean stage. The day before the track opened, he went to the stewards' stand and told them, "Gentlemen, I feel it is not only a pleasure but a privilege to serve under you, and I am looking forward to our association."

Most jockeys bridled under the authority of the all-powerful, nitpicking track stewards, and one of them remarked after he met Albert, "I thought the little squirt was needling me." But the next day Siler was gracious enough to shake the hand of each winning jockey, and they were all soon calling him "Prince Albert."

"This boy will get along," one of the stewards said. "That motorcycle will be a Cadillac one day."

But it had been two weeks before he had his first California victory. And despite his picture in the *San Francisco Examiner*, and a story describing his extraordinary, "Little Lord Fauntleroy" politeness, turf writers noted that he was having a "hard time getting started" at Bay Meadows. The implications were clear. The best jockeys in the country were at Bay Meadows. He was now no longer racing at county fairs against amateurs trained to ride donkeys or Shetland ponies. Still, in late October he had two wins in one day, and the veteran trainers who were beginning

to notice him said, "The boy is going to make a rider. Best thing in his favor is that he is absolutely cool." He sent his parents a track photo of himself in the winner's circle. "Boy, am I going to make it," he scribbled on the picture.

His confidence had been short-lived. The next day he couldn't bring a single one of his four Bay Meadows mounts in the money. After riding as the eighty-pound "peewee" who had raced in the bush leagues, his weight had shot up to ninety pounds. As if weight loss was the answer to his problems, he spent the evening drinking Pluto Water to lose weight. He lost four pounds overnight, but his slump continued through the closure of Bay Meadows and the opening of nearby Tanforan racetrack, where he made news by beating Johnny Longden, the nation's leading rider, in two straight races. It prompted comparisons with George Woolf, the world's greatest jockey. Like Woolf, they said, Albert Siler had the ability to "sit chilly" behind the leaders, waiting for a racing opening, defying the wisdom of the legendary trainer Father Bill Daley, who wanted all his jockeys on the lead and had ordered them, "If ye die, die in front."

Leading the pack or trailing, Albert Siler's horses all eventually died in the stretch, and in the jockey's quarters, older riders chided him by blaming his slump on his violation of the most sacred of all jockey superstitions—someone must have bewitched him, they said with straight faces, by touching him with a straw broom.

Those same turf writers who couldn't help rooting for him because he was so small and polite wrote that he was "the best looking apprentice rider" at Tanforan. But where were his victories? He rode mostly hopeless long shots, and when Tanforan closed in December, he was not among the leading riders, having only nine wins the entire meet. As 1938 came to a close, he

could only wonder if those words of good luck scribbled on the napkin in Oregon had been in fact a curse.

If it was a curse, it had not been lifted at Santa Anita with the opening of 1939. Nearly one hundred riders checked in for the meet, including Ralph Neves, Johnny Longden, Johnny Adams, George Woolf, and Jack Westrope. It meant he had to be content riding long shots mainly. He was still trying to realize the promise of his bush league riding, and the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that "Albert Siler would have a chance at Santa Anita to make good." "Finally," they might as well have written. After all of his dreams, after too many nights to remember of carrying his father into the house and then lying in bed, trying to fall asleep by comforting himself with dreams of racetrack glory, after riding bareback in Buttercrick and piloting Shetlands to victory in Lowden—*finally*, after all that, he would realize the prophecies of those drunken, bush-league grooms who had insisted that they knew a star when they saw one.

Still, in the opening weeks of 1939 at Santa Anita, he hadn't been able to buy a winner. Then, at the end of January, on a horse named Deerfly, picked by the handicappers to win the first race and sent off as the betting favorite, he lost a heart-stopping stretch battle by a nose. After the race the little prince whose composure and politeness had never broken retreated to a corner of the jockeys' room, where he sat bawling like a baby. The veterans tried to tell him that slumps and heartbreak were all part of racing, but the next day the papers wrote that he and his horse "had no excuses."

Weeks went by with no mounts at all. He passed the time of day at the rail, watching the stretch run mistakes that other jockeys made. He got good at shooting pool, and a picture in the *Los Angeles Times* of him with Jack Westrope and other jockeys showed

him chalking his cue and studying his shot, as if what he couldn't do on the track, he'd do on the pool table.

At the beginning of March, sixty-five thousand fans had turned out to watch Charles Howard's Kayak II win the Santa Anita Handicap. Albert was still too inexperienced to have a horse in such a big race, but he had five other mounts that day, and each time he rounded the far turn and galloped for home, the roar of the huge crowd at the finish line was so deafening that he could not even hear the pounding of the horses around him. He felt as if he were back at the Delta Fair, gliding on a wooden, merry-go-round horse frozen in full stride. It all made his heart beat like a triphammer, but not one of his horses finished in the money.

On getaway day in mid-March, he had five mounts, all of whom finished out of the money again. It seemed like the end of his dream, and he had jumped on his motorcycle and roared out of Los Angeles as fast as he had come, back to his family, back to a familiar landscape. But his family had moved several times since his departure, and now his father was sharecropping on four hundred acres of rangeland on the Snake River in Oregon. The farm was as remote and plain and dull as the farms at Buttercrick or Lowden, and after a few weeks of slopping pigs and doing chicken chores, his dream began to come alive again. Perhaps he had been hasty. Perhaps he had gotten discouraged too soon. Perhaps those five long years in the bush leagues hadn't made him patient but just the opposite—impatient. Perhaps it was stardom he had to "sit chilly" waiting for.

On his way back to Los Angeles for the opening of Hollywood Park, he had stopped in San Francisco and paid ninety-three dollars for a new whip, a thirteen-ounce saddle, and two new pairs of silk riding pants. If he hoped that the new equipment would change his luck, it worked. Or maybe it was the sea of mari-

golds, the Goose Girl, or simply time, which heals all slumps. They had told him not to get discouraged. "Oh, I shan't be discouraged," he had answered, and the wins began coming here and there, then daily, until finally, by mid-June, he made multiple trips to the Hollywood Park winner's circle each day, where he found himself mingling with actors and starlets. The papers had begun calling him "Hollywood's newest apprentice star." He moved into third place, not just among apprentices but among *all* riders. Only the "best reinsmen on the track" had been assigned mounts for the upcoming Hollywood Gold Cup race, the *Los Angeles Times* noted. One of them was "Master Siler, who may wind up the ranking pilot of the meeting."

Finally, he was realizing his dream. But no dream came without complications as confusing as that tangle of bungalows in the distance. He was in a limousine now on a lonely road with a friendly but demanding stranger. Who, for all he knew, along with Mr. Sweeney and Mr. Sangbusch, and probably even more menacing-looking "big shots," were all part of a gang of mobsters with a criminal reach from which there was no escape, especially for a tiny eighteen-year-old bug boy with the nickname of Prince Albert.

After Big Mooney had studied the form, he told Prince Albert that he wanted three horses pulled that afternoon: Synod in the third race, Mar Quick in the fourth, and Fair Cynthia in the eighth. He gave Albert three hundred dollars cash, with the promise that he would give him another three hundred dollars that night after he had successfully pulled the horses. Finally, he gave Albert directions for the code words he was to use whenever he called the house on Sherbourne Drive in West Hollywood, for further directions. Because federal authorities could be tapping the lines

and eavesdropping, he was supposed to say that he was Louis B. Mayer of MGM Studios, or the director John Ford, or the actor Don Ameche. For Albert, the subterfuge added one more layer of confusion to the scene, blurring the distinctions between the fantasies of the silver screen and the real world of the actors and starlets and Hollywood producers who had stood with him in the winner's circle.

In the jockeys' room at Hollywood Park before the first race, Albert sought the advice of Gus Dye as well as a twenty-year-old Idaho jockey named Burt Reynolds. They both told him the same thing: you better go along. Jockeys' rooms were filled with stories about young riders, braver than was good for them, who had crossed fixers and wound up tied to cinder blocks and dumped in the ocean. There were also dubious but nevertheless frightening stories of gangsters who had sliced a deep and painful *X* across the bottom of some disobedient jockey, so that it was months before he could ride again. Big Mooney might have looked friendly enough. But Sangbusch was frightening looking, with the pallor and lippy desire of a movie vampire. And there were others involved. Gus Dye had met them. Doc Kebo was humorless, and Benny Chapman looked like an aging prize-fighter, with sunken cheeks and hard eyes. A rider could defy one of them but surely not all of them.

The other choice for Albert was to just pocket the money, some of which he could send home to his needy parents, and ignore Big Mooney, as Whitey Phillips had done. But if Albert had to flee, as Whitey had also done, he would be tearing himself away from any chance of stardom, the dream of which he had been harboring for almost seven years now. No, the best course seemed to be to "sit chilly," exactly as he did on a horse, galloping along with

the flow of the race, watching, waiting for advantages or opportunities that would open up like a sudden hole and allow him to escape. Maybe Big Mooney and the fixers would get content and go away. Or maybe, once he got to know Big Mooney—which was going to happen, he was sure of it—that friendly side of him that was so apparent would be vulnerable to a sympathetic appeal from Albert to leave him alone, because he was just a farm boy from Oregon trying to make it in the big time, with an ailing father who could use his support. Or maybe the stewards, the same ones who had been so chary about his Prince Albert approach to them—maybe they would be alert enough to figure out what was happening and crack down. Or maybe, in one of those gang battles that seemed an inevitable part of what little Albert Siler knew about big-city gangsters, some stronger, more violent gang would sweep in and crush Big Mooney and his fellow fixers. And that would be the end of it.

Meanwhile, he did not want to risk being crushed himself, and the immediate problem was what to do about Synod, the horse Mooney had ordered him to pull in the first race. Only a week earlier, Albert had ridden Synod in a mile race. Down the backstretch, he had been a distant eleventh, and the horse had shown no life. Then, Synod had begun picking his own holes without Albert's direction and moving steadily up. At the head of the stretch, he was still five lengths behind the leader, but he closed in a rush to win by a head. The competition was no better today, and Synod was a horse so willful and spirited that short of throwing out an anchor, Albert felt he would gallop easily to victory.

But, "I shan't pull favorites," he had insisted. Now, Synod was a heavy favorite at three-to-two on the tote board, and that pledge disappeared. He begged Gus Dye and Burt Reynolds to help him make sure that his first response to Big Mooney wasn't the same

kind of outrageous defiance that had sent Whitey Phillips running, perhaps for his life.

They offered to help. Synod always broke slowly, and both Dye and Reynolds agreed to position their horses to shut Albert off on the rail at the rear. And as they headed into the backstretch, everything seemed to be going as planned. Albert had Synod dead last on the rail, boxed in by a horse named Transbird immediately in front of him, and Dye and then Reynolds on his outside. Moving down the backstretch, the four horses formed a nearly perfect box at the rear of the field. Each time the box threatened to collapse, Dye and Reynolds tightened their corners of it, and Synod remained trapped.Entering the far turn, they passed the Goose Girl, who was poling along indifferently in her skiff. Seagulls, flushed suddenly by the sound of the passing horses, circled in the rising noise coming from the grandstand across the lake. Suddenly, Transbird shot ahead, and neither Dye nor Reynolds could get their horses moving fast enough to square the box. And without Albert even touching him with his whip, Synod sprinted into the opening ahead. Then, at the head of the stretch, he began drifting outside for more racing room. Reynolds, on a forty-to-one shot, couldn't keep the pace and only watched as Dye hustled his horse alongside Synod and tried to force him back to the rail. But the effort it took Dye's horse to catch up exhausted him quickly, and as soon as he was alongside Synod again, he began slipping back, leaving Synod free to seek his own way. He drifted out once more, found a straight path to the finish line, and began passing horses in leaps, as if he had unfolded himself, advancing in long, powerful strides. And no matter what his instructions had been from Big Mooney, no matter what was at stake for disobeying him—perhaps his own life—Albert Siler felt powerless to stop Synod from winning.

5. WHICHCEE

Synod lost by three lengths. His rocketing stretch run, coming all the way from the rear of the field, gave the fans who backed him something to cheer about, but it had exhausted Albert Siler. Not only had the physical struggle to hold back Synod tired him, he was also spent emotionally. He had a horse under him who was full of run, and by not putting his own body in accord with the long, powerful rhythms of Synod, and instead sitting as frozen as one of those carved, wooden jockeys on the merry-go-round at the Delta Fair, the required restraint had drained him. After the race he sat in the jockeys' room shaking like his father and feeling the same sweaty depletion he felt after a victory. Defeat, he knew now, also required a struggle. Those drunken grooms in the bush leagues who had long ago given up, and the broken souls who stood on street corners holding the tin cups of their defeat—it had been a fight for all of them. They hadn't just quit and then waited for resignation to relax them like a hot bath. They had faced a tense battle all the way down. And after his ride on Synod, Prince Albert shook with the realization that running for Sweeney was going to be hard work.

He managed to compose himself enough to follow Mooney's instructions to pull the two-year-old Mar Quick in the next race.

Then in the eighth race, Albert kept his aging, lightly raced mount Fair Cynthia alongside Gus Dye, who was riding Rodney Pan. Albert could see that Dye was letting his horse "have his head," as Mooney had ordered. It was precisely the handling under which Rodney Pan refused to run, and as the two horses crossed the finish line in a sluggish battle for dead last, isolated boos rose from the grandstand.

Albert was still shaking on Sunday when Gus Dye delivered the additional three hundred dollars Mooney had promised him. Big Mooney found it convenient to let Dye or his bagman Irving Sangbusch make the payoffs. The less Mooney was seen in the company of jockeys, the better. For Albert, the less he saw of either Mooney or the menacing vampire face of Sangbusch, the better.

Still, he had been so "dependable" carrying out the first orders from Mooney that the following Tuesday he had directions to pull all six of his mounts. The fixing led to eight straight favorites losing during the day, and the *Los Angeles Times* reported that bettors were "weeping and gnashing" their teeth. Turf writers noted that some of the horses had been "weirdly ridden," and stewards would surely be questioning the jockeys. Those same turf writers were still describing Albert as the "most improved rider at the meeting," but any news that put him in the spotlight made him anxious.

Meanwhile, Big Mooney went right on directing which horses would run for Sweeney, and he set up three locations from which to operate. The first was a rented room in an auto court at 1000 Manchester in Inglewood, not far from the alley where Gus Dye had been recruited. The small room in the auto court would serve as the jockeys' headquarters. Because it was close to Hollywood Park, it was a convenient location for Albert Siler, Gus Dye, and

any other jockeys who were successfully brought into the ring to receive their payoffs for pulled horses. With tourists coming and going at all times of the day and night, the movements and activities of Big Mooney's bagmen and the jockeys would be inconspicuous. Albert was also told that he could use any of the room's several telephones to call Mooney each morning in order to receive riding instructions. He was to identify himself as one of the Hollywood celebrities whose names he had been given. If he answered yes to Mooney's question, "Will I see you at two o'clock?" he would confirm that he would pull a horse as instructed in the second race.

Before races each day, Mooney himself would be situated at one of two other locations. The rented house on Sherbourne Drive in West Hollywood would serve as a bookmaking parlor, from which Big Mooney, along with Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, and other bookmakers could serve their betting clients in Hollywood. And if the jockeys couldn't reach Mooney at the house on Sherbourne, they were to call the K-C Smokeshop on West Fifth Street in downtown Los Angeles, across from the Biltmore. If Mooney didn't happen to be there either, they were to make sure that the smoke shop manager, an old man who stuttered occasionally and often became confused, understood clearly which horses would be pulled in what races.

The Manchester, Sherbourne, and West Fifth Street locations gave Mooney three centers of operation for bookmaking coverage of nearly the entire Los Angeles basin, from Hollywood to Inglewood, from Venice Beach to Chinatown. But the focus for Big Mooney and the fixers was Hollywood. With less of a pug nose, Big Mooney might have made an appealing Victor Mature, and he had long been attracted to the glamour and fame of Hollywood. Now, the house on Sherbourne Drive was a convenient

spot from which to serve his Hollywood betting clients—film stars, producers, secretaries, and movie lot grunts whose trust had been carefully cultivated. Chester Lauck of Lum 'n Abner fame, George Raft, Don Ameche, and Hunt Stromberg, an MGM producer whose statuesque blond secretary phoned her boss's bets to the house on Sherbourne Drive—they all became targets for Big Mooney and the fixers.

Capitalizing on the confidences they had built in Hollywood, Big Mooney, Benny Chapman, and Doc Kebo began planting whispered tips around the movie lots. In an industry that seemed to run on fantasy and gossip, the tips spread like wildfire, and bets on horses running for Sweeney poured into the house on Sherbourne. Small-time bookmakers, swamped with bets they couldn't cover, laid off much of the money to Big Mooney and the fixers. Mooney's wallet grew fatter than it had ever been. Still, the money wasn't enough for Big Mooney, who was haunted by the nagging fear that he was just another "squirrel" in the world of gambling and that a streak of bad luck was just around the corner. Even if he had control of one or two jockeys in each race, uncertainties remained. What if, as had almost been the case with Albert Siler on Synod, a horse was so full of run he refused to lose? What if one of Mooney's bribed jockeys was set down at the last minute, or got sick, or was otherwise removed from a race? What if all those Hollywood bettors, stung again and again, eventually got wise to the phony tips and stopped calling Big Mooney and the fixers? The realization of any of those uncertainties would bring exactly the financial calamity that seemed to dog him wherever he went. He'd be wiped out. He'd have to start over . . . again. Building a new bankroll. Hoping his luck would last. Being so guarded and careful with each bet that the gambling rush he had counted on to carry him along, from pitching pennies to crap games—even that would be gone.

The solution was clear to Big Mooney. Those uncertainties could only be reduced, perhaps eliminated entirely, by recruiting more jockeys to run for Sweeney. With half a dozen jockeys in each race pulling horses, winning would no longer be an issue of "percentages." Winning could be made a guarantee.

Across a hall from the jockeys' steam room at Hollywood Park, a special lunch counter for the riders served lemon meringue pies, donuts, and sandwiches with thick cuts of sliced roast beef and ham. It was in the flow of traffic between the two interdependent sites—jockeys gorging themselves in one place, sweating it off in another—that nineteen-year-old Willis Ward learned that he could get paid for pulling horses. Raised on a farm outside of Wichita, Kansas, Ward was the sole support for his parents, who were struggling to hang on to their farm through the hard times of the "Dry Thirties." Every month he mailed them four hundred dollars from his earnings as a rider. The payments left very little for him, so he wanted to hear more about getting paid extra now to ride horses that he didn't think could win anyway.

Irving Sangbusch took him to meet Big Mooney at the house on Sherbourne Drive, where Ward agreed to "kill" certain horses. For doing so, Mooney explained, Ward would receive two hundred dollars for favorites, one hundred otherwise. He listened carefully without comment as Mooney directed him to call nightly from the auto court on Manchester and give the name "Bob," after which he would receive coded instructions for which horses to pull. "Don't run in no win on me!" Mooney finished, as if he could sense from Ward's silence that he was reserving for himself the right not to try to pull favorites.

On the evening of July 3 Ward received instructions from Mooney to pull his first horse, a three-year-old named Hollywood Zar in

the third race the next day. The morning of the Fourth of July, the phones rang off the hook at the K-C Smokeshop and the house on Sherbourne. Most of the calls were from bettors whose urgent voices suggested that they were trying *not* to bring the whole betting world in on a whispered tip they had been privileged to receive on a horse named Hollywood Zar. He "is always in there pitching," the *Los Angeles Times* handicappers wrote of the horse and pegged him at five-to-one. Still, at just after three o'clock, a hot, southern California sun burned down on the Fourth of July fans crowded ten deep at the rail, and Hollywood Zar went off at ten-to-one. He traded places for dead last the entire race. After the race, Big Mooney and the fixers counted their profits in the tens of thousands of dollars. That night, one hundred extra dollars in his pocket, Willis Ward knew that the financial woes of his parents back in Kansas were over.

It was not at all that simple for Albert Siler. The latest jockey standings showed he was in third place among *all* riders, ahead of George Woolf, Jack Westrope, and Ralph Neves. He had already pulled almost a dozen horses since meeting Mooney. He might well have been fighting for the lead in the jockey standings if he had let any of those horses run. One minute he was in the winner's circle with a statuesque starlet smiling down on him, and he was realizing exactly the dream he had had over and over again in the bush leagues. But too often his victory celebrations were followed by a losing ride, after which he made the long walk from the scales in front of the grandstand to the jockeys' room, passing in front of railbirds who jeered him for failing to bring home a horse he knew he might have won on. Mooney's warnings not to make Whitey Phillips's mistake, or worse, "run in a win on me," made it clear to Albert that he had no choice but

to obey Mooney. In doing so, however, he worried that it would end up depriving him of the riding championship. At Hollywood Park! The thought left him whipsawed between the pride of glorious victory and the shame of self-inflicted defeat.

He found it especially difficult to reconcile the two versions of himself in the feature race that Fourth of July. Because here he was, good enough to be in the same jockeys' room with George Woolf, the "ice man" himself, in whose footsteps Albert Siler had followed, from the miserable bush league shedrows in Canada and Montana to the glamour of Hollywood Park. Now Woolf sat in the corner with his eyes closed. Was he practicing his usual prerace visualization of exactly how he would win, or was he, as some suggested, so icy and relaxed that he could fall asleep, even before a big race?

Whatever he was doing, Albert was determined to beat him in the feature race. It didn't matter that Woolf would be riding Kayak II, who was being compared to Seabiscuit by some turf writers, while Albert would be riding Flying Wild, a four-year-old mare who wasn't given much of a chance. But eager to challenge Woolf, perhaps even catch him by surprise, Albert took Flying Wild out to a three-length lead at the beginning of the race. Then going down the backstretch, as Kayak II began to close, Albert used his whip so aggressively on Flying Wild that she began to drift out, forcing Kayak II almost into the middle of the track. Still, Kayak II steadied himself and had all the run he needed to win easily. After the race, the stewards felt that Albert's rough riding in the backstretch confirmed their suspicions that his politeness was all a put-on, and they fined him fifty dollars and suspended him from riding for five days.

The suspension for an honest race gave Albert time to become even more anxious about his situation. He had been trying so

hard to win, to escape not just the other horses chasing him but the curse and the shame of Big Mooney, that the effort had put him in the thick of the fight to be the leading rider at the meet. It was as if riding more boldly in races that *weren't* fixed would be redemption for the ones that were. But now his eagerness had gotten him suspended by stewards who only knew half of the story of why he was riding so aggressively. How much longer would it be before they knew the whole story?

Meanwhile, more young jockeys were being drawn into the ring. It was only a matter of time before the authorities became aware of the whole crooked enterprise, with Mooney and the fixers and their betting parlors that seemed to be spread all over Los Angeles. The prospect of discovery became so apparent to Gus Dye that on July 5, he refused Mooney's orders to pull a horse named Audacious Lady. A week earlier Dye had refused to pull a horse named Cerro, and the repeated disobedience sent Mooney into a rage. That night, Gus Dye and Bert Reynolds, who had also been drawn into the fix at that point, packed their bags. The next day they left for Seattle and Longacres racetrack.

Again, Albert faced the choice of fleeing himself. But his friend Gus Dye had had only one victory at Hollywood Park. Neither Dye nor Reynolds was receiving the attention from the press, or the predictions of greatness, that Albert received. For them, Seattle offered a fresh start away from Mooney. But for Albert, seeking a new Eden, exactly as his father had done over and over, didn't make sense. He had half an Eden where he was.

He spent his suspension at the rail or in the grandstand, watching as Freddy Scheih, a young rider from Idaho, and Frank Chojnacki, a veteran rider from Chicago, were warned by the stewards for "indifferent" riding. Both had been running for Sweeney. The next day he watched as Willis Ward, on stern orders from

Mooney, struggled to pull a five-year-old mare named Tis True, who was as full of irrepressible run as Synod had been for Albert. Tis True refused to stay in any of the pockets that Ward tried to run her into in a desperate effort to lose. Then in the stretch, as she was drifting out and closing on the leaders, he got her to bolt to the inside so abruptly that she appeared to skip sideways. Still, she found her way back outside again and narrowly missed winning the race. During Ward's struggle to restrain her, she had been all over the track. But the stewards made no inquiries, and no one challenged Ward's performance.

It helped Albert to believe that if he rode his honest mounts hard and did his best to win, his pulled horses wouldn't be noticed among the numerous indifferent or odd rides by other jockeys in Big Mooney's expanding ring. And in mid-July, on his first days back from his suspension, he won three races and resumed the battle to be Hollywood Park's leading rider. On July 17 he was still in third place among all riders but was closing on second. "Only the best reinsmen on the track," the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, would be riding in the upcoming Hollywood Gold Cup, among them George Woolf, aboard Kayak II again, and sensational bug boy Albert Siler, this time on a horse named Whichcee. Albert smoked an Old Gold before the race, for good luck. But when Kayak II passed Whichcee and moved easily into the lead at the head of the stretch, a mighty roar rose from the nearly fifty thousand fans who made a sea of faces that began with those standing and packed against the rail and then swept back and up into the grandstand. Meanwhile, Big Mooney had arranged to have a horse running for Sweeney in every other race that day *except* the Hollywood Gold Cup. That mighty roar the fans lifted for Kayak II had been for the only entirely honest race to that point in the

afternoon. Listening to that roar helped Albert forget, at least for the moment, how dishonest things were elsewhere.

The last race of the day brought Big Mooney and the fixers all back into sharp focus. Willis Ward, instructed to pull a twelve-to-one shot in the race, had to struggle again to make the horse obey. Ward had already pulled four horses in earlier races, with the agreement that he would receive a payoff that night of five hundred dollars, which he planned to mail immediately to his parents. He had had no trouble pulling any of the horses until Jargo in the final race of the day. Jargo broke poorly but then began to fly by horses at the head of the stretch, including Albert's lifeless mount. From the rear of the field, Albert watched as Ward struggled to pull his horse. But nothing he did—at first pulling on Jargo's reins, then letting him have his head—would discourage the horse from running. He closed eight lengths in the stretch and won going away. That night, Mooney raged at Ward and refused to pay him any of the five hundred dollars he was due.

There were a half-dozen jockeys in the ring now, and Mooney's threats against Ward prompted worried talk among them. Despite Mooney's big-shot friendliness, he was volatile and unpredictable. What *else* might he do to poor Willis Ward, besides withhold the money? Tie cinder blocks to his feet and drop him off the Santa Monica pier? Carve an *X* in the seat of his silk riding pants . . . with Ward still in them! There wasn't a jockey in the ring who didn't believe that Mooney would carve that *X* if he was angry enough.

On Thursday, July 27, thunder from the clouds piled like ice cream over the San Gabriel Mountains sounded a drum roll heralding

the seriousness of the day for Albert Siler. In the second race, he would be riding a three-year-old named Cohigh, whom he had ridden to victory three weeks earlier. Despite the previous victory, this morning handicappers overlooked him and rated him at seven-to-one. But Albert was confident he had a good horse, and he was determined to win. The favorite in the race was a horse named Blue Breeze, who was consistently in the money and would be ridden by veteran Charlie Corbett, the leading rider at the meet. Since returning from his suspension, Albert's victories had moved him into second place among winning jockeys. Albert was certain that if he hadn't been told to pull so many mounts, *he* would have been the leader, not Corbett. Meanwhile, there was no chance for him to catch Corbett before the meet was over at the end of the week. But he could do something just as satisfying. He and Cohigh could beat Corbett and demonstrate that he was the superior rider, even if Corbett had more wins. Mooney had kept his foul hands off of the race. Albert would be running for himself, for his own pride and glory, not Big Mooney's or Sweeney's or anybody else's.

The threat of rain brought out a light crowd that day. But waiting in the jockeys' room for the call, Albert felt as nervous and on edge as he had felt riding the day of the Santa Anita Handicap and the Hollywood Gold Cup. For good luck, he sat by himself before the race in a corner of the jockeys' room, smoking another Old Gold and quietly humming his favorite tune, paraphrasing the lyrics so that his blue moon *had* turned to gold.

When they were all in the gate for the six-furlong race, he turned to Charlie Corbett, just outside him in the next post position. He offered a soft "good luck" to Corbett, but it was swallowed in the noise of trucks grinding through their gears out on Century Boulevard.

A sudden slap of metal sounded, and the gates popped open. Corbett broke Blue Breeze on top. Two lengths back, trapped in a knot of horses trailing Blue Breeze, Albert tried to find racing room as they moved down the backstretch, but there was no way out. Despite Albert's determination to ride hard in an honest race and prove how good he was, it was as if he couldn't escape Mooney's crooked hand. He was running for Sweeney now, despite his determination not to.

His only choice was to sit "chilly"—to wait and hope that a hole would eventually open up.

Rolling his body steadily, in beat with Cohigh's stride, Albert heard the reminder to himself to "wait, wait, wait!" creak in his head as steadily as a rocking chair.

Drifting into the far turn, the two horses immediately ahead of him, who had been bumping each other, were separated slightly by one of the collisions. The brief, narrow opening between them wasn't wide enough for him to get through without more bumping, perhaps creating a disaster worse than the spare tire incident on Buttercrick, with jockeys and horses tumbling and bouncing because of his reckless move.

But he had no choice, he felt. And only a split second to slide through before the hole closed.

Without going to the whip, he pinched his elbows, pumped his arms and shoulders, and Cohigh responded. Moving between the two horses, he felt his legs catch for a split second on the legs of the opposing jockeys. One of them turned and looked at him. "What the hell?" his face said.

But he went through the opening in a flash, and at the head of the stretch, he slipped in a length behind Corbett, who had Blue Breeze going as easily as his name suggested.

At the sixteenth pole, the two horses were side-by-side, their strides in perfect synchrony, their heads bobbing in unison. The sudden roar from the crowd quickened Albert's pulse, but the two horses seemed part of an equine drill team as they crossed the finish line.

It was a photo finish. Albert and Corbett took their horses in nervous circles as they waited for the results.

Albert worried that as long as he had waited for the hole to open up, it hadn't been long enough, that the effort it took to shoot quickly through the hole and catch up while on the turn had drained Cohigh of the little extra it would have taken to put his nose in front at the finish line. He should have waited until he was in the stretch for the hole to open up, he told himself. It might have made just the small difference it took to win.

They had to wait five minutes for the results. A crowd gathered around the winner's circle, most of them wanting to hear that it was Cohigh. The long shot. With the Peewee from Lowden in the saddle. The tiny riding sensation, the toy jockey who cried if he lost, but who was daring enough to shoot through the narrowest of holes.

Finally, the tote board lights blinked: Number 3, Cohigh, by a nose. A sudden whoop rose from around the winner's circle like a puff of locomotive smoke. Then a flash camera exploded and caught Albert grinning, not at the camera, but into space. Because no matter how deep Sweeney or Big Mooney or Irving Sangbusch had gotten their shirt-collar fangs in him, they could never reach his honest, hard-riding heart.

6. SPORTING WOMEN

"Albert Siler has shown courage and daring," the *Los Angeles Times* wrote the next morning. He had a knack for riding horses, they said. Track old-timers liked to say that a good jockey slipping through a tight hole didn't leave room for a shingle. There hadn't been room for even that shingle in Cohigh's race. Siler needed courage and skill to slip his horse through such a narrow opening and then beat Blue Breeze. Big things were in store for him, the *Times* predicted. In the last two days of the meet, he would not be able to catch Charlie Corbett, the leading rider. However, he had performed better than any other rider at the meet, they said, better than Jack Westrope, Eddie Arcaro, Ralph Neves, and better than George Woolf!

If only he would have been able to get Big Mooney out of his life. He could have then enjoyed his brilliant victories without feeling as if he had another, deceitful half that was completely at Mooney's mercy. If only Big Mooney's jockeys ring would go away. He even dared to hope that it wouldn't follow him to Del Mar racetrack, where a new meet would open on August 2. Del Mar would mean a clean slate, a chance now to win riding honors. No more hanging out in a sleazy, Los Angeles motor court,

making phone calls pretending that he was Don Ameche because the "authorities" might be eavesdropping. Who did Mooney think he was fooling? If the police were tapping the lines, they certainly wouldn't confuse Albert Siler's boyish voice with that of Don Ameche, who had one of the most recognizable voices in the country, as unique as radio's Rochester.

The subterfuge was one of the many foolish circumstances connected with Big Mooney's operation of the jockeys ring that began to worry Irving Sangbusch. Despite his vampire look and his fangs, he complained of "twinges" of guilt. Little Albert Siler's courageous ride on Cohigh stood as a stark reminder to Sangbusch that every time he delivered payoff money to the jockeys budding stars were being corrupted. The day after Albert's win on Cohigh, Sangbusch went to the house on Sherbourne and told Mooney that he was worried about the jockeys ring. Mooney refused to accept Sangbusch's uneasiness. He explained that he was planning a big jockeys' party that night at his apartment in Venice Beach. He had invited several new jockeys he wanted to bring into the ring, and the plan was to discuss how they would continue to operate at Del Mar. They would be able to bet on races in which every fit horse except the one they were backing heavily would be running for Sweeney. There was literally no limit to how much money they would make betting on those certain winners. Finally, he explained, there would be plenty of beer and liquor at the party, along with attractive and young "sporting women." They would serve as a preview of the pleasures the jockeys could expect at the hands of Big Mooney and the fixers.

On Friday night the setting sun dropped onto the ocean horizon and flattened like a red water balloon. For a moment before it disappeared, the balloon seemed stuck on the horizon, and it cast

Venice Beach in a soft, scarlet twilight. For a beach town with a honky-tonk history, the twilight seemed appropriate. It was the sensual light of dance halls and carousels, of bathing beauties and billiard halls. The town's founders had tried to make it a respectable Venetian paradise, with rococo buildings and Italian gondoliers. But the gaudy Venice Pier was the place that drew the most visitors, with its roller-coaster wildness. Hollywood came and filmed Buster Keaton and the Keystone Cops in madcap adventures. Harold Lloyd leaped from one of the canal bridges. Mary Pickford batted her sleepy eyes. Jazz bands standing in the ocean played for drunken dancers trying to fox trot in the surf. It was the perfect setting for Big Mooney to meet with the members of his jockeys ring.

The party in his apartment, above a grocery store off the beach, began just as darkness overtook that scarlet twilight. Big Mooney had touted the party to Irving Sangbusch as a grand affair that would expand the jockeys ring. But only a few jockeys showed up, and with the exception of Albert Siler and Willis Ward, none of them had been successful at Hollywood Park. Frank Chojnacki and Freddy Scheih, the two riders who had been censured by stewards for "indifferent riding" at Hollywood Park, had had only ten victories between them. Scheih was so eager to do better that he was heading east the next morning in search of greener riding pastures. Eddie Yager from Kentucky had had only a handful of mounts at Hollywood Park, and none had even finished in the money. Finally, twenty-six-year-old jockey Freddie Miller, from Salt Lake City, had gone to the winner's circle only four times.

Mooney began by gathering the small group together. Smiling as he spoke, he said he wanted to get down to business before the sporting women arrived. The Hollywood Park fix ar-

rangements had gone well, he felt. He did not bother to explain how much walk-around cash his brother had stashed for him in his numerous Los Angeles safe deposit boxes. But he wanted to do a few things differently at Del Mar. Without explaining that Irving Sangbusch was beginning to get cold feet, he said that jockey Freddie Miller would be his new bagman. Miller was known as the "King of the Bull Rings" because of his uncanny ability to negotiate the tight turns of half-mile tracks. But success at Hollywood Park had eluded him. Married, with a young child and very little money, he had been ripe for Mooney's plot and had agreed to pull horses at Hollywood Park. But he had gotten so few mounts that he had run for Sweeney only twice. Now he was facing the prospect of very few mounts at Del Mar. So he welcomed the chance to at least make enough money to take care of his family by serving as Mooney's gopher.

Mooney also explained that at Del Mar he didn't want to go to the expense of setting up a jockeys' headquarters, as he had done at the motor court on Manchester. It only invited trouble, he said. Instead, at Del Mar he or Freddie Miller would meet the jockeys nightly at various locations around Del Mar, Solana Beach, and Encinitas, to deliver money and instructions on which horses to pull. Then, his smile disappeared suddenly, and he gave his usual warning. "Use your head," he said. "Don't make no mistakes."

The words had a chilling affect on everybody but Frank Chojnacki, who later vowed quietly outside earshot of Mooney, "I don't want nothin' to do with pullin' horses." But the rest of them listened closely as Mooney predicted that Del Mar would be as profitable for everybody as Hollywood Park had been.

For Albert Siler, it had indeed been a profitable meet at Hollywood Park. On top of all the cash he had gotten from Mooney for pulling horses, he had the legitimate money for all his rides

and his victories. The total amount, as closely as he could reckon it, came to over five thousand dollars. For only two months of riding! It made him feel like a twelve-year-old again at the fair in Walla Walla, his pockets stuffed with cash. This time, however, there would be nobody to take it away from him, and he made plans to go shopping the next morning for a fancy new car, to replace the motorcycle that was not at all in keeping with his new station in life.

Before the sporting women arrived, a trainer named Saul "Sonny" Greenberg dropped in on the party. Greenberg was considered one of the most colorful people in racing. He wore checkered suits, chewed on long Manila cigars, and spoke in rapid bursts, joking through an easy smile that he had once been the world's worst jockey. Everybody in racing knew him. He was a good friend of George Woolf's, and only a year earlier he had been the stable agent for Tom Smith, Seabiscuit's trainer. Now he had his own small stable of horses, which he had sent back east. He planned to head east himself in the morning, he said. But as Mooney invited his guests to eat and drink at his expense, Sonny Greenberg's presence at the party was left unexplained. Had he dropped by innocently? Had Mooney invited somebody with his reputation just to lend credibility to his jockey ring? Or worse, was Sonny Greenberg one of the "big shots" in the ring, along with Big Mooney, Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, and who knew who else?

No explanations were offered. Instead, the young women paired up with the jockeys, and couples began disappearing in various corners and bedrooms of the apartment. As the jockeys disappeared, Mooney took Willis Ward aside and explained that he had a horse named First Bid at Hollywood Park the next day, for the final day of the meet. He wanted First Bid pulled, he said.

Then he gave Ward two hundred dollars cash. Mooney still owed him another four hundred from previous horses who had run for Sweeney, and Ward tried to bring up the matter. But Mooney promptly shoved him into the company of one of the sporting women, and the subject was dropped.

It was pitch dark and Mooney's party was in full swing when two small boats with no running lights, each loaded with an armed team of sheriff's deputies and Los Angeles cops, cut through the choppy waters off Venice Beach and headed for two gambling ships that had been anchored in Santa Monica Bay. Earlier in the week, after conferring with Los Angeles officials, Attorney General Earl Warren of California had declared war on the gambling ships, describing them as menaces, "the greatest single nuisance in southern California." They had been operating with impunity, he declared. On weekends skywriters working in the sky over the packed Los Angeles beaches drew smoky invitations to the ships, which were anchored beyond the reach of U.S. authorities. Radio ads invited listeners to take water taxis out for an evening of gambling. Once aboard, gamblers could enjoy everything from bingo to craps. Thousands made the trip nightly, and when pressed to explain what, if anything, he could do to shut down the ships, Warren had been deliberately evasive. "We will find ways and means," he had vowed. Meanwhile, Los Angeles Police Chief Arthur C. Hohmann was even more evasive, grinning enigmatically and quoting Lewis Carroll that the time had come to talk "of shoes and ships and sealing wax."

One of the ships targeted for the Friday night surprise boarding team was known as the *Texas*. Six weeks before the raid, the old barge had been converted to a gambling ship by its owner, Captain Web Monstad. Monstad, who sported a waxed mus-

tache with sword points and who had a reputation for heavy drinking, had needed cash backers to make the conversion. He had approached Big Mooney and Benny Chapman and offered them a fifty-fifty split of the gambling profits if they agreed to bankroll the enterprise. Mooney and Chapman had insisted on three-quarters of the profits, and after a long night of negotiation, Captain Monstad had finally agreed to the terms. The ship was outfitted with roulette wheels, blackjack and craps tables, chuck-a-luck, slot machines, and a bookmaking parlor.

Eight officers boarded the *Texas* just before midnight. They worked their way through scores of oblivious gamblers in the casino and served abatement orders to Monstad. It was almost dawn before water taxis had removed all the gamblers from the ship. But news of the raids was all over Los Angeles and especially Venice Beach by early morning. Big Mooney had hardly finished cleaning up after his party when he heard the news: four gambling ships anchored in the waters off Long Beach and Santa Monica Bay had been ordered to shut down by District Attorney Buron Fitts. Among the ships was the *Texas*, whose roulette wheels turned idly as the old barge rocked in the waves. It did not take Mooney long to decide to take back his gambling operations, and by mid-morning he had put together a boarding party of his own.

To protect the gambling equipment after the shutdown the night before, Capt. Monstad had hired a burly guard named William F. Keys and brought him aboard the ship. Only a half hour earlier, Keys and Capt. Monstad had barricaded the ship's two gangways. Then, before Monstad went ashore, he ordered Keys, who carried a gun and a length of lead pipe, not to let anyone come aboard.

Keys stood watch vigilantly. Mid-morning, he spotted a water taxi racing toward the *Texas*. Fifty men were packed on the deck. They had been hastily rounded up at dawn, and they were led now by Big Mooney, along with Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, and Willie Einstoss. Mooney's men came scrambling up the portside gangway of the ship. Keys used his length of pipe to beat on them as they tried to come aboard. Mooney shouted at the captain of the water taxi to move around to the starboard side gangway, where the men came aboard unchallenged. Two of them overtook Keys from behind as he struggled with the portside boarders. They took his gun and pipe length and escorted him to Mooney, who had by then made his way into the shipboard casino.

All of the ship's gaming equipment, from the roulette wheels to the dice tables to the short wave radios for bookmaking, was covered with sheets. Mooney considered it all his now. He and his men seized it like pirates. Mooney was certain that the floating casinos could be shut down for good only after years of court action. Meantime, he intended to change the name of the *Texas* to the *Monte Carlo*, then reopen it with the help of his partners Benny Chapman and Doc Kebo.

Shortly, his men brought him the guard Keys, who was bloody and breathing heavily. But he remained defiant and bragged to Mooney that at least nobody had come up the portside.

"Well, you're goddamn lucky we didn't throw you overboard," Mooney snarled at him.

Albert Siler stood in the showroom of a Los Angeles Chevrolet dealer that morning, happily unaware of the events transpiring in Santa Monica Harbor. For Albert, the green Chevrolet JB Master 85 Coupe on the showroom floor was all he could think about. He had seen the ads for the racy, new car in the news-

papers. They featured starlets on the fenders, or handsome actors at the wheel wearing plus fours and tam-o'-shanters. Now here was that same new car in a deep green, parked on a glossy showroom floor. It was exactly the car he had dreamed of owning when he had been riding in the bush leagues.

Albert wore a white shirt, Levi's, cowboy boots, and an expensive green suede vest that he had just bought that morning and that he buttoned tightly over his tiny chest. He was eighteen-years-old and not five feet tall. He had an Old Gold smoldering in the corner of his lips. Albert told the salesman who waited on him that he wanted to buy the green coupe on the showroom floor. But the salesman began his routine sales pitch: Did Albert know that the Chevrolet company had sold fifteen million cars? Did he know that with their sleek styling and riding comfort, the new Chevrolets were often mistaken for Cadillacs and Packards? Did he know, he went on as he lifted the hood of the coupe, that the Chevrolet came equipped with a "Tiptoe-matic clutch," and a powerful, eighty-five horsepower, straight-six engine?

Albert put his hand on the fender of the showroom coupe. It was the one he wanted.

Did he want the two-passenger coupe or the four-passenger, business coupe? And what color did he prefer? Green, brown, blue, gray, maroon, or beige?

He preferred the green one that was *on the floor.* How much was it?

Six hundred and twenty-eight dollars.

He would take it, he said.

The salesman smiled down on him. Why didn't Albert bring his mother and father in? Then they could talk more about the purchase of an automobile.

Albert carefully took out his wallet and slipped one hundred dollar bills from it while the salesman watched and lifted his eyebrows. When Albert tried to hand the money to the salesman, he quickly recovered himself. After all, he hadn't even learned Albert's name yet, he protested.

Albert introduced himself and the two shook hands.

"Well, Mr. Siler, I'm sure we can find the right automobile for you to purchase."

For a third time Albert told him that the green coupe was the car he wanted.

But there were accessories to consider, the salesman reminded him. Did he want the deluxe steering wheel? The seven-tube radio with dual speakers? The deluxe heater?

He didn't care, he said. Whatever was on the green coupe in front of him. Could he sit in it?

The salesman opened the door for him. Albert slipped inside and fidgeted with the cowling vent handle and then studied the speedometer—the half moon of speeds went all the way to 120 miles per hour.

While the salesman explained other accessories, Albert stepped out of the car. He had been driving a motorcycle for months now, he explained. It had been some time since he had taken the wheel of a car. And he hadn't *ever* driven a car with a column gearshift. Could they take a drive around the block?

The salesman backed the car out of the showroom and onto the street. With Albert behind the wheel, the green coupe lurched and screeched around the block, until he learned to coordinate the handling of the clutch pedal and gearshift. Back at the dealership, the salesman wrote up a contract. It included extra charges for the accessories that were on the floor model: front fender

guides, a clock, fog lights, deluxe wheel covers, rear fender skirts, a safety spotlight, a cigarette lighter with an ash tray under the dashboard, and the five-tube radio.

Suddenly, the salesman stopped and stood up. Wait a minute! he said.

Albert's heart stopped. Was the car already sold to someone else? Were they going to insist that he needed to bring his parents in to sign for him?

But the salesman explained that there were two styles of hood ornaments that came on the car: a high bird or a low bird. Which would Albert prefer?

Whatever was on the green coupe, Albert explained once again. The hood ornament didn't matter. The car was the realization of all of his dreams.

But the salesman said that for the life of him, he could not remember what ornament was on the green coupe. They walked back out to the showroom, where the salesman identified it as the "low bird" ornament. Albert briefly laid his hand on the slick chrome and glass ornament that poked forward from the hood like the tiny bowsprit of a ship. It wasn't as much a bird, Albert felt, as it was the miniature head of a horse, mane flying, headed for the finish line. And driving slowly away from the dealership, the ornament gave Albert the thrilling sensation that he was riding bareback again in Buttercrick.

7. THE BILTMORE HOTEL

Albert Siler drove straight from the Chevrolet dealership to ride six mounts at Hollywood Park's getaway day. Three of them were short-priced, or favored, horses, but with his mind more on his brand new green coupe than his riding duties, the highest he had been able to finish was a distant third. Big Mooney did not order him to pull a single horse, giving him hope that the fixers would not bother him at Del Mar. By his best reckoning, he had pulled nearly twenty horses at Hollywood. Several of them would have been sure winners, and there were others he might have coaxed to victory on the strength of his bold riding. Despite the predictions of greatness that had followed him everywhere he went, nowhere in his bush league dreams had he ever imagined anything quite so improbable as winning the riding championship at Hollywood Park. But he calculated now that he might have won that championship. He might have beaten George Woolf, Ralph Neves, Johnny Longden, Eddie Arcaro—all of them. It surely had been within his reach, and he dared to hope that without Mooney haunting him at Del Mar, he would continue his winning ways and capture the riding championship.

Still not confident in the handling of his green coupe, on Sunday he began a slow drive south on Highway 101 for Del Mar, north of San Diego. He drove along playing with the safety spotlight, occasionally throwing a beam on some target that was already brightly illuminated in the midday sun. And he fiddled with the radio, listening to country music or trying to find the latest news.

It was then that he had heard the report that Mooney and his men had seized the *Texas* like pirates and immediately renamed it the *Monte Carlo*, then removed the sheets from the chuck-a-luck and craps tables, in preparation for putting the boat back in full operation. The ship's seizure was a stark episode that made Albert and the other jockeys in the ring even more anxious. Big Mooney wasn't just a crooked horse player and gambler. He had the impulses of a cutthroat pirate. Defy him, make him angry, or try to shut down one of his gambling ventures, and there was no limit to how boldly he would strike back.

Willis Ward was finding that out for himself on Sunday afternoon. Mooney still owed Ward the four hundred dollars he had refused to pay him on the day he had been unable to pull Jargo. Ward had pulled two more horses since then, for which he was owed an additional two hundred dollars. Eager to cover bad checks that he had outstanding, Ward had gone to Irving Sangbusch and asked for his help in getting the six hundred dollars owed him by Big Mooney. Ward explained that because of the bad checks, the police were looking for him. He needed to get cash out of Mooney immediately, he said.

Sangbusch had heard the news of the wild party with young jockeys and sporting women in Venice Beach the night before. Sangbusch felt that the party had been foolish and brazen and that, along with Mooney's seizure of the *Texas*, it would eventu-

ally lead the authorities to uncover the jockeys ring. Before the discovery happened, Sangbusch wanted to distance himself from the so-called big shots, and he told Ward, "You're gonna have to go see Mooney yourself and shake him down for the cash."

But where was he? Ward wondered.

Probably out in Santa Monica Harbor with the rest of his swashbuckling pirates, Sangbusch joked. Or maybe at the Biltmore, smoking cigars with Benny Chapman in celebration of the reopening of their gambling ship as the *Monte Carlo*.

In the men's lounge at the Biltmore, Chapman and his bookmaking friends often sat in red, lacquered chairs with their felt hats on their knees, reading the *Los Angeles Times* and smoking Havana cigars. Ward went there immediately, driven by his friend Charles Forester, whom he brought along for support, if he needed it. They parked in the alley behind the Biltmore and found Big Mooney and Benny Chapman at a table in the Grill Room, which was packed with Sunday guests enjoying the five-course dinner, with selections of roast Long Island duckling or a broiled English mutton chop with bacon—all for $1.50.

After Ward and Forester approached him in the restaurant, Big Mooney insisted that they discuss Ward's request for money in private, and the four of them went outside to the alley where Forester had parked his car. They walked out through the *Galleria Real*, the hotel's central promenade, as wide as a boulevard and as long as a football field, and reminiscent of a Venetian palace, with ceiling friezes of winged horses and dancing nymphs. They passed the portal to the Biltmore Bowl, where only six months earlier a thousand Hollywood notables had sat jammed between the arched colonnades of the huge room to witness the eleventh annual Academy Awards ceremonies. James Cagney had been one of the Best Actor nominees, for his performance as the swagger-

ing and ruthless "Rocky" in the gangster melodrama *Angels with Dirty Faces*. Now here was Big Mooney, as swaggering and ruthless as the screen Rocky, escorting the son of dirt-poor Kansas farmers out to a shadowy alley in the big city. The scene was as sinister as if those Hollywood notables who had gathered only months earlier had scripted it.

Once they were outside, Mooney spoke first. "What the hell did you come *here* for?" It was Sunday, he reminded Ward. The hotel was jammed with guests!

"I need the six hundred dollars owed me."

"Six hundred? How do you figure?"

Ward explained that he had never been paid the four hundred owed him from the day of the Jargo failure, plus two hundred from Saturday's getaway card. That totaled six hundred dollars.

Mooney shook his head. "Two hundred, maybe, is all."

"I pulled four horses the day of Jargo." Ward named each of them, his voice tense and high-pitched. "Those were good pulls. I couldn't help that Jargo won. I'm owed."

"I don't owe you no six hundred. I told you more than once not to make no mistakes. You made a mistake."

"On one horse. You still owe me for the others."

Ward explained that the police were looking for him for passing bad checks. He hadn't meant to draw the attention of the police, but if Mooney had paid him promptly it would never have happened. He was about to explain further that his parents were also expecting money from him, but before he could get to the subject, Mooney exploded suddenly and began violent cursing that echoed in the alley.

"You're a lousy, little squealer!" he shouted and pressed close to Ward. None of the other jockeys in the ring were making a fuss about being paid, Mooney thundered. So why was he whin-

ing and squealing like a barnyard pig? "Quit bothering me for money!"

Ward insisted on the money he was still owed.

"You don't need any money!" Mooney was still shouting. "You should have all the money you need. If you didn't act like a millionaire, you'd have plenty of money."

Ward stepped back and straightened himself to deliver what he thought was his ace in the hole. "I may have to go to the Racing Commission and tell them my story."

For a moment Mooney looked stunned by the threat. Then he reached and grabbed Ward by the lapels of his jacket and lifted him up. He dropped him back down and slammed him into the door of Forester's car. Ward began sliding down the side of the door. Mooney jerked him erect and began slapping him, fanning his hand back and forth, striking Ward on the chin with his palm, then the back of his hand. Charles Forester, who had been standing against the alley wall of the Biltmore, began moving toward Mooney. But as soon as he did, he saw Chapman unbutton his suit coat and reach for a gun tucked in his belt. Forester froze and watched as Mooney continued striking Ward, whose head snapped with each blow.

Finally, Mooney jerked open the door to the car. "I've got a good mind to kill you, you little fucker!" Mooney shouted.

He pushed Ward onto the seat.

What made the little bastard think he could just come waltzing into the Biltmore Hotel? Mooney shouted. "Don't come here no more!"

Ward was slumped in the seat, blood flowing from his nose. "Sangbusch told me to come see you."

Mooney glanced at Chapman, who had buttoned his suit coat back up. "I'll have to kill that son-of-a-bitch, too," Mooney said.

Ward tried to sit straight in the seat.

Mooney leaned in the window. "I'll kill *both* of you if you try to get any more money out of me. I've paid you enough."

He reached in his pocket, pulled out a wad of bills, counted out two hundred dollars, and tossed it in the window. "There," he said, "I don't owe you no more!" He was smiling now, an incongruous and terrifying smile, as if his sudden eruption of violence and profanity had been no more than a brief, uncontrollable seizure.

Still smiling, he turned to Charles Forester. "Now the two of you, get the hell out of here." They were never to come to the Biltmore again, Mooney warned. Or they'd *all* be arrested.

Mooney's fears of arrest were not unfounded, and there were three different gumshoes who were threatening to uncover the jockeys ring as Mooney prepared to move it to Del Mar racetrack.

The first was J. Edgar Hoover, whose love of racing was so well known and undisguised that he had a parking space marked "Hoover" just outside the jockeys' room at Del Mar. He used his regular summer trips to Scripps Clinic in La Jolla for his health check-ups as an excuse to drop in at nearby Del Mar. He and his famous G-men had all they could handle trying to keep the lid on organized crime elsewhere in the country, but Hoover's good health seemed tied to the reach of his criminal suspicions, and there was a chance that somehow, in the act of attending the races at Del Mar, he would inadvertently spot something suspicious and stumble across Mooney's jockey ring.

The greater chance was that Mooney's ring would be uncovered advertently by the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB), which the state had established in 1933 to license, regulate, and supervise all race meets in California. The CHRB had, among its many charges, the responsibility to protect the public from fraud.

State stewards at each track oversaw daily operations and suspended or banned any horsemen or jockeys who violated strict CHRB rules.

California's chief steward in 1939 was Edwin J. Brown, a graduate of Harvard Law School who had learned the racing business at Longacres racetrack in Washington. As the first chairman of the Washington Horse Racing Board in the 1930s, he had earned a reputation for being a relentless watchdog for the public's interest. He had broken up suspected jockeys rings and been an advocate for stricter regulations against racing fraud that left the public bitter about the sport of kings. Once, after terrified track judges at Longacres took refuge in his office from angry fans, Brown reassured the judges, "Gentlemen, do not be concerned. These are my people." But when he opened the door to speak to the mob, he was immediately overwhelmed. The incident earned him a reputation for bravery, and he eventually became president of the National Association of State Racing Commissioners. He had friends everywhere in racing, and in 1938 he presented Charles Howard, owner of Seabiscuit, with the Stakes Horse of the Year trophy.

By the spring of 1939, Edwin Brown had landed the prestigious job as chief steward in California. He was not intimidated by wealth or fame, and he had hardly taken office when he began aggressively interrogating jockeys to get to the bottom of rumors surrounding the so-called "Richardson jockeys ring," led by veteran jockey Noel "Spec" Richardson, who rode under contract to the Binglin Stables, owned by Bing Crosby. He quickly gained the confidence of California horsemen by doubling the days of suspension for rough-riding jockeys. He had J. Edgar Hoover's nose for evil and corruption, especially in races in which there were jockeys or owners who had no intentions of winning. For

years the betting public had been objecting to the practice by rich owners of entering horses in races that were no more than exercise romps in preparation for upcoming stakes races. Brown had spoken out strongly against the practice, and the experience had given him a sharp eye for horses who, if they weren't actually running for Sweeney, clearly weren't running to win.

For a year there had been rumors of fixes at Hollywood Park. It bore watching, Edwin Brown decided, and from the perch of the stewards' box above racetrack grandstands, Brown had watched without gawking and listened without probing. Then after Hollywood Park closed in 1939 and riders and horses headed for Del Mar, several turf writers dared to suggest in their racing columns that some of the jockeys at the Hollywood Park meeting were guilty of lackluster riding. There were "mutterings about strange happenings at the track," the writers said. They even dared to write that there were rumors again of a jockeys ring. Pointing out that pulling horses or fixing races were not then crimes in California, the writers advocated new laws to clean up racing. Stung by the criticism, Hollywood Park officials, in their annual report to stockholders, insisted that racing *was* clean. The turf writers were just disgruntled handicappers who were passing around rumors of a jockeys ring as an alibi for their handicapping failures.

But steward Edwin Brown was still watching and listening carefully, and the rumors of a jockeys ring were too persistent to be idle. Then the CHRB received a tip from somebody who called himself simply "Sangbusch." It wasn't clear whether that was his real name or merely the secret name behind which he intended to hide as a tipster. But he said he had "certain disclosures" he wanted to discuss with them. There were some big-shot bookmakers in Los Angeles who were corrupting young jockeys, he

said. The fixers and the jockeys had established a secret meeting place at a motor court in Ingelwood. Jockeys who had refused to meet or were reluctant to pull horses had received death threats. Sangbusch claimed that he was risking being shot himself as an informant. But he was having pangs of guilt, he insisted. He wanted to save young jockeys coming up. Meanwhile, if the CHRB wished to employ his services as an informant, he was willing to serve them—for whatever fee they thought would be appropriate.

Sangbusch appeared to be half-crackpot stool pigeon, half-conscience-stricken citizen. But Edwin Brown decided he could take no chances. It was time to start a serious but secret investigation by the CHRB. The first step was to hire two private investigators who would tail riders about whom there were suspicions. The detectives promptly identified a motor court on Manchester Street in Inglewood as the place where the fixers had been meeting with jockeys, and Brown laid plans for a raid on the establishment. But the stories in the *Los Angeles Times* had suddenly turned the fixers cagey. They were meeting now in cars, in dark alleyways, or on busy street corners where they would be inconspicuous. There was no longer any point in trying to catch them by surprise in Los Angeles. Brown's best hope was to catch the ring at work during the upcoming meet at Del Mar.

8. BURON

There was a third gumshoe lurking around the edges of the Hollywood Park jockeys ring. He was an unlikely "Sam Spade," with a peg-leg walk and a sad face that reflected a long history of misfortune. His name was Buron Fitts, and his troubles began in 1918 as a young first lieutenant in World War I during the Meuse-Argonne campaign in France. For months in the steady rain, he had led a scouting party of three men crawling along gullies and trenches in the Argonne Forest and pinpointing German machine gun nests. Then one night he and his men came under artillery fire and took cover in a shell hole half filled with liquid mud. A shell that burst immediately overhead killed all his men and shattered his right knee, which streamed blood into the muck. An ambulance loaded with other soldiers wounded in the bombardment took forty hours to drive fifteen miles through the mud to an evacuation hospital. By the time they arrived, Buron Fitts was the only one still alive.

He came home and spent months in the hospital while they tried to dig the shrapnel and dirt out of his knee. Again and again they scraped away infected bone. When he was finally back on his feet, working as a prosecutor in the Los Angeles district at-

torney's office, he had to sit without bending his knee, and he walked as if he had a peg leg. But the limp didn't stop him from vigorous prosecution, and he was soon the chief trial deputy for Los Angeles County.

He had a fascination with airplanes, and in 1922, after a brief flight in a biplane that ended in a forced landing on a beach in Carpinteria, he nearly drowned in the surf. In 1926 he became the "flying politician" who stumped the state in his campaign for the office of lieutenant governor. His sad face reflected decency and the capacity for hard work. Married now, and backed by veterans groups who admired his military record, he won the election easily. But once in office, and traveling the state by air in a crusade against professional criminals, his plane ran out of gas in Dunsmuir, California and crashed in a plowed field. Fitts walked away from the wreckage and continued to stump the state by air, despite two more crash landings in 1927. He survived each one, and his crusade against crime never wavered.

He underwent seventeen operations in the decade after the war to remove the diseased bone in his right leg. After each operation, infection and abscesses formed, and his doctors worried that unless they amputated his leg, his health would deteriorate beyond treatment. In May 1928 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that he had finally lost the fight to save his leg. Amputation was unavoidable, his doctors told him. But Fitts refused to let them go ahead, and he insisted on more surgery to scrape away the infected bone. Meanwhile, from his hospital bed he declared his intention to run for Los Angeles district attorney and clean up a city that had been corrupted by crooks and venal politicians. "If elected," he declared simply, "I will enforce the law."

Again he won easily. As soon as he took office, he instituted criminal proceedings against his predecessor for corruption and

bribery. Then he assigned twenty special undercover investigators to work with the Los Angeles grand jury to uncover graft and corruption elsewhere in the city. In 1929 the infection in his leg returned and once more he had to battle doctors who wanted to saw it off. As soon as he was out of the hospital, he took to the air in his crusade against crime, but his plane ran out of gas again, this time over Sacramento, and he crash landed in a field, plowed through a fence, and nosed into a ditch. He crawled out of the wreckage bloodied but still undaunted in his crusade.

As the Los Angeles district attorney, he declared war on bootleggers and the underworld. The Los Angeles Police Department would finally be purged of crooks and graft, he vowed. Brothels and bookmaking joints that served champagne and caviar to corrupt police would be shut down for good. The illegal gambling barges operating off Long Beach would be raided. If he couldn't get them closed legally, he promised to make their lives miserable in other ways. The gamblers and crooks fought back and swore they would burn him the first time they caught him alone. Armed guards were assigned to protect him everywhere he went in the city. But it didn't stop the crooks, who caught up with him one night and tried to kill him by pushing his car off the Arroyo Seco Bridge as he drove to deliver a speech in Pasadena.

On September 2, 1930, a three-foot rattlesnake sank its fangs in the leather of his right shoe as he limped along a fence on an evening walk above Malibu Beach. He stomped the snake to death with his good leg, but he wound up the next spring back in the hospital again with chronic leg pain. He was in and out of the hospital battling amputation for the next four years. In August 1934 he lapsed into unconsciousness and was declared critically ill with a raging leg infection that drained pus and the mud of the Argonne Forest. His temperature spiked to 105 de-

grees, nurses packed him in ice, and eighty-five of his deputies gave blood to save his life.

He recovered in time for his 1936 reelection campaign. His backers included Hollywood producers from Cecil B. DeMille to Daryl F. Zanuck, each of whom recognized that his life contained the heroic stuff from which melodramatic movies were made. He was honest, his supporters said. He had kept the underworld out of Los Angeles. Four out of five of the criminals he caught were convicted and jailed, including three ruthless kidnappers who were sentenced to life in San Quentin just two days after their victim was released.

But there were still those who wanted to kill him. In March 1937, driving to his parents' home in Duarte for his weekly, Sunday night visit, a black sedan pulled alongside his car and shots rang out. The front windshield exploded, and bullets tore up his right arm. Still, he managed to continue on to his parents' home, where he staggered up the walk. "Mother," he called before he fell bleeding, "I'm shot!" He spent a week in the hospital, where doctors rebuilt the shattered bones of his left forearm. Meanwhile, police investigating the case reported that the assassination attempt had been the work of amateurs. "Experts would have used a submachine gun," they said. But the assassins, who were never caught, remained as mysterious as those other malevolent forces, from crashed airplanes to rattlesnakes, that seemed determined to kill him.

In January 1938 he began a crackdown on Los Angeles bookmakers, as if they were wicked and punishable surrogates for the hidden agents that kept trying to strike him down. The first target in his bookmaking war was a room on the eighth floor of the Oviatt Building on South Olive Street, just a block from the Biltmore Hotel and the K-C Smokeshop. For months the other occu-

pants of the building had been wondering exactly what was going on behind the doors of the mysterious room 817. They could hear the clatter of teletype machines. They could hear the sound of scratchy loudspeakers, as blaring and incomprehensible as the public address system in a railroad depot. They could hear men shouting. Now and then the isolated whoops melded into a roar that rose slowly like a howling wind, then stopped suddenly. The silence that followed was eerie.

On May 26, 1939, just before the start of the Hollywood Park meet, a dozen members of the Los Angeles Police Vice Squad, led by Buron Fitts's deputies, had burst into the room. They made note of the teletype machines, a bank of telephones, the colorful scratch sheets hanging from the walls, the betting markers with the names of some of the customers in the room. They searched four men, one of whom insisted that he was just visiting the parlor. The police laughed and seized the phones and equipment. Then they locked and sealed room 817. Once down on the busy street, thick with the odor of grilled onions and acrid truck fumes, they waited their turn to climb into the police van. A few people coming out of the building glanced at them and nodded their approval, as if they had known all along that something criminal had been going on behind the doors of room 817.

All of the occupants in the room were taken to the police department, where they were booked and charged with misdemeanor gambling. During the booking, one of the gamblers protested that he only *worked* in room 817.

Worked for *who*? they asked him. Give us his name!

"Big Mooney" was as much as the gambler knew.

It did not take long for Buron Fitts to create a profile of the man he knew now as Bernard Einstoss, alias Barney "Big" Mooney. He

was a so-called "betting commissioner" and a big-shot gambler who had a criminal record and was known in gambling parlors up and down the Coast for his earthy language and his champagne tastes. He could be on top of the gambling world one day and tapped out the next. He had a mean streak and a quick temper. But he was young and handsome and brash. He was drawn to celebrities, and he was often seen in the company of actors, producers, and big Hollywood spenders. With the right planning, he could be caught in the middle of one of his brazen gambling ventures and jailed as quickly as those three kidnappers whom Fitts had packed off to San Quentin.

Meanwhile, the gossip in the newspapers and elsewhere among trackmen was that a jockeys ring had been in operation at Hollywood Park. Confidential informants were reporting that young riders had been threatened with their lives. On the surface the rumor sounded preposterous, too brazen for any fixer in his right mind to attempt to pull off. But it seemed in keeping with the bold character of Big Mooney. And if he *was* threatening and corrupting young, naïve jockeys, his ring was much worse than simple bookmaking, which only affected professional gamblers who were already corrupted.

At the end of July, as horsemen prepared to leave Hollywood Park for Del Mar, and as the world prepared for war, Buron Fitts pledged to continue his own private war on bookmakers and crime. Mob bosses had established an ironclad dictatorship over gambling in Los Angeles County, Fitts maintained. The Los Angeles Police Department was incompetent, he insisted, too demoralized to fight a proper war against mobsters and gamblers. So Fitts was continuing to work with state attorney general Earl Warren to battle the gamblers, and he decided to bring in Big Mooney for bookmaking and whatever other evils he was in-

volved in. There were plenty of likely sites for a raid that would eventually net him: a smoke shop on West Fifth where he often hung out, numerous gambling dens in Chinatown, a house on Sherbourne Drive in West Hollywood where he was seen regularly, a half-dozen ocean-side card parlors and gaming halls, and finally, a lavish mansion on Hollywood Boulevard, once the home of three prominent actresses, now rumored to be a gambling parlor with expensive carpets, heavy tapestries, and a well-dressed clientele of filmland celebrities.

The Hollywood Boulevard mansion seemed exactly the spot where Big Mooney could be expected to be in operation, and Fitts put together a strike team for a surprise raid early on a Saturday evening at the end of July. But it took the team ten minutes to bash down the front door, which had been locked and barred. By the time they gained entrance, they discovered a gambling hall that was nearly empty. Only seven gamblers were arrested, none of them named Bernard Einstoss, alias Big Mooney. If he had been there, he was long gone, tipped off by a turncoat on Fitts's own strike team or the newspaper rumors of fixes.

Fitts had one more chance to collar Mooney. On August 2, news reached the district attorney's office that a gambler and bookmaker named "Mooney" had boarded the *Texas* with every intention of reopening the gambling barge despite Fitts's order closing it down. Such brazen defiance was surely the work of the same "Mooney" who had escaped the dragnet at the Hollywood Boulevard mansion. Now, Fitts felt there was a good chance that he could catch Big Mooney aboard the *Texas* and arrest him for violating the abatement order, and he immediately organized another gambling barge strike team.

Again, sheriff's deputies and investigators from Fitts's office sped through the waters of Santa Monica Bay. They clambered

aboard the ship and began arresting a small crew that Mooney had left behind to protect the gaming equipment. Convinced that nothing short of busting up the equipment would shut down the ship for good, some of the deputies began pitching roulette wheels and slot machines overboard. They used huge, iron plant pots to smash to pieces dice tables that were too big or heavy to toss overboard. Again, Mooney escaped the dragnet, but lawyers who claimed to represent Mooney and Capt. Monstad filed suit against the district attorney's office for having destroyed their property. Despite pictures in the *Los Angeles Times* showing dice tables being smashed, Fitts insisted, "My men had explicit orders to destroy nothing."

For Mooney, it meant that for the time being, his gambling barge operations were over. The floating casino would provide him no more gaming thrills or bookmaking profits. Even if the two men still hadn't met, Buron Fitts had stumped him. But Fitts's law-and-order reach didn't extend to San Diego County, and Mooney headed for Del Mar racetrack with a deeper dedication than ever to keeping his jockeys ring alive.

9. KANDAHAR

Wednesday morning, August 2, raindrops fell in San Diego County, watering the morning glories along the rail at Del Mar racetrack. Shortly before noon, Bing Crosby appeared at the grandstand turnstiles, smoking his pipe and tipping his dark blue yachting cap to customers as they entered the grounds for the first of twenty-four days of racing. Crosby described his track, built on the floodplain where the San Dieguito River empties into the Pacific, as "just a good tee shot from the ocean." Fans in the grandstand seats were so close to the shoreline that they could watch the surf breaking in successive white lines in the deep, blue water. Trainers galloped horses along the stretches of empty beach. The infield soil was too permeated with salt water for plants to grow, but there were petunias by the millions elsewhere. The Turf Club ushers dressed as gauchos, and the Spanish Colonial architecture, featuring worm-eaten furniture and adobe bricks, invoked the spirit of aristocratic viceroys and rancheros.

From its inaugural season in 1937, when Crosby and the actor Pat O'Brien had put together the partnership of Hollywood celebrities behind Del Mar, the track had a wild side that was anything but aristocratic. The model for the Turf Club was a palace

in Mexico City, and it became a playground for Hollywood stars and a "berry patch for autograph seekers." W. C. Fields cracked jokes with the jockeys. As a symbol of his bad luck, the comedian Red Skelton paraded shirtless in the Turf Club. The comedian Oliver Hardy served as an honorary steward and wore the same dumbfounded look of his Laurel and Hardy movies as he followed each race. Once at a press club party, Jimmy Durante dismantled a piano, and an aging Al Jolson swept aside a table of dinnerware and then tap danced on the table to prove that he hadn't lost his showbiz bounce. In the famous Seabiscuit-Ligarotti match race in 1938, which had put Del Mar on the map, jockeys George Woolf and Spec Richardson had beat on each other with their whips during a ferocious stretch duel that Seabiscuit won by a nose. Finally, because the train bringing fans from Los Angeles was late that inaugural day in 1937, from then on it was tradition for the grandstand fans to raise a wild cheer when the Santa Fe special hove into sight. Its appearance meant that all the railbird sinners from the City of Angels had arrived.

Albert Siler shared a beach cottage in Del Mar with several other jockeys. Big Mooney rented a room in a hotel overlooking a stretch of the beach. Mooney made arrangements to leave an envelope stuffed with cash regularly with the hotel concierge. Each night after the races, Freddie Miller, Mooney's new bagman at Del Mar, would pick up the envelope and pay off the jockeys, most of whom, like Albert, shared beach cottages or took cheap rooms in San Diego.

After the bugle call to the post for the first race that Wednesday, Bing Crosby crooned, "When the turf meets the surf, down at Old Del Mar." The song, which had been especially written for the racetrack, was a bold departure from the mint julep melancholy of "My Old Kentucky Home," the Kentucky Derby's pre-

race paean to hearth and home. Crosby's song said nothing about "hard times that comes a-knockin'," weeping ladies, or field workers toting weary loads. Crosby made no effort to pretend that Del Mar was home. It was a vacation spot of open shirts and beach sandals, as glorious an adventure in travel, the song said, as Samoa or Bali.

The stewards and patrol judges at Del Mar oversaw the races from two vantage points. A wooden perch for the finish judges stood like a diving tower whose platform hung out over the finish line. Meanwhile, the stewards, led by chief steward Edwin Brown, watched from a boxy roost on top of the grandstand. Brown was still troubled by the rumors of foul play at Hollywood Park, especially the talk of a motor court in Inglewood where jockeys and gamblers met. At Del Mar he began a cat-and-mouse game with jockeys who had been the subject of suspicious mutterings. On opening day he issued what he said was a last warning for "indifferent riding" to Freddie Miller, who had been the subject of numerous rumors at Hollywood Park. But all of Miller's rides opening day at Del Mar were preposterous long shots, and it was the horses he rode who were clearly indifferent, not necessarily Miller. So Brown had no clear proof that Miller was pulling horses, and the warning was only a shot in the dark by which he hoped to make it clear that Miller needed to stop doing whatever he was doing before he was caught and suspended permanently.

Brown also told turf writers that he had declared war on jockeys who were giving their mounts "exceptionally timid rides." Rather than admit publicly that Irving Sangbusch had secretly turned on Big Mooney and the fixers, Brown credited Hollywood Park turf writers with having tipped him off to what was going on. He had heeded their warnings, he said. Several rid-

ers—he refused to say which ones—were under special scrutiny. If they didn't listen to his warnings, he finished, they would be promptly suspended.

If Albert Siler was one of those riders under scrutiny, there was no sign of it. He rode all his mounts hard, and he had three winners opening day at Del Mar. The next day he had two more victories. Five winners in two days! He hadn't been that hot as a rider since his first days in the bush leagues. Turf writers said that he was their candidate for the "best rider in the West." By Saturday, the end of the first week of racing at Del Mar, he had ridden eight winners and was the leading rider of the meet. Charlie Corbett, who had beaten him out for the championship at Hollywood Park, wasn't even close.

The championship that Big Mooney had stolen from him at Hollywood Park now seemed well within his reach at Del Mar. Big Mooney hadn't gone away. But the focus of his fixing plans now seemed to be Freddie Miller and especially Willis Ward, whose terrifying confrontation with Mooney and Chapman in the Biltmore alley had put him even more at the mercy of the fixers. On opening day Ward had been ordered to pull a horse named Accordian, whose name Big Mooney and the fixers had whispered around Hollywood as a sure thing. Ward had done exactly as he was told and pulled the horse. Mooney, Chapman, and Doc Kebo had made thousands of dollars on the losing bets they had booked.

Meanwhile, neither Mooney nor his bagman Freddie Miller had approached Albert at Del Mar. It encouraged him to think that he was too prominent now, too much under the watchful eyes of those suspicious stewards for Big Mooney to risk approaching him. Or perhaps he was being left alone because he was in the spotlight of turf writers who kept calling him "little Albert

Siler," which made him too endearing to corrupt. He was the tiny jockey "sensation," the best apprentice anybody had seen on the West Coast in years. Even the icy George Woolf was singing Albert's praises. By the end of the first week of racing, Albert had had twenty-five mounts, seventeen of which had finished in the money. If he could maintain that pace during the Del Mar meet, turf writers predicted, he would wind up as a greater tourist attraction than the celebrities who danced on table tops or even Kayak II, whose fame was approaching Seabiscuit's.

It was time to celebrate, Albert decided. He was back on track again for the realization of all his dreams, and the best spot he could think of for a celebration was the Pacific Ocean, where he could bob and toss and relax in water as boundless as the opportunities ahead. Moonlight Beach, a small inlet of white sand between two cliffs at the mouth of Cottonwood Creek in nearby Encinitas, was the perfect spot. The town and surrounding farmland were the center of a flower industry that blanketed the headlands with colorful slopes of poinsettias and begonias, and Moonlight Beach had once been the site of friendly horse races on Sunday afternoons between ranchers and farmhands. For a novice swimmer like Albert, who had never been in the ocean before, the surf at Moonlight Beach promised to be rolling and easy, without the swirl of angry cross currents and rips that would throw his tiny body around like a cork. The beach's popularity had grown enormously over the years, and Albert was also reassured by the fact that it had a lifeguard tower as well as a dance pavilion and a beach house.

Albert and Willis Ward bought colorful new bathing suits and drove to Moonlight Beach in Albert's coupe. Once they had changed into their suits in the beach house, they built their courage up by standing in knee-deep water and spearing themselves

into waves that had already broken and laid shag carpets of foam on the water. In a matter of minutes, they were both brave enough to move to deeper water, where the waves broke and tumbled them toward the beach. As Albert was tossed willy-nilly in the powerful surf, the sudden roar of the water breaking over him reminded him of the crowd cheering when he rounded the turn into the stretch at Hollywood Park. The noise gave him a feeling of exhilaration, as if he were in the grip of something primal but harmless, and he and Ward began whooping with joy as they hurled their light bodies into one wave after another. For Ward the experience provided temporary relief from the worry over what new demands and threats he would face from Mooney. For Albert it was a celebration of the fact that he was entering a jockey pantheon occupied by the likes of George Woolf and Ralph Neves, who were too famous to ever be the target of somebody like Mooney.

It was late afternoon when the two jockeys finally crawled toward the beach, exhausted from their battles in the surf. Albert finally stood up in ankle deep water. Sunbathers on the beach broke into laughter and pointed at him, because his swimsuit had been ripped off, leaving him buck naked with only seaweed tangled around his legs.

He was still laughing about the episode when racing resumed the next week and Big Mooney appeared suddenly one morning like a demon in a horror film and told him to pull a horse named Silver Doctor. Mooney reminded Albert that the horse ran only when whipped. "So don't give him no whip," Mooney ordered. That afternoon Albert had the horse perfectly positioned for victory at the head of the stretch, but he obeyed Mooney's orders and withheld the whip. Silver Doctor finished a distant sixth. On Friday morning Mooney gave him another horse to pull, this time

a twenty-two-to-one shot named Thirsk, who had no chance in the first place. No matter what Albert did in the stretch, whip or no whip, the horse refused to run.

The news that weekend was that the last survivor of the Civil War, the drummer boy at the bloody battle of Shiloh, had died at ninety-years-old in Beverly Hills. The story had all the superstitious railbirds poring over the entries for Saturday, looking for Civil War connections to bet on. Meanwhile, Willis Ward's version of what had happened behind the Biltmore Hotel made it clear that Mooney, with Chapman's help, would go to any lengths to insure jockey obedience. He had yet to commit any bloody horrors, but his continuing influence on Albert Siler threatened to endure as long as the memories that the poor drummer boy of Shiloh had taken to his grave.

At noon on Saturday, there was no breeze off the ocean and the temperature rose into the eighties. By one o'clock, the Del Mar grandstand was packed with fans who delivered their traditional cheer when the Los Angeles train arrived. Mooney had ordered Albert to pull three different horses that day. For the first race, Mooney ordered him to pull Tannhauser, a four-to-one shot Albert had already ridden three times that summer. Just the previous week he had ridden the horse to an easy victory, and he was certain now that he could win again on him. But he did exactly as Mooney ordered and pulled the horse, finishing a distant third. Then, entering the stretch in the second race on a horse called Star Stepper, a horse he had also ridden previously, he again had his mount positioned for a winning drive to the wire, but he let Star Stepper hang in the stretch. For two straight mounts he had given up victories that would have lengthened his lead in the jockeys' race. Instead, he had obeyed Mooney rather than risk being shot in a dark alley somewhere.

Meanwhile, he and Willis Ward and the other jockeys who had come and gone in the jockeys ring had pulled so many mounts now that Albert had lost count. Surely those stewards who were issuing warnings about "indifferent riding" and threatening to suspend jockeys would call one of them on the carpet soon and confront them with hard evidence that they had fixed races.

The eighth and final race of the day threatened to do just that. Mooney had decided that he could no longer bilk Hollywood stars by whispering tips on losing horses, some of whom ran so poorly that he risked arousing suspicions. Instead, he would focus on races with small fields and only two or three live horses. The eighth race featured an eight-horse field, and Mooney's handicapping had determined that only three horses had any chance of winning. One of them was a five-year-old chestnut gelding named Eye Jay, ridden by a veteran Kentucky jockey named Eddie Yager, whom Mooney hadn't yet approached. The second horse with a chance at victory was a six-year-old, heavily raced horse named Undulate, with Albert Siler riding. Finally, the third horse to figure in Mooney's handicapping system was the favorite, a seven-year-old gelding named Kandahar, who would be ridden by Willis Ward. Ordering Siler and Ward to pull Undulate and Kandahar would leave the race wide open for Eddie Yager on Eye Jay, whose morning-line odds were six-to-one. Mooney would then bet heavily on the horse with bookmakers around Los Angeles and San Diego. In the end the set-up would yield him far more money than trying to bilk Hollywood celebrities who were growing suspicious about his so-called inside information.

Eight horses went to the post for the mile-and-a-sixteenth claiming race just before six p.m. For the railbirds watching the race, the horses seemed to be breaking out of a fiery gate backlit by the setting sun. From an outside post position, Eye Jay broke

cleanly from the gate but then was content to race wide through the first turn. By the time he shuffled down to the rail in the backstretch, he was dead last and losing ground, hardly the place that Big Mooney expected him to be in order to win the race.

Down the backstretch, Albert Siler had Undulate in third place, a length off the lead horse. But Albert could feel subtle changes in the tempo of Undulate's stride, a sure sign that he was beginning to labor. There would be no trouble holding him back in the run through the stretch. Even if he had to go to the whip to avoid the appearance of indifferent riding, he was confident that Undulate would have little left in him with which to respond.

The problem was the third horse, Kandahar. Earlier that summer at Hollywood Park, Kandahar had bled in a cheap claiming race and finished dead last. Now he showed no life through the backstretch, and he loped along far to the rear, just ahead of Eye Jay. But as Willis Ward guided Kandahar through the far turn, he went wide and began passing horses with alarming speed. Pulling the reins only increased Kandahar's pace, and he shot past Albert Siler on Undulate, who was fading now, and he began closing fast on the leaders.

At the head of the stretch, Ward worried that if he pulled the reins any harder, he would jerk his arms out of their sockets and betray his actions to the stewards. Yet he also knew that Mooney had bet heavily on Eye Jay, who was nowhere in sight. If Mooney's horse somehow failed to win, he could only blame his own handicapping for overestimating Eye Jay's chances. But if it turned out that Ward was the one who beat him on Kandahar, it would be exactly the provocation that could finally get him shot.

Ward began desperately using the reins to saw the bit through Kandahar's mouth. The maneuver only served to make the horse run still faster. Then he tried to take Kandahar into a clot of

horses, but he plowed through like a fullback. Finally, Ward began beating Kandahar over the head with his whip. That, too, failed to slow him down.

At the eighth pole, Ward glanced behind him and spotted Eye Jay finally beginning to close on the leaders. Approaching the close scrutiny of the finish-line judges on the diving tower, there was little Ward dared do to hold Kandahar back any longer, and he looked back a final time and saw Eye Jay closing with a rush. In a half-dozen strides, the two horses were side by side, and Ward almost indulged in a whoop at the thought now that he wasn't going to win, that he wasn't going to have to face both Mooney and Chapman's rage because he had disobeyed orders and stolen the race.

But again and again over Kandahar's long career, the sight and sound of another horse drawing alongside him in a ferocious stretch duel had driven him to even greater speed, and even without Ward using his whip, he surged ahead and refused to let Eye Jay pass him. The two of them drew steadily away from the field of tiring horses, all of whom seemed to be moving in slow motion. They passed neck and neck under the watchful eyes of the patrol judges who stood at the lip of the finish-line tower, peering straight down at the two horses as they flashed beneath them.

It was another agonizing photo finish. Ten minutes later, the results flashed on the tote board: Eye Jay by a nose.

Kandahar had "lost by a dirty nose," Ward angrily told his fellow riders in the jockeys' room after the race. It was his way of disguising his relief that Eye Jay had won.

Eye Jay paid $14.80 to win. If Big Mooney was unhappy with Ward for coming so close to winning, he said nothing. That night when he paid off Siler and Ward for their pulls that day, he

was in his champagne mood, too flush from his huge winning bet to let himself be angry. Besides, he would have argued, the heart-stopping finish was a reflection of his superior handicapping skills, since he had figured that Kandahar had been one of only two other horses in the race who could have beaten Eye Jay. For the time being at least, Willis Ward escaped another frightening alley confrontation with Big Mooney.

It was Edwin Brown and the judges who were upset. The sight of Ward beating Kandahar on the head with his whip at one point, then *not* going to the whip in the stretch drive—it was suspicious. Meanwhile, Albert Siler had pulled six horses in three days. His lead in the jockeys' race was still secure, but he didn't have a single winner in six mounts that Saturday. If Mooney kept ordering him to pull horses, the lead would soon be gone.

It all prompted the Del Mar turf writers to note that following week that Albert Siler was "beginning to have his troubles winning." They had no idea how deep those troubles would become.

10. PINKUS AND OMELET

Albert awoke Monday morning to startling news: Nazi troops were massing along the Polish border. Hitler was poised to attack, the headlines screamed. World war was imminent. Some in Washington were predicting that it would begin as soon as August 20. Poland's only hope against attack was that the entire country was a quagmire of liquid mud, which made Germany's tanks and mobile artillery useless. Meanwhile, to carry out the muddy attack, Germany was furiously buying horses all over Europe.

The idea that in an era of dive bombers and tank warfare horses would be the instrument of attack seemed almost comical, but another news item buried deep in the paper struck Albert with more of a sense of urgency than the possibility of world war launched by horses: the man who owned Albert's riding contract, an owner-trainer at Del Mar named L. T. "Whitey" Whitehill, was reported to be in failing health. His whole stable of horses was up for sale, and the likely buyer was said to be the Hollywood movie mogul Mervyn LeRoy, whose romance with horse racing had begun by playing a jockey in a horseracing melodrama. Now he owned a huge stable of stakes horses, and if the sale was

completed, his thoroughbred empire would be even bigger. But what especially caught Albert's eyes was the news that his own riding contract "might be included in the transaction."

The practice of having his riding contract bought and sold was nothing new to Albert. Ever since George Drumheller had spotted him riding a Shetland pony in Walla Walla and struck an oral agreement with him, his contract had changed hands a dozen times, as if he were a chattel slave. Slave or not, a riding contract with a specific stable had been a guarantee for Albert, especially in the bush leagues, of a steady weekly wage, a place to sleep, even if in a horse stall or a tack room, and money for food. In return the stable had first call on Albert's riding services. In races where his contract owners had no horses, he was free to ride for whoever else wanted him.

Of all the stables Albert had ridden for, Whitey Whitehill had owned Albert's contract the longest. Whitehill had discovered George Woolf and trained him for the big time, and he had been carefully grooming Albert to follow in Woolf's footsteps. The news now that Whitehill might include Albert Siler's contract in the deal with Mervyn LeRoy was intriguing. Was Whitehill really ill and getting ready to unload his stable? Or had the press box rumors of gamblers and fixes made him anxious to be rid of a crooked jockey, no matter how endearing he was to turf writers?

Whomever Albert wound up riding for—Whitey Whitehill, or some wealthy Hollywood mogul for whom racing was a kind of board game, like checkers or dominoes—the news only served to remind him that it was Big Mooney who *truly* owned him. The few days that Mooney had left him alone at Del Mar had been only a short vacation. Now the gamblers were back in his life, demanding that he pull horses every day.

When racing resumed on Tuesday, August 15, Albert had two victories that day and two more on Wednesday. The wins preserved his lead in the jockeys' race, and they put him in the winner's circle smiling broadly while another pretty starlet presented him with a bouquet of flowers as big as he was. Still, neither the starlet nor the flowers could make him forget that Big Mooney was watching from the Turf Club seats, casting a shadow as ominous as world war.

Wednesday night Freddie Miller came by Albert's Del Mar cottage and told him that Big Mooney wanted to see him. The two of them got in Albert's coupe and drove a short distance to a dirt road going up into the hills just north of the track. The road passed between neat squares of apricot orchards, whose banks of trees, illuminated by Albert's headlight beams, stood like high walls.

They parked at the top of the hill. A night fog, which seemed to hold the thick, sweet smell of ripe apricots, was beginning to drift in off the ocean. Still, the dim outline of the turf club bell tower was visible down below in the moonlight. There were solitary lights flickering in the barn areas, where grooms and stable boys tended to restless horses.

Big Mooney appeared out of the dark. The three of them stood beside Albert's car. Mooney's face, moist with sweat, shined in the moonlight. He wanted three horses pulled the next day, he said.

"Omelet in the sixth race," he said. "Answer True in the seventh. Pinkus, in the eighth." He retrieved a wad of money from his pocket. "Omelet will be short." His voice reflected the confidence of his handicapping calculations. "Answer True will be long. Pinkus will also be short," he continued, then peeled off four hundred dollars.

Albert politely refused to take the money. "I've not ridden Omelet," he explained. But he knew the horse would be one of the favorites. There was talk all over the jockeys' room about how strong the three-year-old filly was. A shrewd San Francisco businesswoman had bought her the previous spring for a mere twenty-five hundred dollars from the wealthy easterner John Hay Whitney. Omelet had won two out of three races at Hollywood Park, and she was now a candidate for the three-year-old filly championship in the West.

"I don't think I can get her beat," Albert said.

It wasn't just that he didn't think he could maneuver her properly to get beat. He didn't *want* to. As far back as he could remember, riding his first horses bareback around Buttercrick, then breaking those rank colts on the way to school in Lowden, he had discovered that there were certain bighearted and headstrong horses for whom running at anything less than full speed was torture. And he had no stomach for torturing Omelet.

He paused and looked at Freddie Miller, inviting Mooney's bagman to agree with him. But Miller remained silent.

"She's a first-class horse," Albert said, quoting the morning-line handicappers.

Mooney didn't care. He wanted Siler to give Omelet an "unsanitary" ride.

Well, Albert insisted, he couldn't guarantee anything.

What about Answer True? Mooney said, raising his voice.

Albert explained that he had ridden Answer True previously at Hollywood Park and knew he was a lifeless six-year-old who would finish far up the track, whether he pulled him or not.

That would make Albert's job easy then, wouldn't it? Mooney said.

"Yes, sir, it would."

"Well, then, don't make no mistakes."

Finally, Albert turned to his objections to pulling Pinkus. The horse was a runner, Albert said, fit and ready for victory. Only two weeks earlier, Albert had guided the three-year-old to an easy win at Hollywood Park. Anything less than that at Del Mar would look suspicious to the stewards, who were *already* suspicious. He very much doubted, he told Mooney, that he could keep Pinkus out of the winner's circle the next day.

Mooney refused to budge. He wanted all three horses pulled! Or there would be trouble!

He folded the money, reached to tuck it in Albert's pocket, and disappeared in the dark and fog.

The news in the jockeys' room the next morning when Albert arrived was that the stewards were finally cracking down on suspicious riding. A veteran jockey had been suspended for his failure to keep his mount straight in the stretch. The jockey hadn't been running for Sweeney, but the implication was that he had taken his mount all over the track in an effort to lose. Meanwhile, the stewards had also suspended a trainer for "conduct detrimental to the interests of racing." It meant that *something* crooked had occurred, even if they weren't saying exactly what.

A hot mist leaked from the door to the steam room in the far corner of the jockeys' room as Albert changed into his riding silks for the first race. Then he climbed a short staircase to the jockeys' recreation room, with a lunch counter and a pool table. French doors led out to an elevated sun deck, where he sat in the morning sun, trying to reconcile his own dreams of victory and fame with what Mooney was demanding of him. He had a mount in every race that day. He was confident that Omelet and Pinkus could both win. He was also hopeful that he could pick

up another winner or two during the day. It could mean a hat trick, or perhaps four or even five winners for the day. His lead in the jockeys' race would be untouchable, no matter what he did for Mooney from then on.

But through the first five races, he could not bring a single one of his mounts home. And when he was legged up on Omelet in the paddock for the sixth race, he was determined to let the filly win. It wasn't that he had found the courage at last to defy Mooney. The truth was that he did not want to try to defy the will of a horse like Omelet, who would run her heart out in an effort to win. It would be cruel—probably even useless—to try to make her run for Sweeney. Omelet would have it her way, no matter what he did.

She broke slowly and ran easily down the backstretch of the six-furlong race. Through the far turn, Albert found an opening along the rail and positioned Omelet for a run at the leader. But at the head of the stretch she was in second place and four lengths behind.

Albert still hadn't gone to the whip. Nor did he think he should. Whipping Omelet to victory would be such a dramatic defiance of Mooney that it would provoke violent rage. But for a moment Albert considered using his whip as a last resort for overtaking the leader. Then, proving that she was every bit the first-class horse everybody said she was, Omelet suddenly shot forward in gulps. She passed the leader as if he were standing still and won by almost two lengths.

Albert removed his jockey's cap for the picture in the winner's circle aboard Omelet. Then he glared at the camera, as if the photographer were Big Mooney and he was telling him, "I told you the horse was too good to pull."

He weighed out at the scale beneath the judges' tower at the finish line and hurried to the jockeys' room. He hadn't had to

use his whip once on Omelet, but he had still won on a horse Mooney had ordered him to pull. As he passed in front of the railbirds, some cheered, others hooted at him. He looked neither left nor right, half fearing that among those railbird hooters would be an angry Mooney. Like all assassins who made a public spectacle of their work, Mooney would point a pistol at him and shoot him then and there.

During the saddling for the seventh race, he stood in the paddock stall with Answer True, fiddling with the horse's saddle, again refusing to look around the ring of fans pressed to the paddock rail. If Mooney wasn't there, his fierce glower warning Albert not to make "no more mistakes," he would be up on the Turf Club balcony that overlooked the paddock. Waiting patiently to get a clear shot at Albert, he would be lurking beneath one of the yellow umbrellas tipped to the west like sunflowers drinking in the sunlight.

Answer True ran with the leaders in the early stages of the mile-and-a-quarter race. But she slid slowly back from then on. To prove to those suspicious judges that he was trying, Albert went to the whip all through the stretch, but just as he had told Mooney, the action did nothing to inspire Answer True to run, and the horse crossed the finish line eleven lengths behind the winner.

Those Turf Club balcony umbrellas were tipped straight into the setting sun when the call came for "riders up" for the last race. Albert mounted Pinkus and fell in at the end of the line of ten horses headed for the tunnel under the grandstand and onto the track. It was a mile race, and Pinkus broke from an outside post position and then won by a nose in a two-horse drive that began at the head of the stretch and continued as the two horses crossed the finish line, Albert's whip arm moving like a

pump handle, his body jacking itself with each stride. The win was the ultimate defiance of Mooney, and after his picture had been taken in the winner's circle, he fairly vaulted from the saddle, weighed out quickly, then trotted to the jockeys' room. Once inside the door, he peered out one of the windows and spotted Big Mooney and Chapman standing like boulders in the stream of fans pouring from the Turf Club and heading for their cars.

The route to Albert's parked coupe would take him through the stream and straight into Mooney and Chapman, who were waiting to confront him, waiting to grab him by his shirt and lift him off his feet and then bloody his face, the way Mooney had bloodied Willis Ward's.

Albert found a valet and handed him the keys to his coupe. He instructed the valet to pull his car around and park it under the sun deck of the jockeys' room. Then he changed quickly into his street clothes, hurriedly buttoning his green suede vest as he ran up the narrow stairwell to the recreation room. Several jockeys, already settled in for a poker game at the lunch tables, hardly noticed him as he slipped out the French doors and onto the deck. He stepped over the rail and swung by both hands from the edge of the deck before he dropped to the ground, tumbled beside his car to absorb the shock of the ten-foot fall, then jumped behind the wheel and sped off.

He spent the night in his car at Moonlight Beach trying to decide what to do. He was tempted to pack up everything and go back to Oregon. In time, he could return to racing. Back east, perhaps, where Mooney wouldn't stalk him. But there were other considerations. It had been almost exactly a year since he had broken his maiden at Spokane and almost won the riding championship there as a bug boy. At Hollywood Park, he could have won

the championship if he had just dared to disobey Mooney. Now, he was on the verge of winning the Del Mar riding title.

The only rider with a chance to catch him was the legendary Ralph Neves, the so-called "Portuguese Pepperpot." Once, after a spectacular racing spill at Bay Meadows racetrack, Neves had been left for dead in a county morgue. The next day Bing Crosby had been scheduled to present a gold watch to the meet's leading rider. Neves was so determined to win the watch that he resurrected himself from the dead. To keep him from riding, stewards had to chase him up and down the track in front of the grandstand. The episode had made racing history, and now Albert couldn't just walk away from the chance to beat out somebody as celebrated as Neves for the racing title at Del Mar. He had to stay and finish the meet. But at what price?

Big Mooney caught up to him later that night and made it clear what the price was.

"God-damn-it! You cost me thirty thousand dollars!" he screamed at Albert.

They were back in the apricot orchard on that moonlit hill just north of the track. Mooney had finally found Albert at his beach cottage and ordered him to drive up to the top of the hill again, where the two of them stood in the orchard shadows.

"Thirty thousand dollars!" Mooney repeated. Did Albert understand how much money that was?

Yes, sir, he did.

Mooney began pacing in and out of the shadows, his dark shape flickering in the moonlight like the images in flip-books.

He flailed his arms, he stomped, he shouted and cursed.

Without the profanity, it was exactly the state of incoherent rage that often crippled his father, and Albert worried that he was going to have to carry Mooney to his car and drive him home.

But Mooney continued raging against Albert. Who did the little shit think he was? Some hotshot, with his new car, his fancy, green suede vest? Mooney ripped it open now so that the buttons shot into the dark like bullets.

Mooney was too angry to admit that it was his own handicapping that had led him to bet other horses against Omelet and Pinkus. Even if Albert had warned him that the horses couldn't be pulled, it was all Albert's fault. Even if Mooney had nobody to blame but himself, Albert was entirely to blame.

"I've thrown boys in the ocean for less!" Mooney shouted.

His pacing and shouting continued for ten minutes. At one point, Albert considered breaking and running, down the hill, away from Del Mar, back to Oregon, where after all those years of wandering, from Kansas to Buttercrick to Lowden, his father seemed to have finally found Eden.

Suddenly, Mooney stopped shouting and stood in a small patch of moonlight. All right, mistakes happen, he conceded. Smiling now, he approached Albert and patted him on his shoulder and straightened the vest he had just torn open. Tomorrow was a new day. The seventh race for fillies and mares featured a small field of seven horses. Mooney explained that he had handicapped the race carefully. Only six horses had a chance. He was going to be betting himself on a horse called Day Dawn, who would be ridden by the veteran jockey Lloyd Knapp. All the jockeys in the race except Knapp on Day Dawn would be running for Sweeney. Albert's mount in the race was Miss Amie. Did he understand what he was supposed to do?

Yes, sir, of course he understood. He was to pull Miss Amie.

"Well, good. Don't make no mistakes."

Mooney gave Albert one hundred dollars and turned to leave.

"You said one horse in the race didn't have a chance," Albert called to him.

Mooney stopped and nodded.

"Which one?" Albert wondered.

"Cellar Door."

"Cellar Door?" Albert thought. "Cellar Door?" He had studied the *Racing Form* earlier in the evening. He had no recollection of a horse named Cellar Door in the seventh race.

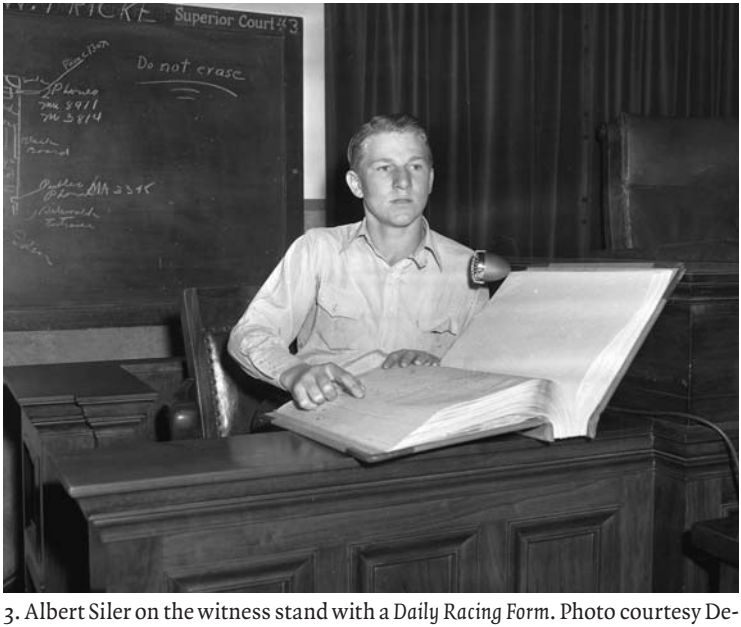
Mooney grew angry. Cellar Door. *Cellar Door*!

Then it dawned on Albert. It was Celer d'Or. Even he knew enough to pronounce the horse's name with a French flair. But now was no time for an unschooled bug boy like Albert Siler to give Big Mooney a lesson in French.

"Just don't worry about Cellar Door," Mooney said, and disappeared in the dark.

1. Albert Siler at Bay Meadows racetrack as a "bug boy," October 1938. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.

2. Albert Siler with actress Marian Marsh at Del Mar racetrack, August 18, 1939. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.



3. Albert Siler on the witness stand with a *Daily Racing Form*. Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

4. Albert Siler weighing in after a race at Hollywood Park, summer 1939. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.

5. Albert Siler aboard Pinkus, in the winner's circle at Del Mar, August 17, 1939. Pinkus was one of the horses Siler refused to pull, prompting his "fateful day." Photo courtesy Freda Siler.

6. Albert Siler standing with his brother, Lawrence, next to a 1939 Chevy. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.

7. Big Mooney (*right*) on the witness stand, showing his attorney how to beat the races. Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

8. Irving Sangbusch, alias J. J. Murphy, on the witness stand. Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

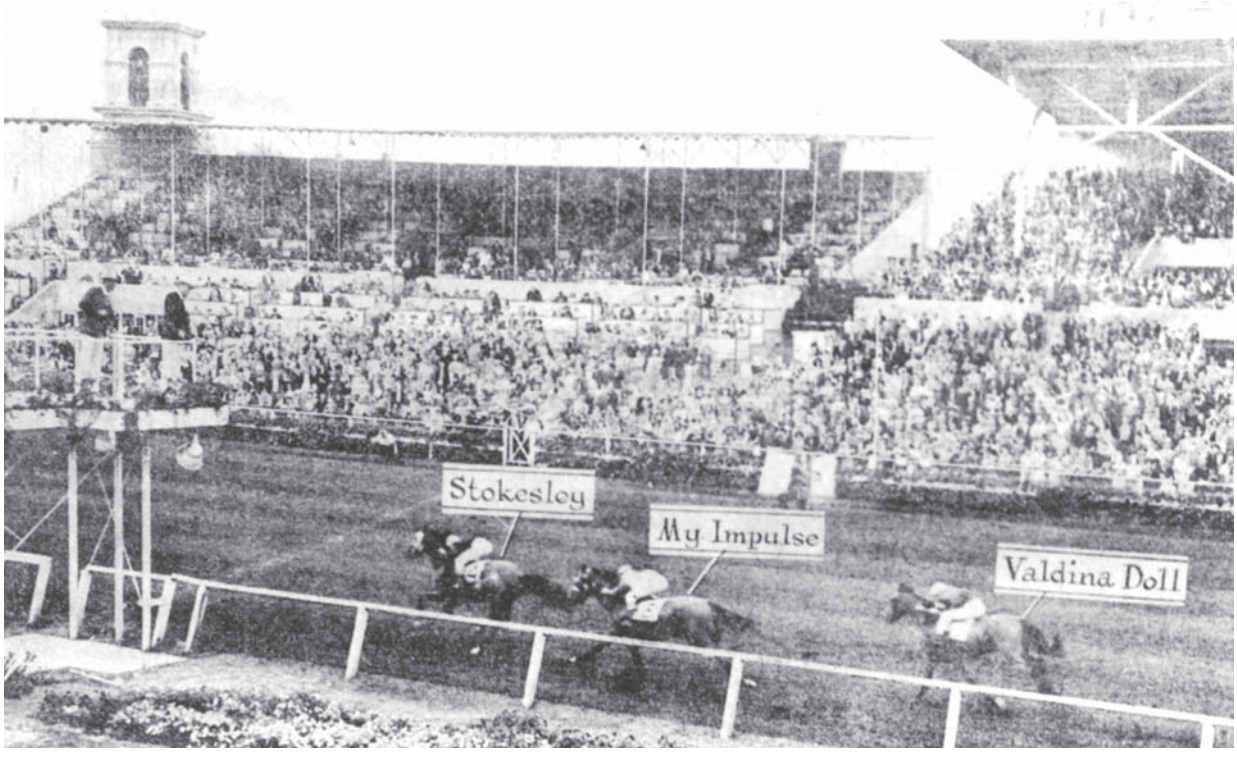
9. Buron Fitts (*left*) in court with Deputy William E. Simpson, who prosecuted the fixing case. Photo courtesy Los Angeles Public Library.

10. Buron Fitts (*far right*) receives details of the racing fix from California Horse Racing chairman Jerry Giesler (*second from right*). Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

11. A group photo of the jockeys riding at Santa Anita in the spring of 1939; Albert Siler is second from right in the back row. Other jockeys pictured include George "The Ice Man" Woolf, Johnny Adams (the country's leading rider at the time), Johnny Longden, and Ralph Neves. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.

12. Willis Ward outside the courtroom, apparently after giving testimony at the trial. Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

13. Albert Siler (*far right*) shooting pool at Santa Anita in the spring of 1939. Photo courtesy Freda Siler.



14. View of the finish line at Del Mar in the fall of 1939. Albert Siler is aboard Stokesley. Patrol judges on the stage at left are directly above the finish line; track stewards, including Edwin Brown (who exposed the fixing case), are on the grandstand roof. Photo courtesy San Diego Historical Society.

11. ENGLISH HARRY

The next afternoon in the seventh race, Norway Nell, the longest shot on the board, took the lead quickly in the mile race. Albert Siler, riding on Miss Amie, fell in behind Norway Nell, and the two ran in tandem going into the first turn. The rest of the field, led by Day Dawn, Big Mooney's "guaranteed winner," was strung out around the turn like figures on a charm bracelet. In the backstretch Norway Nell began tiring. On the lead now, Albert glanced back at the string of horses and saw that Lloyd Knapp had Day Dawn two lengths back in second. Albert could feel that Miss Amie had plenty of run in her, but he made no move to call for it, and the slow *click click click* of the white rail posts flashing by at the corner of his vision marked an almost sluggish pace. Any moment now, he was certain, Knapp would tire of the dilatory pace, shift Day Dawn into high gear, and take the lead.

Content to let someone else begin the sprint to the finish, Knapp made no such move. Through the far turn, Albert kept the lead, while Day Dawn trailed by half a length. The other jockeys in on the fix began to bunch their horses behind them, seeking company in their indolence. At the head of the stretch, Albert still had the lead, and he began to panic. He could not possibly go any

slower without betraying his efforts to the stewards. They would have already been suspicious of an entire pack of horses moving at little more than a canter. For him to drop back with them in order to let Day Dawn take the lead—it would have cooked his goose. Yet if he didn't, he would have to face Big Mooney again. This time Mooney's rage would not end suddenly. It would keep building until Albert was strangled or pistol-whipped or shot dead and left to lie in the ripe, apricot moonlight of the hilltop orchard.

At the eighth pole, Miss Amie suddenly had no more run in her and began trying to spit her bit. Albert struggled to keep her straight as she drifted back, and Day Dawn finally took the lead. Relieved to be no longer in contention, Albert almost let out a whoop. Then a horse flew by him on the outside and drew within half a length of Day Dawn. It was Celer d'Or, the horse whose name Mooney couldn't pronounce and whom Mooney had discounted. For a moment Celer d'Or looked to be the certain winner, and a sudden cheer rose from all the long-shot players. Then Knapp went to the whip on Day Dawn. She responded immediately and crossed the finish line half a length ahead of Celer d'Or.

Despite Day Dawn's narrow victory, the race proved to Big Mooney that by bribing numerous jockeys in a single race, he could manipulate the sacred percentages almost entirely in his favor. However, most of the innocent Los Angeles and West Coast bookmakers who had to pay him off for his huge bets on Day Dawn and other horses were wiped out now. The few who were left were convinced he was either incredibly lucky or crooked, and they refused to book his bets. The situation left him in need of a new gambling plan.

The plan he eventually developed was daring and simple. He decided to sting bookmakers in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago. But first he had to earn their confidence by placing a series of losing bets with them. The bankroll for the losses would come from the money won on Day Dawn. After two or three losses, the bookmakers would begin to see Mooney as a hopeless loser whose bets they would be eager to accept. Then he would move in for the sting, placing a huge bet in a race where he had all the fit horses running for Sweeney and he had again absolutely guaranteed the outcome.

It was a confidence game as old as the pigeon drop. But he would be trying to pull it on eastern bookmakers and wise guys. If he made one mistake, or if any of the jockeys whined and squealed the way Willis Ward had done, Mooney would be the one who would wind up pistol-whipped or pitched into the ocean with cinder blocks for shoes. But he knew that his reputation for champagne generosity and likeability was widespread. He also knew that he had a reputation for wild fluctuations of his gambling luck. The two together gave him the confidence that he could pull off the sting.

Mooney met with Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, and his brother Willie to lay out his plan. In the first set-up race for the sting, a single jockey would pull a horse on which Big Mooney and the fixers had bet forty thousand dollars with the eastern bookmakers. Picking the right jockey was critical. Little Albert Siler was developing an independent streak. He was no longer as dependable as Mooney had once thought. Frank Chojnacki had rejected Big Mooney's overtures at the Venice Beach party, and there was no indication that he had changed his mind and would agree to pull horses occasionally. Bert Reynolds, who had fled to Seattle with Gus Dye, was back at Del Mar and available to the fixers,

but what if he got cold feet and fled again? Freddie Miller was dependable, but he couldn't be counted on to get mounts. That left only Willis Ward, a chronic whiner, but the whining was a reflection of how desperate he was for money to support his Kansas parents. His desperation made him reliable.

Mooney would carefully pick the set-up races over the next two weeks. Then the final sting, with several horses running for Sweeney in the same race, would come toward the end of the Del Mar meet. Meanwhile, state steward Edwin Brown had announced that he would be leaving Del Mar to oversee the Sacramento Fair at the end of the month. His departure meant that Big Mooney and whatever jockeys were involved would be out from under the watchful eye of the one gumshoe who seemed to be hot on their trail.

Tuesday morning, August 23, Mooney spotted the first race he wanted to fix as part of his set-up plan. The next day Willis Ward would be riding a horse named English Harry in the sixth race at Del Mar. The race was wide open, with no improbable long shots or prohibitive favorites, and five of the horses were listed at eight-to-one, including English Harry. It meant that anyone could win, including English Harry, and Mooney's backing of the horse would look reasonable to those New York, New Jersey, and Chicago bookmakers. Tuesday afternoon, Mooney used the phone lines of the house on Sherbourne in West Hollywood to call back east and place forty thousand dollars worth of bets on English Harry with a half-dozen bookmakers.

Tuesday night back in Del Mar, Mooney and Freddie Miller met with Willis Ward and gave him directions for the mile-and-an-eighth race. He was to break poorly and take English Harry wide on the first turn. On the backstretch, he was to stay in the rear, then go wide again on the far turn in search of racing room.

Running wide on the two turns would leave English Harry with no kick for the stretch drive. Meanwhile, both Freddie Miller and Albert Siler would be riding fit, competitive horses, either of whom could win. In the end, English Harry's loss would be convincing, especially to those wise guys who had booked Mooney's bets.

The race on Wednesday, the first step in setting up the wise guys, went exactly as planned. Running on the far outside, English Harry had no life in the stretch and finished fifth. Freddie Miller won the race, and Albert Siler finished second. It was, by Mooney's proud calculations, a perfectly fixed race. That night, when he paid Ward two hundred dollars for his part in the fix, he was in his champagne mood.

But then Ward told him that after the race that he had been called to the stewards' office by Edwin Brown and made to answer for the poor ride he had given English Harry.

Mooney's mood quickly turned foul. What the hell had he told Brown?

Nothing. At least nothing about the fix. Only that he hadn't been able to keep English Harry from going wide on the first turn. Then he had gotten stuck behind horses on the far turn and had had to take English Harry outside again for racing room in the stretch. The winding route had tired his horse, he had told Brown.

Had the son-of-a-bitch bought it?

Hell no, he hadn't. He was suspicious, Ward whined.

Brown's suspicions made Big Mooney and his entire jockeys ring guarded and nervous. Almost a dozen different jockeys had pulled horses off and on. Or they had been ordered to. As word of Brown's suspicions spread around the jockeys' room, they all began to feel that they were in the spotlight, and none more so than little Albert Siler, Prince Albert, the Peewee from Lowden.

They were calling him a "riding sensation," and he was so far ahead in the jockeys' race that he was already at the center of everybody's attention. With so much notoriety, he worried that it was only a matter of time before the jockeys ring was exposed and his whole world would come crashing down on him.

In fact the roof was already beginning to fall in on Albert. The first sign of it was that Mervyn LeRoy, the Hollywood mogul who was rumored to be interested in Albert's contract, had changed his mind. The new apple of his contract eye was Bobby Rousseau, a sixteen-year-old, tow-headed bug boy from Boston who had electrified the southern California racing world with victories in his first two races at Caliente Race Track in Tijuana. While the press reported that Siler was "beginning to have his troubles winning races," Mervyn LeRoy was said to be "hot on Rousseau's trail." Meanwhile, Albert's so-called "comfortable lead" over the fiery Ralph Neves in the jockeys' race didn't look all that secure to him. In the third week of August, Albert could only muster three wins. Big Mooney was leaving him alone, but Neves was winning steadily and narrowing Albert's lead. Meanwhile, Bert Reynolds, who had been one of the jockeys pulling his horse when Celer d'Or had almost beaten Day Dawn, was also made to stand before Edwin Brown and explain his erratic riding. It was, Brown told him, his last warning.

The third running of the Del Mar Handicap on Saturday, August 26, was another dramatic setback for Albert. A sea of fans crowded against the rail to watch the start of the mile-and-a-sixteenth race. One of the favorites in the race was Whitey Whitehill's coal-black, three-year-old stakes horse Teddy Kerry, with Albert Siler in the saddle. But as soon as all twelve horses were in the gate, Teddy Kerry broke out and began sprinting down the track. Albert could not stop the runaway horse from galloping past the grandstand like a black thunderbolt. The first pony

boy chased him until the backstretch and then gave up. As Teddy Kerry flew into the far turn all alone, the horses still waiting to run were yanked from the gate and hustled to the outside rail. Then the starting gate was hastily pulled from the track. As Teddy Kerry galloped past the grandstand again, his tail streaming, fans whooped and cheered for the rogue horse. A second pony boy also could not run him down in the backstretch. It wasn't until he crossed the finish line a third time that Albert was finally able to bring the exhausted horse under control.

Teddy Kerry had run almost two miles. The stewards had no choice but to scratch him. It was, the turf writers in the press box grumbled, a "rodeo performance." Yes, the horse was defiant, but Siler had been "caught asleep at the switch." Meanwhile, Whitey Whitehill, however much he might have been ailing otherwise, was almost splenetic over the wasted performance of his highly rated black thunderbolt. The question was no longer who would wind up with Albert's contract—Whitehill or Mervyn LeRoy. Whoever it turned out to be, the question those turf writers were asking was whether or not a tiny jockey nicknamed Prince Albert had become too smug and comfortable with his successes to want to try and handle rank mounts.

On Monday, August 28, Edwin Brown and the stewards issued a warning that the older riders at Del Mar were not hewing the "straight and narrow." They should leave Del Mar, he said. He gave no indication of what the older riders had done specifically to provoke him. The warning came exactly a year after Albert's first win at Spokane, which had officially made him an apprentice rider. Now his apprenticeship was over. He was a journeyman rider and no longer entitled to the five-pound riding allowance that worked to a bug boy's advantage. And he could only wonder if Edwin Brown included him in his warning to riders.

Or worse, did Brown know for certain what was going on? Was his warning a broad hint to the fixers and the jockeys involved to pack up and leave?

It was all troubling, and during the last week of racing, as Labor Day approached, Albert could only manage one victory. Meanwhile, Ralph Neves, the Portuguese Pepperpot, had seven wins in three days. It gave him twenty-three victories, two behind Albert, whose seemingly insurmountable lead was now in jeopardy. The turf writers wondered if he had he cooled off. Whatever the cause of his slump, those turf writers who had found him so tiny and likeable warned that he would "have to do some high-class skippering" if he expected to win the Del Mar riding championship.

He intended to just that. And for the time being, no matter who Edwin Brown was including in his warning, he was still only eighteen-years-old, still only a boyish prince with peach fuzz and a baby face, and he wasn't going anywhere. Not yet.

Reading the *Racing Form* on Tuesday night, Mooney spotted the next race he intended to fix as part of his plan to bilk eastern bookmakers. It was Wednesday's first race, featuring a ten-horse field of two-year-olds who had never won. Mooney instructed Willis Ward to pull his mount Bachelor Tom in the race.

At first Ward balked. In a field of unproven, unreliable horses, Bachelor Tom was the second favorite, pegged at six-to-one in the morning line. If he didn't run well against such a dismal field, it would look especially suspicious. Besides, Ward complained, he had already been called on the carpet once. The stewards would be watching him carefully.

Mooney said he didn't care how Ward did it, just pull the horse.

Wednesday morning Mooney called the same eastern bookmakers to whom he had already lost forty thousand dollars, and he placed another forty thousand dollars worth of bets on Bachelor Tom to win in the first race at Del Mar racetrack. Once the horses were all in the gate, Ward gripped the left rein and pulled it tight. As soon as the gate opened, he jerked the rein and Bachelor Tom wheeled suddenly like a bucking bronco. While the rest of the field headed down the track, Ward threw out his right arm in an effort to keep his balance as Bachelor Tom continued wheeling. Finally, he sailed off the horse and skidded on his side on the track dirt.

It was a convincing performance, and Ward received no calls to appear before the stewards. And as far as Mooney was concerned, the eighty thousand dollars he had now lost to the same bookmakers and wise guys back east had properly sunk the hook. He was ready for the final step in his plan.

12. TESTA

Across the country in New York City, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sat waiting in a black limousine at the corner of 28th Street and Fifth Avenue. A block away, two radio-equipped police cars filled with Hoover's G-men also waited. It was a warm August evening, the street was filled with passersby, and Hoover wore dark sunglasses to avoid recognition. At 10:15 p.m. another limousine pulled up alongside Hoover's. Inside were famous columnist and radio broadcaster Walter Winchell and Louis "Lepke" Buchhalter. Lepke was a member of the infamous Murder Incorporated, and Governor Thomas Dewey of New York had called him the "most dangerous criminal in the United States." He was wanted for racketeering, narcotics trafficking, and murder. For months, an FBI manhunt led by Hoover had failed to turn him up. Finally, in one of his Sunday night radio broadcasts, Winchell had persuaded Lepke to give himself up to Hoover, who would make sure he had a fair trial. Now, Lepke stepped out of Winchell's limo and into Hoover's. The two police cars standing by screeched onto the scene. Within the hour, Lepke was in jail.

Carefully orchestrated by the FBI, the news broke the next day that J. Edgar Hoover had personally arrested Lepke. Convinced

that he had silenced the critics who claimed that he had never made an arrest, Hoover packed his bags and left for his annual vacation and medical exam in California, where he checked into the Casa de Manana Hotel in La Jolla. San Diego newspapers made note of the presence of the man who was "making the underworld squirm." At Del Mar racetrack, the reserved parking space outside the jockeys' room was swept in anticipation of his arrival. His private Turf Club box was prepared. Official FBI photos of the director standing before the two-dollar window were supposed to reflect his commitment to "temperance and moderation in everything." Those photos were as contrived as the story of his single-handed arrest of Louis Lepke. The truth was that Hoover, through runners who took his money to the windows, often bet as much as two hundred dollars a race, and his passion for racing was nearly an addiction. The story in the corridors of the FBI building was that the agent who had the grayest hair was the one assigned to get Hoover to the track on time.

Meanwhile, steward Edwin Brown had not departed Del Mar as previously announced. So the presence of America's number one crime buster at Del Mar, along with the suspicious Brown, set an ominous backdrop for Big Mooney. Yet he could not turn back from his plan. It had cost him eighty thousand dollars to set up the eastern bookmakers. He was eager to complete the sting before Del Mar closed, no matter who might be watching in the crowd.

On Thursday night, August 31, he pored over the *Racing Form* and picked the fourth race at Del Mar on Friday's card. The race featured a field of ten going six furlongs. Seven horses were impossible long shots, ranging from twenty-to-one to sixty-to-one. According to Mooney's handicapping, only three entries had a chance.

The odds-on favorite was Testa, a big, four-year-old, brown gelding who had won a third of his races. Testa would be ridden by Wallace Leishman, a twenty-one-year-old veteran rider from Logan, Utah, whose life was beginning to contain the elements of tragedy. His brother had committed suicide, and Wallace was supporting his widowed sister-in-law. Meanwhile, his own sister had been killed in an auto accident. Despite those tragedies, or perhaps because of them, Leishman was a steady, hard-working jockey. There was no question that he would be trying his hardest to bring Testa home.

Black Hair, a morning-line six-to-one shot, would be ridden by Brooklyn jockey Charles Bianco. Black Hair was nine-years-old, but he raced frequently and figured to be close.

The third horse was Willis Ward's mount Dandy Vale, a six-year-old who had an uneven record but occasionally came up with a big race. The morning-line handicappers speculated that this might be that big race.

Late Thursday night Freddie Miller told Ward that Mooney would be laying a very big win bet with eastern bookmakers on Testa. The horse *had* to win. He was good enough to do it legitimately, but Mooney wanted to take no chances. "He wants Dandy Vale pulled," Miller said.

Ward shook his head. "Dandy Vale's a pretty good horse. I don't wanna do it."

Ward's reluctance was deep. Turf writers had taken to calling him Willis "Longshot" Ward, suggesting that his riding was strange and uneven. Beyond that, he had aroused steward Edwin Brown's suspicions, and he knew that every one of his rides was being watched closely. Ward had tried to warn Mooney that things were getting too dicey, but the warning had only made Mooney more incautious, with his daring scheme to make a

huge killing off eastern bookmakers. He was courting disaster and arrest, if not death at the hands of the same underworld that J. Edgar Hoover was making squirm. It was as if the thrill of Mooney's normal gambling activities was gone, and he needed more and more stimulation and risk to achieve the same emotional high.

"Well, you'll get two hundred bucks if you pull Dandy Vale. Mooney's gonna be up in the Turf Club balcony," Freddie Miller said. He would be sitting under those sunflower umbrellas. "If you decide to do it, carry your whip in your left hand as you walk to the paddock."

Late that night, Ward studied the *Racing Form* and saw that Testa would be a prohibitive favorite. Charlie Bianco's mount Dark Hair also had a slim chance. It wasn't clear whether or not Bianco would be pulling Dark Hair, but Ward decided that he would do his part, if he had to, on Dandy Vale. *If he had to*—that was the point. Testa would win handily, Ward thought, whether or not he did anything illegal on Dandy Vale. Meanwhile, the two hundred dollars that Mooney promised to pay him would be that much more to keep his parents' creditors at bay back in Kansas. But if Dandy Vale presented a serious challenge, Ward was prepared to somehow make sure he lost.

Friday, the first day of September, brought a chilly, crystal clarity to the southern California air. Albert Siler had only one mount that day, a long shot in the sixth race on which he had very little chance. He spent the early part of the afternoon sitting by himself on the sun deck off the jockeys' recreation room, smoking an Old Gold and sorting through the difficulties of his life, none of which had been imagined in his bush league dreams. Those same turf writers who had been predicting riding star-

dom for him were now claiming his success had all been luck. He had gotten live mounts, they wrote, because trainers with good horses wanted the benefit of his five-pound bug boy allowance. Without that allowance, the writers said, he was getting second pickings. Their explanation seemed borne out by what had happened to him the day before. He had had four mediocre mounts, two of which had finished dead last. The only one who had any life in him at all had been all over the track, and Albert had learned from the stewards that morning that he had been fined one hundred dollars for the erratic ride. Now that his apprenticeship was over, he was having "tough sledding," they wrote, and nobody seemed to want him to ride any more, least of all Whitey Whitehill, who was still trying to peddle Albert's contract. Mervyn Leroy had finally said no thanks, but another studio owner, Harry Warner, was reported to be interested. It all sounded very confusing to Albert, who sat enveloped in a cloud of Old Gold smoke. He knew that Whitehill was still angry with him for burning up Teddy Kerry as a runaway out of the gate. So if Whitehill didn't want him to ride any more, who did? Mervyn Leroy? Harry Warner? Was there anybody out there who would ask him to ride good, live mounts? How could they not be bidding for his services, when he was on the verge of winning the Del Mar riding honors?

Meanwhile, Big Mooney remained a looming menace in Albert's life. He was about to cash in with a big bet after having set up eastern bookmakers—all of it right under the suspicious noses of the stewards and even J. Edgar Hoover. Under those circumstances, it was foolhardy for Willis Ward to be passing secret paddock signals to railbird crooks. And Albert could only wonder what Mooney would demand next from the jockeys ring. All of them were in danger of being arrested and dragged off to

prison. The best that Albert could hope for was that the officials would understand his predicament. Mooney wasn't somebody you dared defy. At least not until the Del Mar meet was over in two days. Then, after he had beat out Ralph Neves for the riding championship, he decided, he would pack his bags and leave.

Albert glanced at his watch and stood up. It was time to go down and see for himself the drama of the fourth race.

Willis Ward, carrying the whip in his left hand, entered the paddock at 3:30. He was wearing red, white, and blue silks that made him look like a walking flag. All that was missing was a bandaged drummer boy and a fife player flanking him as he marched along. Within minutes, half a dozen bookmakers in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago who had twice taken Big Mooney's losing bets began accepting wagers from him that would total a quarter of a million dollars on a horse named Testa running at Del Mar racetrack.

On the day's card, heavy favorites had won the first three races. Testa, at three-to-five, promised to be the fourth. Leishman got him out of the gate quickly, and halfway down the backstretch, Testa had a six-length lead and was going at his leisure. Ward, who had been forced to take up Dandy Vale in close quarters at the start, was far back, running side by side with Black Hair.

At the far turn, Ward had Dandy Vale in second place, still six lengths behind Leishman on Testa, and running wide of two other horses who were already beginning to tire. Ward slid Dandy Vale down to the rail and entered the stretch as the only horse who had a chance of catching Testa.

Running free of the rest of the field, he was convinced that the stewards were watching his every riding move closely. He needed to give them some sign that he was serious about closing the gap on Testa. Something brief, he decided, but convincing.

He cracked his whip once on Dandy Vale's left hindquarters.

Dandy Vale almost bolted sideways to the middle of the track before Ward got a tight hold on him again. Still, his hold wasn't tight enough to stop Dandy Vale's continued drift to the outside, and he jerked repeatedly on the reins to get back down to the rail. By the time he had finished struggling with his horse and focused his attention straight ahead, he almost stood up in the irons.

He was running right up on the heels of a tiring Testa.

Ward managed to slide Dandy Vale up alongside Testa, and the two horses crossed the finish line together. While they waited for the photo, Ward remembered the first time he had almost crossed Mooney by bringing Kandahar to the wire in a photo finish against Eye Jay. After that race, Mooney had been in his champagne mood because the close race verified his handicapping genius. This time, however, if the photo came up Dandy Vale, there would be no generosity. Not when Mooney had a quarter of a million dollars riding on the outcome.

The photo showed Testa by a head. At $3.60 to win, Mooney had won almost two hundred thousand dollars off the wise guys back east. In the jockeys' room, Ward was too shaken to pretend disappointment over the close race. He knew that if properly ridden Dandy Vale could have won by fifteen lengths. The rest of the afternoon, he could hardly focus on his mounts, and none of them finished in the money. Meanwhile, he half expected the volatile Mooney to come flying into the jockeys' room and assault him for almost giving him a heart attack.

Albert Siler went to bed Friday night expecting to wake up to the good news Saturday morning that his contract would be sold to studio owner Harry Warner. It would mean livelier mounts, he

hoped, and a chance to continue riding winners. It would also mean more of the exciting world of movie stars and Hollywood glamour. But at dawn Saturday morning, when he showed up to exercise horses for Whitehill, he learned that Whitehill had refused to sell his contract to Warner.

His first reaction as he stood enjoying a sunrise smoke was a quiet anger that struggled to express itself against the straightjacket of his habitual politeness. But there was no use fighting it. The few mounts Whitehill had given him to ride on Saturday's program were pathetic. It was as if Whitehill was still punishing him for having let Teddy Kerry run away. So he had no intentions of exercising Whitehill's horses that morning, he said. He was through!

But what about his contract?

He snarled that he didn't care what his contract said, that Whitehill could get somebody else to exercise his mounts and ride for him. He wasn't going to be anybody's lackey any more. He had spent too long in the bush leagues sleeping in tack rooms and riding cheap, broken-down horses to wind up in the saddle of dead horses.

His anger was surprising for a toy prince. And most of it was misplaced and meant for Big Mooney, who was the real tyrant in his life. But Whitehill was a convenient and angry focus for Albert, who spun on his heels and walked off.

Walking away from a contract—it was the ultimate disobedience, tolerated or overlooked by racing officials only if it was committed by somebody like George Woolf, who occasionally disappeared or just took a day off to go fishing, leaving his contract owners in the lurch. But Albert Siler was no George Woolf. At least not yet, and Whitehill went straight to the stewards to lodge his complaint that Albert Siler was refusing to meet his

contract obligations. By mid-morning he had been suspended indefinitely from racing, "for leaving his contract employer without his consent." Notice was given to all horsemen in California "not to employ or harbor said jockey Al Siler."

As soon as the stewards had issued their suspension to Albert Siler, they called Willis Ward to their offices. He had already been warned for his zigzag ride on English Harry. Then he had fallen off Bachelor Tom. Now Edwin Brown was livid. The charts for Friday's race, explaining that Dandy Vale had been "eased up" twice against Testa, were in his hands. The turf writers were calling Ward's ride "another lulu." Whatever the press box suggestions of riding impropriety had been at Hollywood Park, this accusation was much worse, and Brown demanded that Ward explain the ride he had given Dandy Vale.

For half an hour Ward denied to Brown that he had done anything wrong. He admitted that he had been all over the track in the stretch but said that was because Dandy Vale was rank. Still, there it was in the charts, Brown pointed out. The whole world had seen it: Dandy Vale was "much the best horse." There was no explanation for Ward's indifferent ride and Dandy Vale's loss to Testa. Ward was facing serious discipline. The hearing was over!

Ward was shaking. "Judge, do you want me to check with you before I weigh in for the first race?"

"You won't need to weigh in," Brown snapped. Ward was removed from all his mounts that day.

That afternoon, Albert Siler began packing his green coupe with all his belongings. Dressed in his green, suede vest jacket, the bug boy sensation who had led all riders from the first day of the meet at Del Mar watched the races from a small bleachers on

the backside, where the hot walkers and stable boys and grooms gathered before each race.

His lead in the jockeys' race did not last much longer. Ralph Neves, the Portuguese Pepperpot, had winners in the second and third races, putting him in a tie for the riding championship with Albert Siler. And in a cruel irony that made Albert's stomach turn, Neves's last mount of the day, in the seventh race, was the very same Omelet that Albert had refused to pull for Big Mooney. If he hadn't been suspended, he might have been on the three-year-old champion instead of Neves, ready to ride her to victory again.

It was almost six o'clock when the horses went to post. Shadows cast by the hill with apricot orchards were beginning to creep across the backstretch, a dark reminder to Albert of Big Mooney's presence in his life. He had pulled half a dozen horses at Del Mar on Mooney's orders during the meet. Victory on just one or two of them would have meant that Neves's ride on Omelet was meaningless. Again, as he had at Hollywood Park, Big Mooney was threatening to destroy one of his dreams. And there was little he could do about it except sit and watch in frustration.

Omelet broke poorly and raced at the rear of tightly bunched horses through the first turn. Down the backstretch, running sixth and gliding through the lengthening shadows, she seemed listless, not at all the powerful filly that Albert had ridden to victory. She was going to lose, Albert felt. Neves and Siler would share the riding championship at twenty-five victories each. Albert would have at least part of his dream, along with the admission, mostly to himself, that he could have had all of it if he had been able to get Big Mooney out of his life.

On the far turn, Omelet came to life and began closing. When the horses were at the head of the stretch, Albert's fists tightened and his arms jerked, as if Mooney had corrupted him so

completely that he couldn't help himself from trying to pull Omelet by proxy.

Before Omelet had even crossed the finish line with a half-length lead, it was obvious that she would win and that the Portuguese Pepperpot would have the championship all to himself. The crowd was still roaring with the excitement of the drive to the finish line when Albert stood up suddenly and began walking quickly to his car.

Saturday night Willis Ward met Big Mooney on the busy road between La Jolla and San Diego. Mooney was in his champagne mood again. He and his fellow fixers were nearly two hundred thousand dollars richer as a result of the sting. It had gone off smoothly. No one seemed to be the wiser. Even Ward's race to the wire, in which he had almost nipped Testa, had looked convincing. Mooney was grateful, he said, and he gave Ward the promised two hundred dollars.

Between the Hollywood Park and Del Mar meets, Ward had pulled dozens of horses for Mooney, and he had sent all of the money from Mooney's payments to his parents on their Kansas farm. The bribes amounted to thousands of dollars. But the price he was going to have to pay for his steady obedience to Big Mooney was a suspension for one year from racing. Perhaps even his entire career would be lost if the stewards ever made it clear that their charges of indifferent riding masked their deeper concern, which was that he was pulling horses on behalf of big-shot gamblers.

The one thing Ward was determined to salvage from his association with Big Mooney was the money still owed him from previously fixed races.

Mooney offered to settle up with him later, at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Los Angeles.

Ward's face reflected his disappointment.

"Look," Mooney offered, "I'll see that you get a couple of new suits, too."

Meanwhile, Mooney wanted to know, did Ward have any idea where Albert Siler was?

At his beach cottage, Albert packed his car with the last of his belongings. He had heard the news that Willis Ward had been suspended for a year. It meant that with Ward out of action, Mooney would probably come looking for Albert, ordering him to carry out ever more dangerous fixing schemes. And who knew who else would be searching for him? Edwin Brown? An angry "Whitey" Whitehill, pursuing him as if he were a runaway slave, in order to bring him back to riding bondage? Perhaps even J. Edgar Hoover, whose presence that Saturday in his private Turf Club box, looking full of temperance and moderation, created the impression that he had come to investigate the fixing situation himself, in order to make more members of the underworld squirm.

Heartsick and bitter and frightened, Albert finished packing, climbed behind the wheel of his green coupe, and headed for refuge in Oregon.

13. GATE BREAKIN' ADAIR

For four months, through the fall and into the winter of 1939, Albert Siler seemed to disappear from the face of the earth. No one in racing knew where he had gone, or why he had left so suddenly. There were numerous rumors, each containing small truths drawn from the circumstances of his life: his father was sickly and helpless, and the Peewee from Lowden had returned to Washington to work on the family farm; he was so polite and loveable that he had run off with one of the Hollywood starlets who had draped him with flowers in the winner's circle; banned from racetracks in California because he had refused to ride for his contract owner, he had gone back east; his suspension at Del Mar had robbed him of the riding championship, and in a fit of despair and defeatism he had gone back to the bush leagues, where nobody would give a damn about what he did, and where he could smoke his Old Golds in peace and still have his dreams; he had offended shadowy figures from the underworld, and he was hiding out somewhere; finally, there were rumors that wherever he had gone to hide out, those shadowy underworld figures had caught up with him and dumped him off a pier somewhere, cemented into his riding boots.

The truth was that he had fled to the remote farmland along the Snake River on the Oregon-Idaho border, where his father was trying to make a living growing alfalfa. He arrived in his green coupe, pulling a small trailer filled with guns and cases of ammunition, which he had stopped to buy in a gun store in San Francisco. The guns were gifts, he told his astonished brothers, who stood in a circle around the trailer as he passed out rifles and pistols and shotguns for everybody, even an air rifle for his youngest brother. In each Eden his family had tried to settle, the brothers had always hunted and fished. But Albert's trailer arsenal armed them to the teeth, for what purposes beyond recreational hunting Albert never explained, because he wasn't sure himself who might come looking for him. Perhaps it would be Big Mooney and the fixers, worried that he would rat them out. Or eastern underworld killers, determined to settle the score with anybody even remotely connected to the sting that Mooney had perpetrated. Well, it didn't matter. He was holed up in what amounted to an Oregon stronghold, his back protected by the loops and canyons of the Snake River. He was ready to take a stand if he had to.

Winter came early and fierce. By December he was tired of life on the farm, and he began to grow restless. Maybe he had overreacted to Big Mooney's threats. He could hardly remember the man's face, or the menacing shine of his slick hair in the Del Mar moonlight. What kept coming back to him in memory fugues was the attention of the press, the celebrities who wanted to pat his silks, the intoxicating smell of heavily perfumed starlets in the winner's circle, shooting pool in the jockeys' recreation room and making friendly jokes—about George Woolf's naps between races, or Gus Dye's appetite, or his own peach fuzz and his Old Gold cigarettes—railbirds sticking a program

and a pen at him, asking for his autograph, the crisp bugle call to post, that grandstand roar that rose like breaking surf at the head of the stretch. He even remembered that there was something bracing in the smell of the flying dirt and the sound of a dozen horses delivering lippy snorts as they galloped around the track for their workouts in the morning half-light.

One morning his father got up and stood looking at the frozen fields. "There's nothin' much for us here anymore," he said and gave up on his wintry Eden on the Snake River.

The next day Albert put his father in the green coupe and drove him into the town of Richland. On the south side of town, they found a big house with four bedrooms and sliding doors and four adjoining lots, where his mother could grow her vegetables. They dickered with the owner over the price, but the deal was done as soon as Albert counted out twenty-five hundred dollars in cash from his racing bankroll.

When he took his brothers through the house, he didn't bother to explain that it was bought with tainted money, mostly gotten from Big Mooney. He just let the gift stand as something he wanted to do. The deeper possibility—that he was easing his conscience by using the tainted money for generous purposes—would have been too difficult to explain, if indeed he even understood it himself.

As soon as his family had settled into their new home, he left for California. He had to go before Edwin Brown and the stewards to get his riding license back. Facing the stewards, he was his old self, polite and deferential—Prince Albert again. Yes, sir, he told "Judge Brown," he was ready and willing to ride whatever mounts he was lucky enough to get. No one asked him about Big

Mooney or pulling horses. Still, the newspapers reported that he had finally gotten himself "straightened out." From what, they didn't explain. Whatever it was, he was repentant.

In the first few weeks of 1940, there were nearly one hundred jockeys at Santa Anita competing for mounts, and Albert rode infrequently. He had a new contract owner, but what few mounts he was assigned were impossible long shots. He had no wins. And in March, as restless as his father for new opportunities, he headed north for Tanforan racetrack, where he expected to compete for good rides with fewer jockeys.

It was another disappointing Eden. Again, he couldn't get mounts. Those horses he did get finished far out of the money. And some of the very same people and circumstances he had tried to get away from at Del Mar were gathered now at Tanforan. Gus Dye, who had helped recruit him into the jockeys ring, was there, along with Freddie Miller and Freddy Scheih. Then one day he spotted Irving Sangbusch standing with the railbirds, flashing a menacing smile that reflected he was up to something shadowy and criminal.

Big Mooney arrived in San Francisco in mid-March. His risky but successful sting of East Coast bookmakers gave him new confidence and an aura of invulnerability. He rented a suite on the eighteenth floor of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, complete with a Beefeater doorman and vaulted, gold-leaf ceilings. It was a transparent effort to match the regal splendor of Benny Chapman's suite at the Biltmore in Los Angeles. Like Chapman, Mooney had a private phone line installed, and he entertained new as well as prospective members of his jockeys ring with champagne and food.

Rumors began flying around in the jockeys' room at Tanforan concerning the effort by "big-shot" mobsters and gamblers

to recruit a whole new roster of young, green bug boys into a jockeys ring. Then Freddie Miller was suspended for "practices detrimental to the best interests of racing." It was understood that Freddy Scheih would take over as Mooney's new bagman. Payoffs would be made a half block away from the Drake, beneath the trees in Union Square. Elsewhere, the talk of fixed races was so prominent that a notorious railbird drunk, who had been persuaded to bet on one of Mooney's sure things, refused to pay up when the horse lost, and he went around complaining to his fellow drunks that Mooney had fixed the race. As the meet progressed, the rumors began to get specific, and there were warnings to jockeys and numerous suspensions. "I've tried to go straight," one of the jockeys told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "but the gamblers won't let me. Once they get you in their clutches, they won't let go."

Albert Siler knew that feeling of being trapped better than any of them. And he was determined not to be brought back into the same predicament he had fled at Del Mar. He was polite and courteous, but he stayed away from the jockeys he suspected of involvement with Mooney. His only close friend in the jockeys' room at Tanforan was Raymond Adair, a veteran rider from New Mexico who was part Crow Indian.

They called him "Gate Breakin' Adair" because he claimed he could hear a soft click just before the gate opened, which gave him a jump-start in each race. He and Albert became immediate friends. Adair was as tiny as Albert, and he had begun riding horses in fiercely contested match races as a six-year-old in New Mexico. Somewhere along the way, as a defense against all the predators in horse racing, he had acquired a gift for leathery defiance, which stood in sharp contrast to Albert's deference.

Albert was emboldened by just being around "Gate Breakin'

Adair." They shared an apartment in San Bruno. Together they concocted a weight-loss emetic of Epsom salts, a quart of Pluto Water, and four drops of Croton oil. They heated the concoction, then spiked it with oranges and lemons to hide the taste. They drove up to the mountains in Albert's coupe and learned to ski. They drank together until the late hours in bars on the San Francisco Peninsula. Albert knew he could ride as fearlessly as Adair, maybe even more so. The problem was taking that fearless, "gate-breakin'" boldness with him once he dismounted and wound up with only his Prince Albert courtesies to face the likes of Big Mooney. But listening to Raymond Adair tell stories of defiance and independence from his rough-and-tumble boyhood gave Albert the courage to believe that if Big Mooney *did* reappear in his life, this time he'd know what to do about it.

Late one night at a bar in San Mateo, a picket fence of empty beer bottles lined up in front of them, Adair confided to Albert that he had been approached about fixing races. They both had had too many beers for it to be clear to Albert exactly who it was who had approached Adair. But the principal was clear: the fixers expected him to cooperate, and they were prepared to get nasty if he didn't.

"We can make you the leading rider in the country," they had told Adair.

He hadn't hesitated. "I don't ride for no associations."

"Lots of jockeys are making money."

"No, I won't play ball."

His defiance seemed unshakeable, and they had temporarily left him alone. But then they tried again, this time inviting him to meet with them.

His back as stiff as it had ever been, Adair went with a .38 in his belt. Once in the room, he laid the gun on the table.

"I just hope you don't give me no trouble," he warned.

For Albert, it was an heroic and inspiring tale. But then one night in mid-April, he came out of a bar in South San Francisco, where he had gone with another Tanforan jockey who had refused to pull horses. On the street, the two of them were jumped by figures twice their size. The other jockey chose to stand and fight, but Albert eluded them by running up a hillside into a dark pocket of eucalyptus trees where he hid out. From that safe point, he watched as the thugs, whoever they were, overwhelmed the other jockey and dragged him beneath a streetlight. There, they picked him up by his feet and hammered him repeatedly against the light post. Then they left him lying in a broken heap on the pavement.

It was a staged lesson on the perils of disobedience, performed audaciously beneath a spotlight and intended as a warning to other Tanforan jockeys. For Albert the lesson was clear. He was not as bold or defiant as Gate Breakin' Adair. Nor did he want to be, especially if it meant the constant fear of being jumped by night hoodlums. Meanwhile, San Francisco turf writers celebrated the honesty of the Tanforan meet. The riders and horsemen were under the constant, vigilant supervision of the stewards. The "sharpshooters"—meaning the crooks, the gamblers, and the fixers like Big Mooney—had either been driven away or were in such a perpetual state of fear that they had been made to behave.

But it was Albert, not the crooks, who was terrified. He had watched as another jockey had been broken to pieces beneath a light post in South San Francisco. Meanwhile, he had had only ten mounts at Tanforan and not a single winner. The dreams that had kept him going in the bush leagues—of the glories of racing that he had missed so much during his wintry, Snake River sanctuary— had all finally been destroyed. The perfumed star-

lets and the riding championships had been no more than an illusion, grown out of the dirt and misery of the bush leagues. The drunken grooms singing the blues and the railbirds with sad faces had been replaced by sharpshooters and gangsters preying on innocent bug boys. The stewards, the almighty "judges" to whom he had been so deferential, were powerless to do anything about it. It was the real world of big-time racing. And he was finished with it for good.

The day after he watched secretly while the other disobedient jockey was beaten up, he packed up again and fled in his green coupe.

14. NED AND SCOTTY

Edwin J. Brown sat alone in the stewards' office at Tanforan racetrack, poring over a confidential report he had received from the investigators he had hired in Los Angeles the previous fall to look into the rumors of a jockeys ring. The subject of the report was Ned Merritt, a twenty-four-year-old jockey from Heron, South Dakota, who was married with two young children. He had made news in the racing world twice in the last year, once for surviving a horrifying finish-line spill at Bay Meadows, then within weeks recovering to ride five winners in a single day. He had a spotless riding reputation, and he was the last jockey Brown would have suspected of any illegal activities. Now, however, the report in Brown's hands alleged that Merritt was consorting with "suspicious characters."

The details of the report were alarming. Just weeks earlier, jockey Freddy Scheih had approached Merritt and told him he could make some "easy money" if he would consider pulling a horse called High Vote at Tanforan on March 30. Scheih gave Merritt a card with Big Mooney's private line at the Drake. "Call at night," Scheih instructed Merritt. "Say you're 'Bob.' Ask him if there's any business to be done."

Merritt ignored the invitation and threw the card away. Four days later, in a San Francisco bakery store filled with the smell of fresh pastries, and with the CHRB investigators watching from across the street, Sonny Greenberg also approached Merritt. Why hadn't Merritt called Big Mooney? Ned apologized and said he had forgotten the number. Greenberg wrote it down again on a card, but once more Merritt threw it away.

Scheih and Greenberg had been the subject of numerous rumors, especially at Hollywood Park. Scheih's quick departure to Washington with Gus Dye, and Greenberg's trip back east that fall with his stable of horses, had only temporarily removed them from the scrutiny of the CHRB investigators. Now they were both back at Tanforan and under close observation. Brown did not want to tip his hand just yet by calling them in for a conference. But Merritt was a different matter. Brown was confident that he would learn the truth about what was going on from Merritt. It was time to talk to him.

Brown and several other CHRB officials met with Merritt in the stewards' offices at Tanforan. Brown warned Merritt about consorting with shady characters. Merritt explained that he wasn't consorting with anybody who was shady. Scheih and Greenberg had sought *him* out and offered him money to pull horses. Twice he had steadfastly refused their proposal, he said. If they tried again, he would refuse them a third time.

For seven months, since the close of the Hollywood Park meeting the previous August, Brown had not gotten much of anywhere with his secret investigation into rumors and allegations of fixes by "big-shot" gamblers and mobsters. Irving Sangbusch's offer to act as an informant had yielded nothing but more rumors and gossip. None of it would hold up in court, even if they got that far, since fixing races wasn't even illegal. The only legal teeth

Brown had were the racing regulations promulgated by his own commission, stipulating that they were authorized to regulate and supervise "those contests of speed and endurance of man or beast . . . over which there was wagering."

After months of trying to enforce those regulations, Brown still had no specific wrongdoings to prosecute. He had called in several jockeys around whom rumors were circulating at Hollywood Park and Del Mar, and they had all denied knowledge of any fixes. Then after Del Mar had closed and his investigators had told him that Freddie Miller was keeping company with gamblers and bookmakers, he had called in Miller and told him that he knew what was going on. Horses were being pulled. Big Mooney was behind it all.

Miller insisted he didn't know Big Mooney.

But hadn't he pulled horses?

No, never, he answered.

Hadn't he been Mooney's bagman? Hadn't he been meeting him at a Del Mar hotel and elsewhere? Hadn't he been delivering payoff money from Mooney to various jockeys for pulling horses?

No, never!

Miller had tried to offer a lengthier defense. But Miller's denials and stonewalling infuriated Brown, who suddenly lost his patience.

"Leave! Go someplace else!" he shouted.

He had suspended Miller indefinitely. But he had not gotten the admissions he needed to go after the "higher-ups" that he knew were behind Miller. Now here was the first break. An honest jockey who was apparently still the target of the fixers had a chance to obtain inside information. Merritt's determination to keep resisting the fix overtures was admirable. But Brown needed his help.

Ned Merritt agreed to alert Brown if he was approached again to run for Sweeney. When the time came for him to call Mooney for instructions on which horse to pull, Merritt was to make the call from the privacy of the stewards' offices while other stewards eavesdropped on an extension and took notes. Whatever instructions Merritt received from Big Mooney, he was to follow them, short of the point where he actually pulled a horse.

Merritt did not have to wait long to be approached a third time, and he called Brown with the news: Freddy Scheih had asked him if he would pull a horse named Company, running in the fourth race on April 25 at Tanforan. Scheih gave him the number to call in San Francisco. This time Merritt did not throw it away. And from the stewards' Tanforan offices, he called Mooney at the Drake and introduced himself as "Bob."

Mooney's efforts at secrecy were forgotten once he began to feel the excitement of another fixed race, and he began chatting amiably and openly with Merritt. Finally, he got to the point: he wanted Merritt to pull Company the next day at Tanforan.

While a second steward eavesdropped on an extension and furiously took notes, Merritt said he wanted to make sure he would get paid, exactly as Scheih had promised.

Of course he would get paid, Mooney reassured him. Just keep Company from winning.

The next day, a half hour before post time for the fourth race, the stewards announced that Ned Merritt had been taken off his mounts for the rest of the day. He was sick, Edwin Brown let it be known. With a substitute jockey in the saddle, Company finished a legitimate fourth.

That Ned Merritt had been too sick to ride wasn't far from the truth. Brown's entrapment plan had taken the young jockey right up to the brink of treachery. The whole episode proved to

be the kind of criminal flirtation that gave high-minded Merritt the sweats. And it wasn't over yet. The next day headlines in the *San Francisco Chronicle* screamed "2 Ousted in Racing Fix Plot." Scheih and Greenberg were ruled off Tanforan racetrack for "attempting to connive with the jockeys to influence results of horse races at this meeting." There had been no actual fixing, Edwin Brown said, "but an attempt had been nipped in the bud." A complete report on the episode would be sent to the CHRB in Sacramento.

Nowhere in the public story was there mention of Big Mooney. From what Brown had learned, he was a hopeless gambler hiding behind champagne and an engaging smile. It was the "big shots" above him whom Brown wanted to uncover. Who were they? The same underworld killers, like Louis "Lepke" Buchhalter, that J. Edgar Hoover was fighting?

How many other innocent jockeys like Ned Merritt had they tried to corrupt? It would take more entrapments and deeper probing by his investigators to get to the bottom of it. Meanwhile, he was confident that despite the suspensions and the headlines, Big Mooney was so hopelessly addicted to a life of gambling that he would go right on brazenly fixing races. Somewhere along the way he would try to recruit Ned Merritt again.

Two months later, shortly after the Hollywood Park meet opened in June 1940, a stranger pounded on the door of Merritt's Los Angeles apartment at midnight and woke his entire family.

"There's a fellow outside wants to see you," the stranger said. Merritt dressed and walked with the stranger a half block, where Mooney was waiting in the shadows between streetlights. Mooney got right to the point: Merritt was scheduled to ride a horse named Hysterical on Saturday, June 15. Mooney wanted the horse pulled.

It was too dark for Merritt's shock to register on Mooney. Hysterical was an impressive four-year-old stakes horse. Just that week, Hysterical had won the Inglewood Handicap. Trying to pull such a celebrated horse would be a new high in the gambler's fixing madness. Along with the stewards, the entire racing world would be watching the race closely. The idea of pulling Hysterical was absurd, and Merritt said as much.

Mooney persisted. There was five hundred dollars in it for Merritt if he would agree to pull the horse.

Again Merritt refused.

It was a moment before Mooney accepted Merritt's refusal. All right, then, he said and pressed ahead. He wanted Sir Grenville pulled in a different race that same day. Again, he offered Merritt five hundred dollars.

"Sir Grenville won't be in the money anyway," Merritt said.

"Then why not take the money and agree to pull him?"

"Why pay to have him pulled if you don't need to?"

Mooney had no answer, although it was as obvious as a neon sign blinking in the darkness: Mooney's fixing fever was so all-consuming that it was driving him to have hopeless horses pulled. It didn't really matter any longer who won or lost. He was living off the thrill of manipulation and orchestration. The more celebrated the horses being pulled, the higher the thrill.

For a week, Mooney continued to pester Merritt about pulling Hysterical in one of his races. Finally, Mooney appeared himself late one night at Merritt's door. "Look, you want to do business or not?" It was almost a plea, without the snap and presumption of obedience that he had employed with Albert Siler and Willis Ward.

Merritt refused a final time and reported the incidents to the authorities, including Edwin Brown. None of it was a surprise

to Brown, whose investigators had been following Mooney's every move. A good case against Mooney was building, one that would hold up under the pressure of attorneys and denials that had marked his previous efforts to clean up racing. All Brown needed, he felt, was one more solid piece of evidence. He felt that it wouldn't take him long to get it. He was confident that as Mooney sought to expand his jockeys ring, he would recruit more innocent bug boys, one of whom would find the courage to turn on him.

His name was Leonard Scott, called "Scotty" at the pool table in the jockeys' recreation room. At fourteen he had grown tired of the hard work of punching cattle on his father's ranch outside of Sabinal, Texas, and he left for the bush leagues. Three years later Tom Smith, Seabiscuit's trainer, recognized his talents, and Scott was contracted to ride for the stable of Seabiscuit-owner Charles Howard. His Texas drawl was sprinkled with double negatives that made his occasional anger and resistance that much more forceful. Early on in his riding career, he had been described as an "87-pound cowboy," but by the spring of 1940 at Tanforan, he was gaining weight.

"You're getting pretty big to ride," Sonny Greenberg told him as the Tanforan meet drew to a close. "You won't be riding much longer."

The comment was a reference to the ticking weight bomb for many young riders. Despite Pluto Water and daily steam baths and home-brewed emetics, maturation could be delayed only so long. Unless they were genetic freaks, more gnomes than men, when the growth bomb finally exploded many jockeys were finished. It was the same argument that Greenberg had once used to convince Scotty to pull a horse at Bay Meadows. His riding

career would be over soon, Greenberg had told him. Why not make some quick cash before then?

Now Greenberg repeated the argument. "If you want to make some money," he said, "I can introduce you to somebody who'll fix you up."

With CHRB investigators watching from across the street, Sonny Greenberg met Scotty and Freddy Scheih in front of the Drake Hotel a few days later. Greenberg took Scott and Scheih up to Big Mooney's suite on the eighteenth floor. There, Mooney told Scotty to refer to him as "Mister Bernard" in phone calls to the Drake for instructions on which horses to pull. Three weeks later Scotty began pulling horses at Mooney's direction, with the same payoffs—two hundred dollars for favorites, one hundred for all others—that Mooney had made at Hollywood Park and Del Mar. During the course of the meet, Scotty received a lump sum of one thousand dollars for pulling horses at Tanforan. But the headline news of fixes and suspensions of Scheih and Greenberg gave Scotty cold feet. With the close of Tanforan, he made up his mind that if Big Mooney approached him at Hollywood Park, he would not go along.

Meanwhile, the fixing headlines and the suspensions of Greenberg and Scheih at Tanforan did nothing to diminish Mooney's activities. His name had not appeared anywhere in the paper. And there was no indication that Leonard Scott, the latest addition to his jockeys ring, was under any cloud of suspicion. Turf writers described the one ride by Scotty at Tanforan that the stewards challenged as so undisguised and clumsy that it couldn't *possibly* have been part of a sly fix.

Hollywood Park opened for its fourth season on May 30, 1940. Mooney met with Scotty on the familiar corner of Manchester and Western, where a year earlier he had recruited the first jockeys into

his ring. He told Scotty that he wanted to do a "little business" at Hollywood Park, and he was still on the lookout for dependable riders like Albert Siler. Did Scotty by chance know him?

Their paths had crossed briefly that spring at Tanforan, Scotty explained, that was all. They had hardly even talked.

Mooney began boasting about how well he knew Siler and how he had been able to read him in a blink. His ability to read people was part of the survival instincts of a gambler. Those instincts had helped him to recognize Siler's dependability, when they first met in the Los Angeles hills. Beneath Siler's ingratiating politeness, Mooney had spotted an eagerness to please. One did not need the keen instincts of a gambler to recognize in Albert an eagerness to please, along with the reflexive obedience of a farm boy resigned to the necessity of his "chores." But Scott said nothing and let Mooney go on about how well he knew Albert Siler.

"Where is he living?" Mooney finished.

Scotty said he had no idea where Albert was.

"How's he doing?"Scotty shrugged.

"I've given him a lot of money," Mooney said. "He was one of my most dependable riders."

Mooney seemed split between sympathy for a bug boy whose riding life he had ruined and regret that nobody knew where he was so that he could corrupt him further.

Then Scotty dropped a thunderbolt: he would not pull any more horses for Mooney. The best he would do, he quickly offered, would be to see if there were other jockeys at Hollywood Park who might be interested.

Mooney jumped at the offer, and several nights later, again at the intersection of Manchester and Western, Scotty introduced Big Mooney to Steve Packer, Tommy Mansor, and Ellis Gray, three

young riders at Hollywood Park. Mooney met with them at the Manchester and Western intersection, and all three initially rejected his offer to pull horses. It might have prompted Mooney to fall into one of his characteristic rages, but again those blink instincts, especially for vulnerability, told him to be patient. He did not have to wait long. Steve Packer's father had died only weeks earlier, leaving him the sole support for his mother and four siblings. Tommy Mansor was also supporting his family, but he had been riding poorly and needed money. Finally, Ellis Gray was a soft-spoken jockey with a perpetual spooked look that reflected vacillation.

In the jockeys' room of Hollywood Park there were also still plenty of whispered rumors surrounding Big Mooney and the extent to which he would use intimidation and violence to bring jockeys into his ring. And three days after refusing Big Mooney, Packer, Mansor, and Gray began running for Sweeney at Hollywood Park. Mooney paid them off regularly from the back seat of his car, parked at the Manchester-Western intersection. Mooney was in his champagne mood, and he gave Scotty $250 for his part in bringing new young blood into his jockeys ring. They seemed dependable. And there was the possibility now that each time all three of them rode in a race with a small field, he could orchestrate another sting, moving it around the country like a floating crap game, bilking bookmakers in Philadelphia, Detroit, or perhaps St. Louis. Meanwhile, there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of credulous suckers close by in Hollywood who could be enticed into betting on fixed races. For Big Mooney, the grocer's son who had first experienced the thrill of gambling while shooting playground marbles, it was a gambler's fairyland.

In July Edwin Brown issued warnings to Packer, Mansor, and Gray, who had pulled a dozen horses over the Hollywood Park meeting. Brown cited nothing specific, beyond the catch-all phrase, "indifferent riding." Based on reports from his investigators that all three jockeys were consorting with shady characters, the words were an easy disguise for his deeper suspicions that they were repeatedly running for Sweeney.

If Mooney had any suspicions that Brown was closing in on him, he gave no sign of it. And as the Hollywood Park meeting came to a close in late July, one sundown he drove up to a grassy park in Inglewood in search of Scotty, who was part of a softball game between Hollywood Park jockeys. It was a hot evening, half the jockeys were stripped to the waist, and Mooney brazenly invited Scotty, Packer, Mansor, and Gray to his car to discuss how they would fix races at the upcoming Del Mar meet.

Packer, Mansor, and Gray each told him bluntly that they wouldn't pull horses at Del Mar. They had been warned, they explained. Things were getting too hot.

Albert Siler had disappeared. Willis Ward had been suspended for a year. So had Mooney's bagmen, Freddie Miller and Freddy Scheih. Gus Dye was gone. Ned Merritt and Scotty stubbornly refused to pull horses. Now Packer, Mansor, and Gray were also refusing. The news seemed to stagger Mooney. Then Scotty delivered the knockout punch: Mooney was to stay away from all of them!

Mooney's temper exploded immediately. Who the hell was Scotty to tell him where he could and couldn't go? Meanwhile, he wanted to know what Scotty had done with the $250 Mooney had given him.

"I thought it was for me."

"That was for Gray."

Scotty protested that Mooney had said nothing about giving the money to Ellis Gray.

Mooney's voice grew louder. "You're a fucking thief!" he shouted.

Mooney's angry words carried into the twilight and mixed with the infield chatter and the smell of cut grass. That bucolic softball field could not have been a better bull's-eye for all that was wholesome and honest in American sport. Big Mooney had chosen to bring his infamy and profanity into the setting. His intrusion was not just a sign of how reckless he had become. It seemed to put a crack right through the heart of everything that was innocent and pure.

"You bastard!" Scotty shouted. "Don't call me no thief! As big a burglar as you are!"

Mooney began slapping Scotty in the face with the back of his hand. But Scotty stood his ground.

"Anybody getting away with what you're getting away with, you got a lot of guts calling me a thief."

Scotty wrestled himself from Big Mooney's grip. Then he pulled out his wallet, withdrew $250 from it, and threw it at Mooney. "Now don't come around me no more," he shouted and jogged back onto the field.

15. "GET GIESLER"

"Get this straight," Jerry Giesler liked to say in his soft voice. "My name is pronounced to rhyme with *geese*. It does not rhyme with *ice*."

For somebody as famous in 1940 as Jerry Giesler, it was odd that he had to remind people how to pronounce his name. But no matter how well known he was, he did not seem to be able to shed the influences of his humble beginnings in the small town of Wilton Junction, Iowa, where he was born in 1886 and grew up the son of a bank cashier. He had gotten his law degree from the University of Southern California in 1901. As a lawyer one of his heroes was the fiery defender Clarence Darrow. But Giesler had huge eyes and a high forehead, and in court his soft voice and milquetoast manner made him look and sound more like Casper the Friendly Ghost than a shrewd and fiery attorney. "Many criminal lawyers are colorful looking," he said. "I am not."

Giesler boasted that he had defended "hoodlums and dipsomaniacs given to maniacal rages," but it was his successful defense again and again of Hollywood celebrities that made him famous. It had begun in 1929 with the sensational trial of the West Coast theater magnate Alexander Pantages, who had been accused of

raping a seventeen-year-old showgirl. He won an acquittal for Pantages and an international reputation for himself.

One after another, show business celebrities who were in legal trouble turned to him with the words, "Get me Giesler." His popularity brought him to the defense of Busby Berkeley, Errol Flynn, Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, Lana Turner, and the stripteaser Lily St. Cyr, who was seeking to be acquitted of the charge that her bubble bath act was indecent. When they criticized him for defending smug and wealthy stars, he argued that ordinary innocence was easy to defend. The true test was defending the innocence of celebrities whom a jealous world was eager to bring down. In court, emotions that he hid behind his "Casper the Friendly Ghost" demeanor often erupted so violently in defense of his clients that he broke the bones of his hands pounding the jury box.

In 1939 he was appointed chairman of the California Boxing Commission, with directions to clean up boxing and especially wrestling. It seemed an odd charge for a lawyer with so many notorious clients, among them gangsters and killers. But he was a sportsman. The football star Red Grange had been one of his boyhood heroes. He knew how to handle celebrities and show people, who treated him as a father confessor. And his gentle courtroom skills were the perfect instrument by which he gained the confidence of shady characters. In a matter of weeks he had sent wrestling's "The Mohican Mauler" and the "Cantonese Crush" back to their jobs as muscular toadies in Turkish baths, and sportswriters paid tribute to him for having quickly cleaned out a "stable full of muck."

In June 1940, just as Big Mooney was interrupting the twilight peace of a jockeys' softball game in Inglewood, Jerry Giesler was appointed chairman of the California Horse Racing Board. For

no pay, and only the aggravating prospect of having to negotiate territorial quarrels among wealthy track owners for racing dates, Giesler set to work. "I am frank to tell you," he declared at his first public meeting in August, "I don't know anything about horse racing." But he pledged himself and his three-man commission to hold open meetings and to give a "fair and square deal for all." Inviting the same kind of confidences that had served him in court, he said that nobody should fear coming to him.

One of the first people to respond to his invitation was chief state steward Edwin J. Brown, who met with him privately and gave him the astounding news. An elaborate jockeys ring had been operating for nearly two years at Hollywood Park, Del Mar, Tanforan, and Bay Meadows racetracks. The leader of the ring, Brown reported, appeared to be a flashy professional gambler and bookmaker named Bernard Einstoss, alias Big Mooney. Most of the jockeys were "bug boys," young and ambitious apprentice riders who were sitting ducks for crooks and fixers. Meanwhile, the higher-ups and big shots behind Big Mooney were still a mystery. It was therefore important, Brown finished, to continue the investigation in secret until he had had uncovered all the big shots involved.

But Giesler had met enough crooks, gamblers, and underworld killers, in and out of the courtroom, to know how cold their blood could run. Their crimes became serial events, each of which failed to satisfy their growing criminal appetites and escalated through time. Mooney needed to be stopped *now*, before his corruption turned into a rampage. He told Brown that the secrecy of the investigation could no longer be preserved.

Giesler was also convinced that youth, when gently pressed by a sympathetic listener, would eventually "pour out its guilt in shame." And as soon as Brown had finished briefing him on the

jockeys ring, he went straight to San Francisco, where jockeys were beginning to gather for the opening of the fall Bay Meadows meet, and he began private meetings with the riders who had been observed in the company of Big Mooney.

It had been over a year since Willis Ward had been suspended at Del Mar for his suspicious ride on Dandy Vale that had made Mooney nearly $200,000 richer. He was the first to pour his heart out to Giesler. But he did so not from guilt. He could not bring himself to be ashamed of having helped keep bankers from seizing his parents' farm. Instead, the motive for his confession was the promise that he would have his riding license restored if he turned state's evidence. Leonard Scott, still upset by the softball field confrontation with Mooney, was next to meet with Giesler, who delivered a quiet and gentle ultimatum: if Scotty didn't talk, as Willis Ward had already done, he would find himself suspended. Then Ned Merritt confirmed that Mooney had made repeated attempts to get him to pull horses. Finally, all three riders named names and pointed fingers. When Giesler was finished, he had the names of half a dozen riders, including Albert Siler, who were part of Big Mooney's ring. They were all suspended indefinitely from California tracks. Publicly, Giesler would say only that the jockeys had their "noses caught in a bear trap." But they would all receive hearings, which would be open to the public and were scheduled for ten o'clock on Saturday, October 26, 1940, in a conference room at Bay Meadows. All of the young jockeys would be expected to show up and plead their cases— including Albert Siler. Even if nobody could tell Giesler where he was.

After he had fled Bay Meadows that spring, Albert Siler had hardly stopped long enough to eat in the new home he had bought his

parents in Richland, Oregon. Then he had set out in his green coupe for the bush leagues again, no longer bothered by what had once seemed a miserable but necessary stepping stone to riding success. He had had that success, or at least a good measure of it. Success had put him at the mercy of the same contract owners who inhabited the bush leagues, only at Hollywood Park and Del Mar they had been richer and even more possessive. Success for him had meant death threats, frightening midnight meetings in moonlit orchards, and pulling horses he knew he could win on. Success had meant fighting for a riding championship, only to lose it on the last day. For Albert Siler, success had meant the keenest disappointments and failures of his young life.

So he had gone back to the bush leagues, this time with enough of Big Mooney's money in his pockets to sleep in cozy small-town hotel rooms. He ate hardy breakfasts and at night sat smoking and drinking in bars that still smelled of the wood stove fires from last winter. He had gone from one county fair to another in his coupe, from Bend to Boise to Walla Walla in June, then on to Missoula in July and Great Falls in early August, farther away from California and Big Mooney, deeper and deeper into a remote landscape where strangers showered him with a desperate friendliness, as if the chance to sit on a bar stool beside a tiny jockey who claimed he had ridden race horses owned by celebrities in California connected them to something beyond their little towns with only railroad tracks and grain elevators.

But no matter where he went, deeper and deeper into the boondocks, those leathery old grooms or hot walkers who had once predicted his fame would, sooner or later, recognize him, and they would tell him they'd heard about the fixes in California.

What had the old grooms heard?

"We heard they was lookin' for you."

It didn't matter who "they" were—Big Mooney or California racing authorities, or worse, murderous men like Bugsy Siegel or Louis Lepke—because he was gone the next day, on the road again, disappearing without a trace.

Finally, in late August he had wound up facedown in the mud on a bullring track in tiny Dodson, Montana, up along the Milk River on the Canadian border. His mount had gone down during the stretch run, and he had bounced through the slop like a colorful beach ball. The first people to get to him were desperate reservation Indians with faces like dried clay who had been at the rail cheering him on.

"He'll be dead before we get him to the hospital," they said.

In the small hospital in Dodson, a doctor cleaned the mud out of his mouth and nose. There was nothing else to be done, the doctor said. The patient was in a deep coma. No telling how long it would take him to die. Probably only a matter of a day or two, since it wouldn't take long for life to leak out of such a mangled runt.

A young nurse who chain-smoked sat at his bedside and read while waiting for him to die. For days he lay like a pallid corpse, neither moving nor speaking, drifting in and out of sleep filled with disconnected dreams.

Then one night after a week in the Dodson hospital, the nurse's cigarette smoke drifted up his nostrils.

His first slow words were, "How about a drag?"

The nurse dropped her book and fled. When he finally left the hospital, they gave him instructions not to ride again for at least a year. But there was no holding him back now. The Peewee from Lowden had found where he belonged, in the bush leagues, only a step above riding bareback in Buttercrick. Sure there were miseries still. But nobody was threatening to kill him. Nobody was

driving a splitting wedge right through the green wood of his life, creating a corrupted half along with another half that was still innocent farm boy.

Two days later he arrived in Halfway, Oregon, ready to ride at the Baker County Fair.

It began drizzling early in the morning on Saturday, October 26, in the Bay Area. At Bay Meadows racetrack, early-arriving railbirds and handicappers, confident that they could pick the winners themselves, ignored the touts in rain slickers in front of the grandstand singing out the wisdom of their selections.

At ten o'clock a.m., Chairman Jerry Giesler called the meeting in the Bay Meadows conference room to order. The room was packed with jockeys, owners, trainers, photographers, and turf writers who stood along the wall with their reporters' notebooks open. Some of the writers were still hung over from the boisterous dinner meeting of the San Francisco Press Club the night before. Giesler had been the guest of honor and delivered an entertaining speech on the challenges of his new job. The man who looked like Casper the Ghost had been "box office," the writers felt. The man with "oomph" and "it." During a question session afterward, he had received numerous inquiries about the jockeys hearing set for Saturday morning. Rumors about the point of the hearing were everywhere. What could he tell them?

He would confirm only that the hearings would be open. There would be no star chamber sessions, no secret votes. He looked cheerful and untroubled and gave no hint that horse racing was about to be hit with a bomb.

Giesler and the two other members from the California Horse Racing Board sat at a table in front of windows that looked out on small shade trees planted when Bay Meadows had opened

five years earlier. Giesler's felt hat with a high crown sat on the table, beside opened reports and a leather accordion briefcase stuffed with more reports that Edwin Brown, who stood with reporters along the wall, had spent a year gathering.

"I wish you would come and sit in the front row, will you please," Giesler began, politely inviting the jockeys who would be heard to come to the front row. "Mister Ellis Gray? Come forward and sit next to Mister Scott . . . Mister Mansor, sit next to Mister Gray . . . Mister Packer?"

Leonard Scott was Giesler's first witness. He sat in a cane chair placed directly in front of the commissioners' table and was wearing a suit and tie. Despite his efforts to appear as a responsible adult, he looked like a little boy whose crinkly hair had been spit-licked flat by his mother before he had gone out the door that morning.

Giesler began gently grilling him about pulling horses while a secretary in a polka dot dress and a cloche hat that hid her face took notes.

"Do you know Mr. Mooney?" he asked at one point.

"Yes, sir," he answered in his slow Texas drawl. He did.

"Do you remember a boy named Siler?"

Giesler's voice was too soft for Scotty to hear. "Who?"

Giesler's courtroom habit was to put yellow markers in critical spots of transcripts and reports. He turned the pages of one of the open reports in front of him and found the marker he wanted.

He spelled Siler's name slowly. "Did Mooney tell you about him?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"What did Mooney tell you about him?"

"He just said that he knew him and wanted to know where he was livin' and how he was doin'."

"Did he say he had given Siler money?"

Scotty nodded.

"Did he say that Siler was one of his most dependable riders?"

"Yes, sir."

It was only a brief exchange during a half hour of testimony from Scotty, but the discussion brought Albert Siler into the room, even if he was at that moment five hundred miles away.

Then it was Willis Ward's turn. He sat with his legs stiff and crossed at the ankles as he gave Giesler and the commission the details of pulling horses at Hollywood Park and Del Mar. He described the meetings at Manchester and Western, the phone calls to the house on Sherbourne and the K-C Smokeshop for directions, the other jockeys who were involved, including Albert Siler again, the scale on which they would all be paid by Mooney for pulling horses, the deliveries of cash from the bagman Iving Sangbusch and then Freddie Miller, and the rank horses who refused to be pulled or were just too good to lose. And finally, he recounted the threats from Big Mooney in the alley behind the Biltmore Hotel.

"You say he slapped you?" Giesler interrupted.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he do anything else?"

"He slapped me and threw me in the car."

There was a sudden dead silence in the conference room. Only the voices of those touts outside hawking their tip sheets carried into the room.

"He slapped you and threw you in the car?" It was classic courtroom Giesler, repeating whatever he wanted to make stick. While he let his words echo in the silence, Giesler turned to another one of his yellow note markers.

"And what did he say to you?"

"He told me he ought to kill me."

"Did he threaten to kill anybody else?"

"Mister Sangbusch. He said he would have to kill him too."

"Did you see any gun on him?"

"No, sir. But there was another man with him had a gun."

"Another man with him had a gun?"

The polka dot secretary lifted her head suddenly and revealed her young face for the first time. Then she dropped her head again and continued writing furiously as Ward went on detailing the frightening encounter behind the Biltmore with Big Mooney and Benny Chapman.

Ward was followed by Tommy Mansor, Steve Gray, Gus Dye, Freddie Miller, and Ned Merritt, each of whom filled in more pieces of the fix. When they were all done testifying, Giesler addressed them all.

Had any of them done anything corrupt of crooked before?

They all shook their heads.

Giesler paused and stared at them, his face reflecting the sympathy he wanted the sometimes hard-bitten turf writers in the audience to feel. These young jockeys sitting in front of him, as well as others like Albert Siler who weren't there, were the *victims*, he wanted it understood. He looked as convinced of their innocence as any celebrity he had ever defended.

Giesler fixed his gaze on Willis Ward.

"Do you have anybody dependent on you for support."

Only his destitute Kansas parents, he answered. "I help them out."

"Why is that?"

"My father's got a tough time. I have got two younger brothers and sisters, besides myself."

Giesler moved his gaze to Tommy Mansor. What about him?

"I send money home all the time," Mansor answered. "My father can't work."

How about Scotty? "Have you got anybody dependent on you?"

With the recent death of his father, he had his mother to take care of, he answered.

"Any children?"

"No, sir."

Gus Dye explained that he was supporting his wife and his folks.

Giesler paused again. Even the most antagonistic witnesses, he knew, would often melt in the face of courtesy and sympathy. But his sympathy now was more than just a courtroom technique. And he drew on the genuine feeling to deliver his summation.

"These boys have families dependent upon them. They are all young boys. . . . And they have certainly been tempted by a snake in the grass who has not only put his poison out, but he has kept on repeating it in a persistent attempt to corrupt the horse racing business."

He continued then as if he were a physician who had been personally monitoring Big Mooney's rising pulse rate with each new reckless escalation of the fix.

"Even after some of these boys were set down, he had the audacity and persistence to come down to Hollywood Park this summer and attempt to poison these boys again."

He paused and smiled at Scotty, who had had the courage to confront Big Mooney during the softball game.

"These boys, I feel sorry for personally," he continued, "because I believe that they are just young kids, that is all, and they

are not mature. They have not the state of mind to think things out . . . and they are tempted with easy money . . . far more than they ever saw before in their lives."

He concluded by pointing out that there was no statute on the books making bribery of jockeys a crime. But he would ask the legislature to act. Meanwhile, he would refer the matter to the district attorneys of Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco counties for their investigation. He would leave it to them to determine whether or not Mr. Mooney could be prosecuted for conspiracy to commit theft and for contributing to the delinquency of "these boys," he said once more, sweeping his hand along the row of them. He promised that they would all receive justice tempered with mercy.

Then he lifted his eyes to the packed room and scowled, no longer Casper the Friendly Ghost. The real culprit in the whole affair, he finished, was Mooney. Wherever he was at that moment, whatever reckless and poisonous new plot he was trying to carry out, wherever he tried to go to escape justice, the law would eventually catch up to him, Giesler vowed, and he would be "properly taken care of."

16. THE BIG SHOTS

"Amazing Scandal Rocks Turf World" the Sunday morning headlines screamed, in bolder type than was used for the news that British bombers had pounded a Nazi convoy. The story that followed included "shocking and sensational disclosures" of bribery and fixed races, of boyish jockeys and death threats, of mysterious, big-shot gamblers from the underworld. It was the worst scandal in racing in fifty years. The sport of kings was ruined.

But it was the sad spectacle of ruined innocence that struck many readers. The pictures of the jockeys that accompanied the stories revealed that they were still just children, sitting there obediently in their Sunday school suits and their spit-licked hair. Those suits only made them look *more* vulnerable and pathetic, as if swaddling their baby-faced innocence in a suit and tie would shield them from gangsters with guns. The stories quoted Giesler from the hearing: "I feel sorry for you," he had told all the jockeys. It was a remark that prompted readers to see their own childhood innocence and vulnerability in those jockeys and swear a silent oath against the bastards who had ruined them.

When Los Angeles district attorney Buron Fitts received reports of the sensational hearing at Bay Meadows, he promised "prosecution to the hilt." He was especially determined to arrest Big Mooney, whom all the jockeys had named as the apparent ringleader. Fitts had already let Big Mooney slip through his fingers twice, once after the raid on the Hollywood Boulevard bookmaking den and again when the recapture of the *Texas* gambling ship had failed to net him. Now, the district attorney was more determined than ever to arrest Big Mooney, and he instructed his deputies to go find him and bring him in.

But where was he? Just weeks earlier, when the Bay Meadows meeting had opened, Mooney had rented a suite again in the Drake Hotel and prepared to recruit more innocent bug boys into his jockeys ring. But by Saturday night, after the CHRB hearing had adjourned, Mooney had already received the news that his jockeys ring had been exposed. San Francisco police who went to the Drake with a subpoena ordering him to appear before the Los Angeles grand jury found that his suite had been hastily abandoned. He had fled to Reno, they were told. Calling itself the "Biggest Little City in the World," Reno was also one of the most notorious, with gambling catacombs hiding an underworld of bookmakers and gangsters. Still, Buron Fitts had rooted gangsters out of sprawling Los Angeles. He did not expect to have trouble eventually finding Big Mooney in tiny Reno.

While Fitts waited for news from Reno, he briefly turned his attention to matters closer to home. It had been four years since his reelection to a third term as L.A.'s district attorney. On the strength of his war-hero image and his public pledges to clean up Los Angeles County, he had held the office longer than any district attorney in Los Angeles history. During his tenure his office had been praised for a steady increase in criminal convic-

tions, all of it done while cutting his budget. He was, it seemed, the perfect public servant.

Now he was facing the voters again. His Democratic challenger was John Dockweiler, a forty-five-year-old Los Angeles lawyer. The contrast between Fitts and Dockweiler was stark. Buron Fitts was from common folk, a war hero, a homely but brave man of action who was credited with having run hoodlums and spies out of Los Angeles. He had dared to defy the gangsters who had twice tried to assassinate him. He had made the city freer of major crime "than any other major U.S. city." He was unlucky, yes, a woebegone looking soul. But his misfortunes, from suppurating war wounds to plane crashes to rattlesnake bites, had made him a fighter.

Meanwhile, John Dockweiler was from a prominent and wealthy Los Angeles family, and he was Hollywood handsome. He had entered politics after he failed as a young actor, acquiring only bit parts in Los Angeles community theater. In 1938, after serving three terms in the House of Representatives, he had failed in his bid to be Democratic governor of California. He smoked a pipe and had no hobbies except reading and horseback riding on his family's ranch. He was a man of privilege and good fortune. His only political asset was a remarkable memory for names and faces.

Dockweiler seemed no threat to Buron Fitts. Dockweiler's strongest support came from organized labor and one rabid advocate named Clifford Clinton, a wealthy businessman who owned a chain of popular Los Angeles cafeterias. Clinton's regular radio attacks on Fitts were mean-spirited and strident: Fitts had failed to prosecute vice; he had consorted with the very gangsters and spies his supporters claimed he had run out of Los Angeles; he had committed bribery and perjury and graft.

The charges echoed the days of New York's corrupt Boss Tweed and industrial politics, when party bosses who operated in the haze and gloom of factory smokestacks "seen their opportunities and took 'em." But this was sunny, hopeful Los Angeles. There were no corrupt political machines. And gutsy, decent Buron Fitts was a far cry from the political bosses of the past. Predictions were that he would win easily. After twelve years in office, he was still gaining in popularity. Meanwhile, Dockweiler was reported to be too ill to even get out of bed to make any speeches or attend rallies. A sickly, rich pantywaist was the last thing Los Angeles needed for a district attorney. Fitts had spent his life fighting pain and incapacitation. Nothing was too daunting for him. With gambling dens and plots to corrupt the sport of kings, Fitts's Republican backers insisted that his reelection was necessary "now more than ever."

Confident of his reelection, Buron Fitts met with Jerry Giesler in Los Angeles early Monday morning after the CHRB hearing. "The time has come to clean house," Giesler told Fitts. "We've only scratched the surface. Most of the jockeys are just kids. Mooney is the front man for higher-ups."

After their meeting, the two men held a press conference and asked for the help of any informants. And in a move that reflected how little each man knew about gamblers, who normally ripped up losing tickets angrily after each race, they called for any bettors whose horses had run for Sweeney to come forward with their dead tickets. Finally, Fitts acknowledged that there was no specific law prohibiting race fixing. But he said he was determined to prosecute every guilty person. He had assigned a special team of investigators to the case, he explained. Even as he spoke, they were fanning out to racetracks up and down California, serving a dozen subpoenas to witnesses who would appear before the grand jury.

Most of the subpoenas were for jockeys who had either appeared at the CHRB hearing or whose names had been mentioned. In the face of Giesler's sympathetic approach to them, the jockeys had been relaxed and forthcoming. At one point during the hearing, they had all broken out laughing over how confused one of them had become in his testimony. But how would they behave before a stern grand jury or in court, under the imperious glare of a humorless judge and sharp attorneys who weren't as sympathetic as Jerry Giesler? There was the danger they would fold, or clam up, or—worse—change their stories. At least one reliable jockey would be critical to the prosecution of the case. They needed a witness with steadiness. Dependability! A witness whose obedience was almost reflexive. They needed Albert Siler. But when those investigators fanned out on Monday morning with their subpoenas, they had no clear idea where he was.

Fitts's investigators found Steve Packer, Gus Dye, Freddy Scheih, Freddie Miller, and Willis Ward at noon on Monday at Bay Meadows exercising horses. The investigators insisted on taking Ward into protective custody, because of rumors of anonymous threats to kill him if he went before the grand jury. But he denied having received any threats and insisted, "I can take care of myself." At midnight on Monday, the five jockeys and the two investigators set out in a car caravan back to Los Angeles for the grand jury hearings. Meanwhile, jockeys Tommy Mansor and Ellis Gray were picked up in San Diego and also brought to Los Angeles, where they joined Leonard Scott, who had already been brought in by investigators.

The eight jockeys began appearing before the grand jury late on Tuesday, October 29. For two days, they repeated the testimony they had given at the CHRB hearings. But they received little sympathy from the attorneys who grilled them in front of

grim-faced grand jurors. And outside the grand jury room, turf writers belittled them for having clumsily fallen off their horses in order to lose. Elsewhere, hundreds of angry bettors, eager to blame somebody else for their handicapping failures, were calling Buron Fitts's office to complain of being cheated at the track. Finally, Giesler himself had shed part of his avuncular image and announced that all of the jockeys, even the ones to whom he had promised immunity for their testimony, had been suspended from California racing indefinitely.

The response from the jockeys was predictable. Facing the grand jurors and, afterwards, reporters, some of their stories began to change. Tommy Mansor and Ellis Gray claimed that, yes, Big Mooney had given them money to pull horses, but they had never gone through with it. Mansor insisted that the horses he was supposed to pull "couldn't have won anyway." Gus Dye seemed surprised to learn that there were other jockeys in the ring, and he couldn't even remember who had paid him money for pulling horses. Leonard Scott said that most of the money he got was for recruiting others into the ring. Finally, Willis Ward seemed so eager to retract some of his statements that he asked reporters to explain to him what it meant to take an oath.

Still, after two days of hearings, the secret testimony from the jockeys was described as "essentially honest." On the basis of that testimony, the grand jury issued criminal indictments and subpoenas for Bernard Einstoss, alias Bernard Mooney, Benjamin "Benny" Chapman, I. W. Kivel, alias "Doc Kebo," Irving Sangbusch, Saul "Sonny" Greenberg, and Willie Einstoss. The racing and betting public had been defrauded, the indictments charged, and each man faced one felony count of criminal conspiracy to commit grand and petty theft. Proving a conspiracy would be difficult, and Fitts knew it. So he searched now for

something else he could hang on Big Mooney and the fixers, something that would stick. The answer lay in the characterization of the jockeys as all young and innocent. They had been taken advantage of because of their youth and inexperience. It was enough, Fitts felt, to charge each defendant with four misdemeanor counts of "contributing to the delinquency of minors." Even if it was legal language that hardly seemed to capture the gravity of the fixers' crimes, it was at least something.

"I don't know anything about this," Benny Chapman claimed when reporters caught up to him on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the other co-conspirators, including Big Mooney, remained at large, along with the mysterious big-shot underworld figures who were said to be behind the fix. They were just "John Does" in the indictments, and it was left to the imagination of the public to guess whether the fix had been orchestrated by Murder Incorporated, Bugsy Siegel, whose name kept popping up in news stories on the Los Angeles underworld, or some ruthless, eastern crime kingpin.

After two days of searching for Mooney in Reno, Fitts's investigators came up empty-handed. Then late in the afternoon on Thursday, October 31, Sonny Greenberg, accompanied by his attorney, surrendered to the Los Angeles county sheriff. "I am innocent of any wrongdoing," he said. He was released on three thousand dollars bail. The bail bondsman who posted his bail told the sheriff's deputies that Big Mooney would also surrender soon. It prompted rumors that he was hiding out in Los Angeles, and Fitts's deputies raced back from Reno to begin combing Los Angeles for him.

In fact, Big Mooney was in San Francisco, meeting with a colorful, forty-year-old, chain-smoking defense attorney named Jake Ehrlich, whose advice to his clients to "never plead guilty"

had become his defense motto. Those who ran afoul of the law, Ehrlich insisted, were simply unlucky. It was an explanation for criminal behavior that made sense to Big Mooney, who had spent much of his gambling life trying to shake bad luck. He had done nothing criminal. He wasn't guilty of anything—except losing too often.

After meeting with Mooney in San Francisco, Ehrlich sent word to Fitts that the two of them were on their way to Los Angeles. They would spend the weekend meeting with other attorneys, then Mooney would surrender to authorities. Shortly before noon on Saturday, Ehrlich phoned Fitts's office from a Hollywood hotel and told the district attorney that Bernard Einstoss, alias Big Mooney, was ready to turn himself in.

Fitts sent two of his deputies to pick up Mooney at the hotel and bring him to his office. An hour later, Mooney arrived at the Hall of Justice, Jake Ehrlich at his side. The corridors were filled with newsmen and photographers who had been following the story. Their voices echoed and rattled off the high ceiling as they jockeyed for picture positions.

Fitts stepped out of his office to meet for the first time the gambler he had been chasing for over a year. Twice Mooney had slipped through his fingers. Now, Mooney was relaxed and smiling graciously, looking nothing at all like the slippery and nervous figure Fitts half expected to greet him.

"—Mr. Einstoss?" Fitts said.

"Mooney," he corrected, insisting on the prestige of his gambling persona.

Fitts told him he was under arrest. He had arranged for an appearance before a superior court judge in the building. He could post bail then.

Fitts glanced at Jake Ehrlich and waited for him to speak.

"I won't be representing Mr. Einstoss," Ehrlich said. He was only there to bring him in, he explained.

How about the others? Fitts wanted to know. Benny Chapman and Doc Kebo and the several John Does—"Will they be turning themselves in . . . as Mister Mooney has done?"

Ehrlich had no idea.

Before the three left to appear in superior court, they posed for a picture sitting at a table in Fitts's office. They were all instructed to smile brightly for the cameras, but the flash bulb explosions only captured the grimness on their faces. Jake Ehrlich sat with his hand on his chin, staring into space, as if he had grown weary of the burden of defending unlucky clients. Big Mooney sat in the middle, the appropriate spot for what the journalists were describing as the "central figure" in the case. He stared at Ehrlich, as if imploring the attorney to change his mind, to take his case, to protect him from this final, outrageous case of bad gambling luck in his life. Finally, Buron Fitts also stared grimly into space, his face bearing a worried look, as if he knew that one more turn of bad luck was just around the corner for him.

It was, and three days later, on election day, Tuesday, November 5, Fitts sat listening to the results. As he waited for news of his own margin of victory in Los Angeles, it seemed very promising indeed that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was easily beating Republican candidate Wendell Willkie across the country. Roosevelt's Democratic backers in Los Angeles were predicting an easy victory for him in southern California. The country had decided that with world war looming, now was no time to be changing presidents. And with prosecution underway for the biggest fixing scheme in American sports since the Black Sox

scandal, it was also no time, Fitts felt, to be changing Los Angeles district attorneys.

Big Mooney had been arraigned in superior court and charged with conspiracy to commit grand and petty theft and contributing to the delinquency of minors. Even though Jake Ehrlich had declined to take his case, Mooney had followed his advice, pled "not guilty," then been released on three thousand dollars bail. Meanwhile, Fitts had assigned two of his best deputies to the case. "We are after the higher-ups," they announced. "We want the men who engineered this scheme." They were the same gamblers, the newspapers reported, who had been behind the Black Sox scandal of 1919. Fitts also reported that he had four sheets of telephone numbers that Mooney had called from the Drake Hotel to Hollywood, presumably of the stars who had been bilked. Fitts was confident that there would be no shortage of prosecution witnesses, among them an informant named Irving Sangbusch, who was still whispering that he knew the details of Mooney's ring inside and out. He may have been lizard-like—on the street they would have been calling him a "mizzler" and a "satchel-mouth"—but all his tips so far had checked out.

It was bad enough, Buron Fitts knew, to have fate disguised as shrapnel and rattlesnakes striking you randomly. No one, especially innocents like Albert Siler and the other bug boys, needed a *deliberate* menace like Big Mooney in their lives. Whoever the big shots behind him were, Fitts intended to prosecute them to the fullest. Let the chips fall where they may. Even if it meant a third attempt to kill him.

Then, at nine o'clock p.m., the election news hit him like a piece of shrapnel from the Meuse-Argonne campaign. John Dockweiler, the failed actor turned politician, the political pantywaist, had won the election by 180,000 votes.

"I have done the best I could," Fitts told a gathering of his disappointed supporters. "I leave without bitterness."

Dockweiler's jubilant supporters were convinced that Fitts had consorted with gangsters, and Dockweiler vowed, "I have only one boss. Myself."

In the coming weeks, Dockweiler promised, there would be "startling revelations." There would be a shakeup of the entire DA's office. All of Buron Fitts's key men would be sacked. Then, as if his failed stage efforts had embittered him for life, he promised to stop running the district attorney's office in a "theatrical manner."

He had nothing to say about what he intended to do to Big Mooney and the fixers.

17. THE DICTOGRAPH MACHINE

"The next time I see you," Big Mooney shouted into the phone to Irving Sangbusch, "I'm gonna kill you."

It was New Year's Day, 1941, and Sangbusch, who had separated from his wife months before, had spent New Year's Eve with a stunning woman named Adele Challette on his arm.

Broadway in downtown Los Angeles had been roped off, and half a million revelers, throwing confetti and blowing noisy snake whistles, had jammed the streets. Then an electrical storm in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, with sheet lightning and the constant rumble of thunder, had added to the mayhem. Sangbusch and Challette had eventually retired to their room in a Los Angeles auto court, where they had continued to celebrate privately. Now, the last thing Sangbusch needed was Mooney shouting at him, and he held the receiver a foot from his ear.

"I'll kill that fucker Willie Ward too," Mooney vowed.

Sangbusch said nothing, because he had figured the threats were coming. Back in November, just days after Buron Fitts's defeat, he had gone before the grand jury and told them everything about the fix. He testified that he had been a part of the conspiracy to bribe jockeys right from the start, when Mooney had laid

out his plan in the Brown Derby Café. He had admitted to having been the ring's bagman, distributing almost twenty thousand dollars worth of bribes to jockeys for pulling their horses at Hollywood Park. He had explained the details of the bookmaking establishments on Sherbourne Drive in West Hollywood and the K-C Smokeshop across from the Biltmore. He had fingered Big Mooney, Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, Sonny Greenberg, and Willie Einstoss. He had explained to the jurors, whose jaws dropped, how Big Mooney had been the mastermind behind the daring plot to sting wise guys in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago. Finally, he had come out of the grand jury room and passed Benny Chapman and Doc Kebo, both of whom were waiting to be arraigned, and he had smiled unctuously, as if begging their forgiveness for having been turned against them.

"I'm gonna kill you!" Mooney repeated into the phone.

Mooney raged and threatened for ten more minutes while Sangbusch listened patiently. He had seen and heard enough of Mooney's incoherent rages to know that the more violent they became, the more likely they were to be followed by a kind of exhausted reason.

Finally, Mooney calmed down. He was prepared to give Sangbusch two thousand dollars if he would recant his grand jury testimony.

Sangbusch had a better plan, he told Mooney. For two thousand dollars, he would flee the country. And he would take Willis Ward with him.

Before the grand jury, some of the jockeys were already backtracking from the testimony they had given Giesler and the CHRB. Meanwhile, Albert Siler was still nowhere to be found. If Sangbusch disappeared with Ward, there would be no one left to give convincing testimony at a trial. Sangbusch's promise to flee the

country sounded promising, but Mooney still wanted a letter under Sangbusch's signature clearing Mooney of all race-fixing charges. He told Sangbusch to bring the letter to a hotel room in Hollywood on January 15. Once he saw the letter, Mooney promised to pay Sangbusch two thousand dollars cash.

As soon as the arrangement had been made, Sangbusch called Edwin J. Brown, who had been paying him fifteen dollars a day as a CHRB informant. Brown was stunned to hear more discussion of kidnapping, bribery, and murder. He told Sangbusch to call Jerry Giesler immediately, but Giesler, who was busy traveling the state as part of his promise to clean up horse racing, could not be reached. Finally, Sangbusch reached the offices of the new district attorney.

It had been a rocky beginning for John Dockweiler, who in December had stood off to the side as Buron Fitts had said goodbye to his staff on his last day in office. "I have no excuses or apologies," Fitts told them. Staff members who had been with him for twelve years began weeping. "I am walking out of here with my shoulders back," he said, his voice choked with emotion, "and my chin up. I have given my best." Then he gave his office keys to Dockweiler and limped out.

Dockweiler immediately asked the staff for pledges of loyalty. But many of them who had campaigned for Fitts's reelection had resigned rather than serve Dockweiler. Those who didn't resign, Dockweiler fired. Then in one of his first speeches in office, he called the Los Angeles Bar Association "gutless and spineless." Officials of the Bar invited him to come and explain himself to angry members, but he declined. Finally, despite charges during the election of rampant corruption and crime in Los Angeles, a two-year investigation into the issue had uncovered "no major organized crime rings in Los Angeles." Gamblers were

betting five hundred dollars a pitch on Angels baseball games. And there were dramatic raids on a bookmaker who had once operated as a bizarre confidence man selling non-existent burial plots in a cemetery called "Valhalla." But it was hardly proof of the rotten underworld that the two-year investigation had set out to expose. Nor was there any proof that Buron Fitts had been a corrupt district attorney, in the pocket of organized crime. Meanwhile, because Dockweiler had fired the chief prosecutor for Bugsy Siegel, the most visible underworld figure in Los Angeles, Siegel's trial had been postponed indefinitely. For a district attorney who had promised to rid Los Angeles of the underworld, it was slow start.

Still, Dockweiler said that he was determined to uncover "all underworld elements debauching horse-racing." To that end, he had assigned two deputy district attorneys to the prosecution of Big Mooney, Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, Sonny Greenberg, and Willie Einstoss, all of whom had been indicted now. The trial was set to begin in March. Some of the Hollywood celebrities who had been fleeced by Mooney and the ring had agreed to testify. But the prosecution's star witness would be Irving Sangbusch, who had turned state's evidence and had been granted immunity. There were no higher-ups, he maintained, no big shot crime bosses, no "John Does" from the underworld. The mastermind for the jockeys ring had been Big Mooney. And everything seemed to be in place for a trial that would convict him.

So after Sangbusch called Dockweiler's prosecutors to tell them that Mooney had offered him a bribe, they told him, "Stay away from Mooney! He's trying to trap you!"

But Sangbusch had boasted to the grand jury that he was an undercover agent for Jerry Giesler and the CHRB. For the moment, he was convinced that *he* was the one who was laying the trap, and he ignored the warning to stay away from Mooney.

On January 15, Sangbusch met Mooney in a hotel room in Hollywood. He and Adele Challette had packed their car with suitcases and hatboxes, and he told her to wait for him in the car while he went inside to negotiate with Mooney. In his suit coat pocket, he carried three letters which Challette had helped him compose, one to the *Los Angeles Times*, another to CHRB officials, a third to the DA's office, all of them recanting his testimony before the grand jury.

In the hotel room Mooney and Sangbusch argued and swore at each other. Mooney said he was skeptical about any promises from Sangbusch, who grew defensive. He was offering to disappear, he said. He would take Willis Ward with him. His car was packed. His lady friend was waiting. Mooney could come out and see for himself if he wanted to.

Mooney wanted to know here the hell he intended to disappear to.

"South America," Sangbusch answered.

"Where in South America?"

Sangbusch had only a vague idea of Latin American geography and countries. There were towering mountains and dank jungles, and a country called Peru.

"I'm going to Peru," he said.

"Where in Peru?"

"I'm going to Lima."

"How do I know that Willis Ward won't come back here to testify?"

"Don't worry. When I take Willis Ward away from here, he'll never be back."

The implication was that Willis Ward, the Kansas farm boy, would wind up a rotting corpse somewhere in the dank jungles of Peru.

So, Mooney wanted to know, where were the letters that Sangbusch had written, recanting his grand jury testimony?

Sangbusch produced the letters that Challette had helped him write. They were just drafts, he explained.

Mooney wanted assurances that Sangbusch would recant his testimony and go through with sending the letters.

"For two thousand dollars," Sangbusch said, "I'll call myself the biggest fucking liar in the forty-eight states."

Sangbusch sounded sincere, and Mooney was eager to take advantage of the offer. If the two thousand dollars that Mooney handed him in a roll of bills didn't lead to Sangbusch's disappearance as promised, Mooney had a backup plan. He had taken the trouble to conceal a Dictograph machine in the hotel room. Exactly as the DA's office had warned, Mooney was laying a trap for Sangbusch and had recorded the entire conversation. It didn't really matter now whether or not Sangbusch disappeared into the mountains and jungles Peru. The recorded conversation of him accepting a bribe and offering to kill Willis Ward would surely destroy his credibility in court.

Sangbusch finally left Mooney's room with the roll of bills in his pocket. As he approached the car where Challette sat waiting, a squad of sheriff's deputies suddenly surrounded him. They made him empty his pockets.

What was he doing with that much cash?

He was working as an undercover agent, he protested, for the CHRB. He had just coaxed a bribe out of Big Mooney. It was action, Sangbusch argued, that would seal Big Mooney's fate in court.

No, they explained, he might have just sealed his own.

With the arrest and jailing of Irving Sangbusch, it became more important than ever for Albert Siler to appear as a convincing

witness for the prosecution. State steward Edwin Brown, who had led the CHRB's investigations into the fix, offered to do his best to find the young jockey so that a subpoena could be issued. But where had he gone? Brown wondered. Probably back home, back to where he had grown up. But where was that? Shooting pool with other jockeys, he seldom spoke about himself or his boyhood, even when pressed. It wasn't just that the work and sweat of farming had bred in him the habit of reticence. In his case, naming all the places across the country his family had tried to settle would have led to a tedious reliving of one failure after another. The simple answer was that he had grown up all over. He was from *everywhere*. At first glance, with 140 million Americans scattered across the country, Albert Siler could have been anywhere among them.

Despite what little was known about Siler, one thing was clear to Brown: the bug boy had been passionate about racing. That narrowed Brown's search significantly. Siler may have been avoiding California tracks and the possibility of confronting Big Mooney, but that wouldn't keep him from riding somewhere. The problem was figuring out where. Back east? Brown remembered the days when bug boys who had broken into racing with a bang on the West Coast had gone back to Kentucky or New York or Florida in search of big purses and racing glamour. Now, the situation was reversed. The big purses and glamour lay on the West Coast. Besides, Brown figured, Albert would never have risked going back east and meeting up with bookmakers who might connect him to Big Mooney and the fixers. Having an *X* carved in his body would be just the *start* of their retribution.

No, Brown figured, he was somewhere in the West. The first possibility was Phoenix, whose winter racing in January and February drew jockeys who were looking for more than occa-

sional mounts at Santa Anita. But Brown could turn up no sign of Albert Siler in Phoenix. Caliente, then, in Tijuana, where they held Sunday racing year round? Albert had ridden there on Sundays in 1939. But that had been over a year ago, and nobody had seen him since.

That left the Pacific Northwest: Oregon, or Washington, where Brown had begun his own career in racing. The chances were good, Brown figured, that Albert had spent the late summer and fall of 1940 riding tracks in Washington and Oregon, perhaps also traveling to bullrings in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, moving from one county fair to another. He might even have crossed into Canada and ridden any of dozens of tracks, small and large, in British Columbia. Or maybe he had sunk so low that he was riding match races in open fields, with no rails or grandstands, where local farm boys bet plug tobacco and bottled beer on the proposition that "my horse can beat yours." So much local prestige was riding on the bets that it was critical to find an experienced jockey like Albert Siler, not some local nimrod rider who couldn't pace a horse.

No matter where he had gone, he was still riding—Brown was sure of that. He was too good a jockey and still too young to have given it up. Brown would have to check dozens of tracks, putting out inquiries to his friends in the racing fraternity in the Pacific Northwest, asking if anybody had seen or heard of a tiny, polite jockey named Albert Siler, whom they sometimes called the "Peewee from Lowden" or "Prince Albert." With Albert riding so many mounts at so many different tracks, something dramatic and newsworthy was bound to have happened to him: he might have fallen off a horse and been injured; he might have been set down for rough riding; or he might have been the leading rider at a brief county fair meet and been celebrated for his

riding. Or a small town journalist somewhere along the way of Albert's travels had recognized him as the same tiny apprentice who had once starred at Hollywood Park and Del Mar. What was the "Peewee from Lowden" doing riding bullring tracks at county fairs? the journalist might have asked in writing, blowing Albert's cover. What was he doing wasting his talent back in the bush leagues?

Two process servers from Los Angeles finally caught up with him in February 1941 walking hots at a ranch in Oregon.

"Are you Albert Siler?" they asked him.

His throat went dry and he nodded. "Yes, sir."

They had been looking for him for months, they said. One of them smiled as he handed Albert the subpoena to appear in superior court in Los Angeles as ordered.

He looked at it briefly and knew immediately what it meant. He had tried so hard to separate himself from Big Mooney and the fixers. But now they were back in his life. He'd have to face Big Mooney in court. Under the imperious eyes of judges and prosecutors, everything that had happened to him would come tumbling out of him, as if he were having to confess some misdeed to his trembling father. Afterwards, if he didn't go to jail, he'd head for the boondocks again, driving from track to track, trying to stay one step ahead of whoever Big Mooney would send to kill him.

18. "THE FATEFUL DAY"

On April 16, 1941, in the courtroom of Los Angeles superior court judge Charles W. Fricke, Deputy District Attorney John Barnes straightened his tie and then stood up to grill his next witness, Albert Siler. "Tell the court," Barnes began, "how you met the man you knew only as 'Mooney.'"

Albert leaned forward in the witness chair and spoke slowly over the low hum of a courtroom fan high on the wall behind him. "It was on June 24th, 1939. At a lonely spot in the Los Angeles hills. I parked on a side street and pretty soon Mooney showed up."

"What did you discuss?"

"He wanted to know if I would agree to pull horses."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him I would if they weren't favorites."

Barnes glanced at a notepad. "How much did Mooney say he'd pay you?"

"He said he'd give me one hundred dollars for long shots and two hundred dollars for short priced horses."

"What else happened during this first meeting?"

"He gave me three hundred dollars and told me to pull three horses."

"—That afternoon?"

Albert nodded. "At Hollywood Park."

"Did you pull them?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

Barnes stepped away from Albert. "Is the man you met that day in the Los Angeles hills here in court?"

"Yes, sir, he is."

"Would you point him out for the benefit of the court?"

Six years earlier, John Barnes had been the Los Angeles prosecutor for Robert "Rattlesnake" James, who had tried to kill his wife by holding her leg in a box with two rattlesnakes. During the court trial, Barnes had introduced the rattlesnakes as evidence in court. Even though one had escaped and terrified the courtroom, Barnes's vigorous prosecution of the case had led to an easy conviction. At the very moment that Barnes faced Albert Siler, Rattlesnake James was on death row in San Quentin, waiting to be hanged. Now, Barnes was inviting Albert Siler to identify a new courtroom rattlesnake, this one named Mooney, who had poisoned the lives of innocent jockeys.

Albert had to stand up to get a good look at the defense table. He ran his eyes along the row of defendants behind the table—Big Mooney, Benny Chapman, Doc Kebo, Sonny Greenberg, and Willie Einstoss.

"That's him," Albert said and pointed. "Mooney."

His face frozen in a murderous stare, Mooney glared back at Albert. It lasted for only a matter of a second, but the stare seemed to Albert as lethal as a sudden gunshot or the stroke of a dagger. It was as if the two were facing each other again in the Del Mar moonlight, and Mooney was threatening to dump him in the ocean. Such a fierce, cold look from Mooney was ordinarily the preface for one of the gambler's tirades, and Albert sat

down quickly. Whatever explosion of anger and profanity was coming from Mooney, he didn't want to be standing in the direct line of fire.

But once Albert had sat down, Mooney turned suddenly to face the courtroom so that everybody could see him. He smiled broadly. Yes, of course, his smile said, he was Big Mooney. He was the very same "gambler of consequence" whom the newspapers had been describing as the "big shot" behind the fix. He was the very same hail-fellow-well-met young gambler whose generosity and bookmaking bravura were already legendary.

Albert's father sat in the back row of the courtroom, dressed in an ill-fitting suit. He had to crane his neck to see to the front of the defense table. When he finally caught sight of Mooney's smiling face, the man looked nothing at all like the underworld villain he had come to Los Angeles expecting to see.

After Albert had finally been served a subpoena, he and his father had driven in Albert's coupe from Richland to Baker, Oregon. There, they had parked the car and boarded the Union Pacific train for Los Angeles. Albert had said so little about the subpoena to appear at a trial for criminals that the family's understanding was that he had somehow been sucked into a gang led by some notorious underworld figure. Meanwhile, his father was taking no chances. He would go along to Los Angeles, he told Albert, for moral support as well as physical protection. He may have had been prone to the nervous shakes, but he could still buck a bale of hay and protect one of his sons from gangsters if he had to.

After he arrived in Los Angeles with his father, Albert was heralded as the "mystery witness" who would seal the case against Big Mooney and the fixers. As he got off the train, Albert wore a

fedora tilted back on his head, giving himself the air of a jaunty, self-confident Bowery Boy instead of the Peewee from Lowden who was about to confront the man who had threatened to kill him.

John Barnes, who only weeks before Albert's return to Los Angeles had been officially appointed by Dockweiler as co-prosecutor of the case, met Albert and his father at the train station and took them directly to the district attorney's office. Since the announcement of his appointment, Barnes had been racing to familiarize himself with the case, studying the transcripts of Giesler's hearings along with volumes of testimony by witnesses before the grand jury. He had also had to interview dozens of potential witnesses who would establish the existence of the jockeys ring and the conspiracy. He had been playing catch-up in the case from the very beginning. Now, the chance to interview Albert Siler, one of his critical witnesses, only days before putting him on the witness stand meant that he had had to rush to get everything in place.

Albert had fidgeted nervously as Barnes flew from one question to another for two hours. Once the script for his courtroom testimony was in place, Albert and his father were taken to the Alexandria Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, where Albert joined the other jockeys who would testify. All of them were together on a high floor of the hotel and were in the protective custody of sheriff's deputies, who had sealed off the floor and been instructed to shoot any suspicious intruders.

The prosecution of the case had begun slowly and deliberately, because building the case for a conspiracy wasn't easy. Barnes and his fellow prosecutors had started by presenting numerous witnesses to the bookmaking activities of Big Mooney and the fixers at the K-C Smokeshop and the house on Sherbourne

Drive. They introduced as evidence long lists of phone calls from the house on Sherbourne to Hollywood celebrities. Then, once the places for the conspiracy had been determined, the bribery charges against Irving Sangbusch were dropped in return for his testimony against Big Mooney. Sangbusch spent three days on the stand establishing the details of the plot to make jockeys run for Sweeney. The defense attempted to discredit Sangbusch for having offered to make Willis Ward disappear in the Peruvian jungles. But he hadn't offered to murder anybody, he insisted. It was Big Mooney who had threatened to kill *him*. Then he had lifted his head like a proud Mephisto and made the courtroom rock with laughter as he used the salty language of touts and railbirds to deliver persuasive testimony on his role as bagman for the fixers.

Following Irving Sangbusch, a parade of Hollywood witnesses had taken the stand, some of them hiding behind glamorous sunglasses in an effort to conceal the shame of having been fleeced by the conspirators. Then one by one the jockeys had begun to testify. Pictures in the *Los Angeles Times* of them dropping water balloons and sailing paper airplanes out of the windows of the Hall of Justice as they waited to be called underscored their boyish innocence. And the suits and ties and felt hats they wore as they took the witness stand failed to conceal their childish vulnerability.

The first to appear was Willis Ward, whose parents had filed a civil lawsuit against Big Mooney, charging him with beating their son behind the Biltmore Hotel. Then Gus Dye, whose father had brought him from Montana to Los Angeles, detailed how he had been recruited into the jockeys ring, and how it was possible to pull a horse without being detected by the stewards. Next, Frank Chojnacki told the jury that Big Mooney had tried to enlist him in the jockeys ring but he had rejected the idea. By

the time Albert took the stand, John Barnes was fairly strutting back and forth in front of his witness, confident in his prosecution of the case.

"Tell the court," Barnes asked Albert after he had identified Big Mooney, "how you pulled a horse named Synod."

A huge binder with copies of the past performance and results charts from the *Daily Racing Form* lay on a small table in front of Albert. He opened the book to pages that Barnes had tabbed for him.

"Bert Reynolds and Gus Dye helped me pull Synod," Albert said.

"Why did you need help?"

Albert dropped his head as he studied the chart in front of him. "He's a tough horse to hold back. During the race, they kept shutting me off and boxed me up on the rail." Albert stopped, looked at Barnes, and grinned. "That way, it didn't look so bad."

Barnes grinned back, reflecting how well he thought the script was playing out.

"But when we got into the stretch," Albert continued with confidence now, "their horses split, and I had to keep taking Synod to the rail and back out again."

Barnes put one foot on the step up to the witness chair and began taking Albert through a recitation, complete with exact dates and races, of all the horses he had pulled at Hollywood Park and Del Mar. On the same day that he had pulled Synod at Hollywood Park, he testified, he had pulled Mar Quick and Fair Cynthia. "That night Mooney brought me three hundred dollars." On a horse named High Haste, he had "thrown the reins away." On orders from Big Mooney, he had failed to give Montecito a "sanitary ride."

Barnes looked suddenly confused. "You failed to do *what*?"

Albert looked up from the *Daily Racing Form* he had been staring at. "I didn't give the horse a sanitary ride," Albert repeated.

"Is that a racetrack expression?" Barnes asked.

He had first heard it from Big Mooney, but he answered, "Yes, sir, it is."

"Does it mean you didn't give the horse a good, clean ride?"

"Yes, sir."

Barnes paused, then continued to question Albert, who testified that a horse named Silver Doctor only ran "with a lot of stick, so I didn't whip him." In still another race, all the other horses ran so poorly, "I couldn't understand what was the matter with them. After we got back to the jockeys' room, we talked about it."

"What did you talk about?"

Several of the attorneys at the table with Big Mooney and the fixers leaped to their feet at once. The other jockeys were perfectly capable of speaking for themselves, they objected. They didn't need Albert Siler offering hearsay.

It was only a small misstep for Barnes, who continued grilling Albert for another half hour, identifying twenty different horses he had pulled at Hollywood Park and Del Mar.

Finally, he said that August 16, 1939, had been his "fateful day."

"—'fateful day'?" Barnes repeated. It sounded like the melodramatic turning point in the life of a princely poet. But what did Albert mean by it?

"Mooney had given me three hundred dollars to pull three horses at Del Mar. I managed to keep only one of the three from winning."

"What happened to the other two?"

Albert grinned again. "They ran away with me."

"Running away"? Barnes was still playing catch-up in the case,

especially the horse racing particulars, and he wanted Albert to explain what it meant.

"I won on both of them," Albert answered and grinned a third time as he remembered his inability to pull Pinkus and Omelet.

Barnes paused and stepped away from the witness box, removing himself from the stage upon which he expected his young witness to deliver his most powerful lines. "So then what happened?" Barnes said.

Albert's face turned suddenly serious. "I met Mooney that night and he was sore."

Just behind Albert, a fluted lamppost with mock gaslights hung over his head like a cluster of small moons. They were the perfect ominous backdrop for Albert's description of the moonlit meeting in the apricot orchard.

Barnes raised his voice. "Tell the court why Mooney was sore."

Albert dared to glance at Mooney. The affable smile he had flashed to the courtroom spectators was long gone. Every word of Albert's testimony was drawing his face tighter and tighter. "He said I had cost him thirty thousand dollars. He told me he had dumped boys in the bay for less than that."

Barnes stared at the jurors while the low flutter of the courtroom fan blew the words "dumped boys in the bay" into the face of the jurors. Little Albert Siler, the polite Peewee from Lowden, had been bullied and intimidated and finally threatened with death by a rattlesnake named Big Mooney. Was there any doubt in the minds of the jurors who the villains were? Barnes's stare asked. Was there any doubt that Big Mooney and the fixers were guilty of an evil conspiracy to corrupt young jockeys as guileless and vulnerable as tiny Albert Siler, who sat shaking now in the mock moonlight?

19. THE PERCENTAGES

Then it was Big Mooney's turn. He took the witness stand wearing a herringbone suit and a colorful tie. Despite the somber glow of the cluster of lamplight moons, his champagne mood filled the courtroom as he smiled broadly. "I never asked any jockey to pull a horse," he insisted. "I just paid them for their best information."

Once Jake Ehrlich had delivered Mooney to the Los Angeles DA's office, he had also put him into the hands of a skillful Los Angeles criminal defense attorney named Paul McCormick, whose perpetually narrowed eyes reflected his intensity and purpose. McCormick narrowed those eyes even more now, so that they appeared to be closed. Half a dozen jockeys had testified that they had received money from Mooney. It would have been pointless for Mooney to deny it. "So why did you give money to all those jockeys?" McCormick wanted to know.

"Tips," Mooney said. "I often paid two hundred dollars for a tip on a horse that the jockey said would lose."

McCormick cocked his head. Paying to find out which horses would *lose*? The logic of it appeared to confound him. He looked at the jury of eight women and four men. They, too, were puzzled.

McCormick turned back to Mooney. "How could you make any money out of such an arrangement?" he asked.

Mooney's answer to the question was part of a script that had been carefully rehearsed, and bailiffs rolled a blackboard to the front of the courtroom. McCormick brought a stick of chalk to Mooney, who got out of the witness chair and went to the blackboard.

"You can beat the races," he began, "if you have certain information."

His words coming in a rush, one knee bouncing in a steady rhythm, he began filling the blackboard with the names of horses and columns of figures and odds—five-to-two and eight-to-one and twenty-to-one—eliminating first one horse and then another, quickly refiguring the odds, re-totaling his numbers and then underlining them, drawing boxes and arrows and circles. He could have been a smooth lecturer in physics, turning only occasionally to address his students—in this case the jury, who watched with utter fascination. Finally he stepped aside so that the jury could see everything he had written on the blackboard. There it was. The proof. "Knowledge that certain horses are going to lose changes the percentages," he said. Then he repeated what had become his gambling creed. "Percentage has got to win in the long run."

The question had been how could he win if he focused on the losers. His lecture at the blackboard had come across as a spontaneous answer. But it had been as scripted as Albert Siler's testimony. Every word and blackboard chart, every figure and graph had been part of a carefully crafted defense strategy. Yes, Big Mooney and the fixers had paid jockeys. But what they had paid for were tips on the probable *losers*—sometimes two or three in the same race. Those tips helped Mooney to narrow the choices.

Combined with his brilliant handicapping, it helped him determine which horse would *win*.

"On some days I won as much as four or five thousand dollars," he said. "On other days, I went broke."

Again, McCormick cocked his head. Why was that? He asked.

"I got lots of tips. But some of them didn't turn out to be right. Lots of times they said horses would lose, and the horses they thought would lose, would win."

Then McCormick took him to the next scene in the script. Did Mooney ever get tips on which horses would *win*?

Sure he did, Mooney answered. "One day Leonard Scott was riding a two-year-old with a thing called 'the battery.'"

McCormick stopped him before he could go on. "What is this battery?"

Mooney had been smiling steadily throughout his lecture. But now his face turned earnest as he finally had his chance to strike back at Scotty for having called him a liar during the softball game. "Well, the way it was explained to me," he began, as if he didn't understand crookedness, "the battery is a little thing you put in your hand and the jockey kind of hits the horse on the head or the neck and an electric shock makes the horse go forward. So Scotty told me he was going to ride this horse the next day with a battery." Mooney had subsequently bet heavily on the horse. "Which lost," he added ruefully, "with his battery and all."

It was a master courtroom stroke. In one quick anecdote, Mooney's testimony turned news accounts of the trial upside down. The innocent bug boys, whom Jerry Giesler had called "just kids," were now the venal villains, peddling inside information for money to all comers and using illegal devices during races. Mean-

while, Big Mooney and the fixers were the hapless victims who had been swindled.

It was yet another reversal in what had seemed like an overwhelming case for the prosecution. After Albert Siler's testimony, headlines in the *Los Angeles Examiner* proclaimed, "Jockey Tells of Gambler's Threats After 'Fix' Failed." The picture accompanying the story showed Albert sitting outside the courtroom with a frightened face, trying to find comfort in the smoke of an Old Gold cigarette. Then Leonard Scott had taken the stand and described Mooney's eruption in the bosky twilight of a softball field. Tommy Mansor, Steve Packer, and Ellis Gray had gone next, each of them quietly confirming that Mooney had given them money to pull horses. Attempts by the defense to shake them out of their testimony were futile. Big Mooney and the fixers, it seemed, were doomed.

But then Freddie Miller had taken the stand to deny that he had been Mooney's bagman at Del Mar. Yes, he admitted, he knew Mooney and had met with him frequently, but it was only to pass along information on which horses would lose. The testimony played perfectly into Big Mooney's argument that his so-called "jockeys ring" had only fed him tips. But Ned Merritt had followed Miller to the stand and told of Mooney's repeated efforts to get him to pull horses. It was "Honest Ned Merritt," the newspapers said, whose cooperation with racing officials and the prosecution had broken the case against Big Mooney wide open, and again it was clear that the jockeys were the victims.

The southern California weather had been almost tropical as the end of April approached and turned the courtroom into a packed hothouse as steamy as a boxing arena, smoke drifting up into the lights. With all the reversals, the trial had become justice as sport, with confusion and tension rising steadily on the

faces of the jurors as the lead swung back and forth, back and forth, that single courthouse fan useless against the suffocating confusion, first the prosecution leading, then the defense.

Finally, the lead swings became even wilder. The defense called jockey Steve Packer back to the stand and showed him a letter to an ex-jockey named "Izzy" Pelgren, written on Hotel Alexandria stationary and signed "Steve." The letter stated boldly that no jockeys had ever pulled horses. They had only gotten money for giving Mooney tips. Again, it was exactly what Mooney was arguing. But before the defense could begin celebrating, Packer said that the letter was a fake. Two handwriting experts agreed. Furthermore, Izzy Pelgren told prosecutors that Mooney had given him money to forge the letter. "The letter is nothing but lies," Pelgren insisted, and now it was the prosecution that was celebrating.

But wait. As the courtroom temperature rose still higher, the defense agreed that, yes, the letter was a clumsy forgery. But then they produced the *real* one, written by Steve Packer on notebook paper, not stationary, stating that no jockey had ever gotten money from Mooney to pull horses. Packer returned to the stand. "I wrote that letter after I was under guard at the Alexandria Hotel," he admitted. "Mooney never told me to pull no horses, no!" he insisted. The CHRB had promised him they would give him back his riding license if he came clean and agreed to finger Big Mooney.

"Jockey Changes Testimony," the *Los Angeles Times* announced, and the defense called for a dismissal of the case against Big Mooney and the fixers. Judge Fricke immediately denied the motion for dismissal. It was up to the jury, he said, to decide what Packer's letter meant, if anything. It was up to the jury to determine if Big Mooney and the fixers were guilty of a criminal conspiracy to defraud the public and corrupt young jockeys.

Judge Fricke's ruling and the continued heat wave had made the jury edgy and restless as April came to a close and the defense began presenting their witnesses. The indictments had charged all of the defendants with meeting and conspiring on twenty-two different occasions and places, from the house on Sherbourne Drive to the alleyway off Manchester and Western. Benny Chapman had been the first defendant to take the stand and try to rebut those charges. Yes, he admitted, he was a gambler and bookmaker but certainly no part of a conspiracy to bribe jockeys to run for Sweeney. He swore that until the trial, he had never even met Irving Sangbusch. "I work alone," Chapman insisted, "doing business under my hat. I've never talked to a jockey in my life." Doc Kebo admitted that the "K-C Smokeshop" stood for Kebo and Chapman, but he testified that, like Chapman, he was an independent businessman. The actor Lew Brice denied Sangbusch's allegation that he had been present at the Brown Derby the night that Mooney was alleged to have met with him and the other conspirators to explain his plot for fixing the races. Finally, Sonny Greenberg swore that the only other defendant he had ever even met was Big Mooney.

Assistant District Attorney William E. Simpson had gray hair and dimpled cheeks, and he was never without a small smile that reflected a warm heart. But his kindly face belied how scorching and aggressive he could be cross-examining witnesses, and after Mooney finished his blackboard lecture and returned to the witness stand, Simpson tore into Mooney in an effort to shake him from his testimony. But Mooney continued to maintain that he had only paid jockeys for tips. He said it was all part of being a "gambler of consequence" who operated gambling parlors all over California.

"Where did you get the money to start these places?" Simpson asked.

"Benny Chapman bankrolled me."

"And did you tell Chapman what you wanted the money for?"

"If you borrow money from good people, they don't ask you what you want it for."

For another ten minutes, his voice filled with scorn and disbelief, Simpson tried to get Mooney to admit that Chapman and Kebo had a business interest in the operation of his gaming parlors. But Mooney insisted there was no conspiracy to do business with them or anybody else, especially to fix horse races.

But didn't Mooney have bank accounts with the two of them?

"No. But I had some safety deposit boxes."

"Why do you need so many safe-deposit boxes?" Simpson wanted to know. "And where are they?"

Mooney laughed. "I had so many, I can't remember them all."

"Was there one in the Merritt Building? At Eighth and Broadway?"

"Yes. If I remember correctly. I had three there at one time. Maybe more."

"Why?"

"To keep my various gambling transactions separate. For instance, when the lawyers club would meet and I would organize a smoker for them and have gambling."

Mooney glanced at the jurors and delivered his broadest smile. He had connected lawyers, including Simpson, with gambling and lurid smokers and stripteasers. So why was Big Mooney the one on trial?

Simpson changed the subject quickly. "Didn't Benny Chapman have a duplicate key to one of your safe-deposit boxes?"

"Yes. But that don't mean there was a conspiracy between us!"

Why was he making payoffs to jockeys?

"That was for information on the condition of the horses I was betting on."

How many different jockeys had he paid?

"Well, there was Scheih. Dye. Scott." He paused to remember who else. "Mansor. Gray." He rolled his eyes to the ceiling. "Packer. Merritt . . . Siler."

Little Albert Siler? The poster boy for princely innocence? Simpson saw an opening now and jumped for it. "How many times did you pay Al Siler?"

"I cannot remember exactly."

"Do you know what the total was?"

"Well, it was more than five hundred dollars. I remember I paid him six hundred dollars at one time alone."

"Would you say it would exceed three thousand dollars?"

"I'd say about a thousand, I'd guess."

"Always in cash?" Simpson's question dripped with implications of sinfulness and greed.

"Yes."

"Where did you keep that . . . *cash*?"

"I kept it in an envelope I used to give to the clerk at the hotel in Del Mar."

Seedy hotels and night clerks and filthy cash in plain brown envelopes—it was the shabby world of gamblers and crime that Big Mooney had dragged little Albert Siler and the other jockeys into.

For weeks, first Benny Chapman, then Doc Kebo, followed by Sonny Greenberg, Willie Einstoss, and finally Big Mooney had insisted there had been no conspiracy, no fixing of the races. All that cash—thousands of dollars of it—had been for nothing more than tips from the jockeys. The prosecution had yet to get Big Mooney and the fixers to admit that the money had been paid to bribe the jockeys to run for Sweeney.

Simpson brushed back a wayward lock of gray hair from his forehead and tried now to make the connection. "When you paid the money for tips, did you believe that the jockeys would try to prevent their horses from winning in order to *earn* the money?"

"I didn't know whether they would or not."

"Do you believe the jockeys were influenced to perform any dishonest acts?"

"I never gave it no thought."

"Do you believe that the public would bet on these horses if it was generally known that you paid money if the horse lost?"

The attorneys at the defense table leaped to their feet at once like a team of yell leaders. Objection! Objection! Objection!

Sustained.

Simpson brushed his hair back again. "Well, did you believe that you were doing anything corrupt or dishonest?"

The defense attorneys had hardly sat down before they leaped to their feet again. Objection!

Sustained.

In its closing statements to the jury, the defense argued that nothing was more convincing of the defendants' innocence than the absence of any bettors claiming to have lost money on fixed races. Wouldn't they have been standing in long lines in court, demanding the right to testify, if they had been swindled? There

was also no evidence to show that all the phone calls from the house on Sherbourne or the K-C Smokeshop were for the purpose of corrupting jockeys. Meanwhile, there were suspicions that the jockeys who had testified had done so on the promise that their licenses to ride in California would be restored. Finally, Mooney was just a naïve gambling man trying to buy tips, a self-confessed "squirrel" and a chump, who lost as much as he won. He and Chapman and Kivel were just three friendly gamblers who happened to be Jews and who did each other favors now and then. But that didn't mean they didn't deserve a fair trial.

For three days Deputy District Attorney John Barnes presented a closing statement for the prosecution. It was one of the longest speeches anyone could ever remember in a Los Angeles court. At the same blackboard upon which Big Mooney had given his lecture on the "percentages," his voice thick with the same drama he had used to introduce rattlesnakes in court, Barnes drew what he called a "spider web of intrigue" which he said represented the foul conspiracy of Big Mooney and the fixers. For months the newspapers had referred to the "big shots" who were behind the fix. It was a term that suggested criminal conduct, and the prosecution was eager to keep it alive in the minds of the jurors. Now Barnes argued that Benny Chapman and Doc Kebo had been the brains, the big shots, behind the conspiracy. Everything emanated from them. Sonny Greenberg had helped lure the bug boys into that spider web of corruption. Big Mooney was the front man for the conspiracy. "He did the rough work," including the threats to shoot Willis Ward and throw Albert Siler in the ocean.

Then William Simpson took his turn for the prosecution. All five defendants had lived outside the law all their lives, Simpson

concluded. They had hatred and contempt for the law. They had even tried to fix the evidence in the case by introducing forged letters. Simpson's voice rose. Big Mooney and the fixers had cheated John Q. Public, and they had corrupted young, innocent jockeys and made them prostitutes in their own profession. All that was left of the poor jockeys, especially Albert Siler, who had been forced to flee to the bush leagues to get away from Big Mooney, was their bleached bones. The defendants were all termites, Simpson concluded, nearly shouting now, "betrayers of the sport-loving public, contaminators of the sport of kings!"

20. JULY 4, 1946

"Can you ride him?" the trainer asked.

Even in the morning half-light, it was obvious that the beautiful chestnut colt was rank. He wouldn't stand still, and he tossed his head and crabbed sideways as the trainer gripped his halter.

But Albert Siler didn't hesitate. "Yes, sir. I can ride him."

A crowd of grooms, hot walkers, and exercise boys gathered to watch. For months, word of mouth around Pleasanton racetrack had been, "If you want a colt broke, get Al Siler." He broke them all eventually, no matter how wild and unmanageable they were. He credited his success to all the mustangs and wild colts he had broken as a child riding to school in Lowden. But this colt was the rankest anybody could remember. And the small crowd that had gathered had no idea that in less than a year the horse would win the Kentucky Derby. As rank as he was, that seemed impossible. They were there to see if Albert Siler had finally met his match in fractious colts.

His name was Jet Pilot, and his owner was the cosmetic queen Elizabeth Arden Graham, whose affection for her horses often led her to rub them with her company's astringents and facial creams. Just two month earlier, however, twenty-two of her

young horses had perished in a disastrous barn fire on her farm in Maine. Jet Pilot, who had been shipped out the night before the fire, had been one of only two lucky survivors. Arden's attachment to the ornery colt had only deepened. She had sent him west to be broken and properly trained. Now, Albert thought he detected the sweet smell of perfume in the air, mixed with traces of the acrid odor of fireworks from the previous night's celebrations at the Alameda County Fair.

The combination of smells seemed to agitate Jet Pilot. But Albert quickly threw a tiny exercise saddle on the colt.

"He has to be handled carefully," the trainer warned him.

The comment was a reminder that the colt's glamorous owner, who fired trainers repeatedly for mishandling her stock, could be as difficult as her horse.

Albert cinched the saddle, then took the halter from the trainer. The circle of spectators stepped back. Splashes of sunlight were beginning to appear behind the notches of the Livermore hills. It was going to be another scorching day in the Pleasanton Valley for the Fourth of July races. Albert, who had already exercised a dozen horses that morning, approached Jet Pilot, who stood his ground. Then Albert laid his hand on the colt, and with a sudden leap he was in the saddle. Jet Pilot immediately began pivoting in a circle that sent the spectators scrambling. But after two swirls he straightened himself and headed down the track at a jagged walk. He went past the grandstand once, still crabbing and tossing his head. At the end of the grandstand, Albert wheeled him and headed back. By the time he passed in front of the circle of spectators, he knew Jet Pilot was settled. He wheeled the colt again. Then, as he had done so many times breaking colts in Lowden, he reached behind the saddle, grabbed a fold

of horsehide, and pinched it. Jet Pilot broke into an immediate gallop and disappeared down the track.

Albert brought him back ten minutes later and dismounted in the circle of onlookers who had had to strain to follow his progress against the sunrise.

"He's fine. He'll do OK," Albert said. Then he headed for the barns to go back to sleep.

It had been five years since the trial in Los Angeles had ended. After the closing statements, Judge Fricke had sent the jury off to deliberate. But he had instructed them to consider twenty-five possible verdicts against Big Mooney and the fixers, and the confused jury had gone into seclusion. Like the readers who had followed the long trial daily in the newspapers, they were also angry because the sport of kings had been ruined, and *everybody* seemed guilty—gamblers, fixers, jockeys, racing officials, even distant state lawmakers in Sacramento, who hadn't thought to make it illegal to fix races.

After deliberating for three days, one of the female jurors asked for a change of clothes. After five days, the foreman asked for bailiffs to bring in a chalkboard so that they could untangle the snarl of possible verdicts. Finally, after six days, the jury admitted to Judge Fricke they were stumped. Not by the facts, but by the law. What was a conspiracy after all? they wondered.

The eventual verdicts reflected their confusion. Willie Einstoss and Sonny Greenberg were acquitted. The jury was hopelessly split on the guilt of the so-called big shots behind the fix, Benny Chapman and Doc Kebo. They could of course be tried again, but after three months and fifty thousand dollars for the first trial, nobody expected a retrial.

Only Big Mooney was found guilty, of two misdemeanor counts of contributing to the delinquency of minors—Willis Ward and Albert Siler. The "gambler of consequence" who had fixed races, defrauded the public of hundreds of thousands of dollars, stung gangsters, corrupted young jockeys and then threatened to kill them—he had escaped with the light sentence of one year in county jail and a fine of one thousand dollars! There was only one explanation for the prosecution's failure: Fitts's backers had argued all along that he was honest and dedicated, and now switching prosecutors in the middle of a case had proved unnecessary and fatal. Despite John Dockweiler's pledge to clean up the district attorney's office, he had failed in a case in which the evidence had seemed overwhelming.

Despite the fix, in the months immediately following, racetrack betting jumped throughout the country. The exception was California, where wagering fell considerably. It seemed hollow when turf writers from the "Land of Perpetual Sunshine" speculated that it might be the weather, and not the fix, that explained why interest in horse racing had fallen.

Struggling to escape the impression that what had happened was all part of the screwball morality of Hollywood, California racing officials reacted hastily. At Santa Anita Park, stewards were taken to the judges' stand and made to demonstrate their "powers of sight and observation." It was as if the whole scandal could be blamed on poor eyesight. Then, in order to protect the jockeys from crooked gamblers, Jerry Giesler ordered tracks to keep the lists of jockeys and their mounts secret and to lock up the riders until post time. Unfortunately, what was described as a "sharp blow at crooked gamblers" was also a sharp blow to honest ones, who needed the jockey information to handicap wisely, and the reaction from the public was predictably angry.

The secrecy rule was playing "merry hob with handicappers," turf writers complained. Stung by a firestorm of criticism from racing fans, Giesler quickly voided the ruling.

The dramatic struggle between innocent and terrified bug boys and evil gamblers represented a classic face-off between good and evil. The fixers were able to operate as freely as they did because bug boys who had ridden at county fairs for pennies and breakfast were as vulnerable as the midway shooting gallery targets at those same fairs. But cops and district attorneys, from San Francisco to Bakersfield to San Diego, ignored the threat to vulnerable innocence, and they announced crackdowns on bookmakers and began raiding their smoky parlors. In San Mateo they jailed a suspicious man who was "slouching around the barns of Bay Meadows race track." It led to the arrest of a ring of bookmakers who used pocket-sized shortwave radios with microphones disguised as boutonnières to pass along race results to bookies all over the country. Meanwhile, California politicians placed a race-fixing law on the books that was so poorly drawn that it criminalized legitimate practices. Finally, a frustrated Jerry Giesler announced that if racing couldn't be cleaned up, the state would step in and operate all tracks.

In time lawmakers, the police, and racing officials grew less scattergun in their approach to the problem. Hollywood Park put in place a Performance Analysis Department to spot inconsistent performances from horses and jockeys. Eventually, to facilitate that spotting, rooftop stewards had small cameras mounted on binoculars for various film angles of each race. It wasn't long before they were taking 16mm films of each race, which were processed and then pored over by stewards looking for telltale signs of horses running for Sweeney. Television took the precautions even farther, with sixteen individual screens

stacked against one wall of the stewards' perch at Hollywood Park. Three stewards watched each turn and stretch drive from so many camera angles they could have been monitoring a lift-off from Cape Canaveral. But even that provision, which soon spread to major tracks all over the country, didn't stop a small group of jockeys at the county fair in Elko, Nevada—where there were no cameras and only buckaroo stewards—from fixing four days of racing. They were never caught, and fixes and rumors of them kept returning to the sport like water in a beach sand hole. Fifty years later, at the very Pleasanton racetrack where Albert Siler had broken Jet Pilot, one of the jockeys from that Elko ring looked back at that era and observed, "This wasn't the most honest game in the world."

No one seemed to mind. After all, Los Angeles turf writers observed, there were already seventy ways in which a horse could lose a race. What difference did it make if there were now seventy-one? Grantland Rice offered his cynical observation that "there is nearly always chiseling in racing." The worst cynics seemed to be from among the very prosecutors in the case. Ninety percent of all races were fixed, one of them claimed, as if the widespread practice excused the prosecution's failure to make a criminal example out of Big Mooney and the fixers. It didn't help either when Jerry Giesler continued to try to crack down on what he called the "gee-gees" in horse racing—greed and gamblers. The horsemen responded by trying to get Giesler fired for what they said was his courtroom habit of Hollywood sensationalism.

The suspicion and cynicism seemed all a part of the "Sport of Kings," as if there was something inherently dishonest about a sport that owed its origins to indolent kings and Bedouin horse traders who lived in tents. To shake fans from their cynicism, it took an occasional Seabiscuit, or decades later a majestic Buck-

passer, or, as 2005 ended, a little-known horse from California named Lost in the Fog who could *not* lose. Otherwise, suspicion was as much a part of horse racing as hope. And cursed incurably with that suspicion, railbirds moaned that dishonest owners and trainers, eager to escape the watchful eyes of stewards and clockers, were secretly working their horses out on the "slades in Utah."

After the trial Judge Fricke had gathered the jockeys together and advised them all to carry pistols. "If you see Mooney, shoot him first," the judge told them all. "Then come see me." It was advice that Albert Siler hardly needed. The murderous stare that Big Mooney had briefly flashed after Albert had identified him in court had been warning enough. Besides, Albert felt, a gun would have been useless against such determined vengeance. Flight was again the answer, back to the boondocks, to places so remote and countrified they would never draw somebody as flashy as Big Mooney.

Albert stayed for a few days at the new home he had bought his mother and father in Richland. There, his brother Jim, just turned nineteen and looking for adventure on the road, decided to join him and be his valet. The two of them set out for the meet at Longacres racetrack in Seattle, where Albert was promptly suspended for three days for beating another jockey with his whip during a fierce stretch drive. After months of steady riding, Albert refused to accept three days of doing nothing, and that night in a Seattle bar, filled with beer and restlessness, he told his brother Jim, "We're gonna go bumming. We're gonna ride the rails."

The two of them stumbled into a railroad marshalling yard. For Jim Siler, riding the rails promised exactly the road adven-

tures he was looking forward to. For Albert, returning to the bush leagues promised continued avoidance of Big Mooney. But when Albert tried to stand up on the flat car they jumped onto, he was too full of beer and recklessness to steady himself, and he promptly fell off.

It was the end of their railroad adventure but not Albert's flight. He sold his precious green coupe, which was too small for the two of them and his riding tack, and he bought a spacious, four-door Hudson with a back seat where they could sleep on the road. They headed up over the Cascade Range and into Canadian country so remote and wild that Albert called it the "boonsticks," because it was too wild to be called "the sticks," and too desolate for the "boondocks." They went from one fairground to another, staying no more than a day or two in each place, Jim walking hots—cooling tired horses after races—and Albert riding with reckless abandon, because he had nothing to lose—if they suspended him he could take off again—until they were somewhere far up in Canada—neither one of them was sure exactly where—at a track with no rails, where he had cut across the infield to win a race and was given the heave-ho, and they were on the road again.

In late August he rode the Hill County Fair in Havre, Montana. Then he decided that even that wasn't remote enough, and by the fall of 1942, with World War II raging, he had enlisted in the navy, telling friends he expected to wind up in "Timbuktu." Instead he wound up in Australia, which was nearly as remote as Timbuktu, and once there he went AWOL to ride horses at a small, out-of-the-way track. When military police finally caught up with him, he was riding in his Navy blues, and they accused him of disgracing the navy.

"It must be a little biddy outfit," he told them, "if somebody like me can disgrace it."

A year later he was back in the United States, riding the county fair in the little town of John Day, in central Oregon. One day during the fair he walked into a restaurant in town wearing his green vest and a black cowboy hat with a sixteen-inch crown. The odd hat made him look taller than he was, and the vest had to be stretched to button shut over a chest muscled by years of riding and hard work. And what had once been a baby face was now handsomely hardened from his years in the bush leagues, his troubles with Big Mooney, and the U.S. Navy.

Freda McKinney, the young waitress who served him, was part Indian, with darkly attractive features. Her desperately poor family had come to Oregon in the twenties in a horse-drawn covered wagon with metal wheels. She had learned to cook for ranching crews in Montana and Oregon, and she was taken by the polite, shy smile behind Albert Siler's obvious hunger.

"What would you like to eat?" she asked.

They were married a year later in a small ceremony in Oregon. Fed by Freda's cooking, he had gained weight but continued riding at county fairs. He told her very little about why he was reluctant to return to California. He explained only that gangsters, whom she assumed were henchmen of the late Al Capone, routinely sliced jockeys from cheek to cheek across their bottoms so they couldn't ride any more. "They would have done it to me, too, if I didn't do what they asked."

In the fall of 1945, buoyed by the country's victory celebrations at the end of the war, he found the confidence to return to northern California, to the little town of Pleasanton, site of the oldest racetrack in the United States. The quaint town and its nearby hills and canyons had once been a mini-Hollywood for early films featuring Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Buster Keaton. Meanwhile, the new Hollywood, which had proved so dangerous

for Albert, was three hundred miles away, and Pleasanton was as close as Albert wanted to get. Still, he had brought his brother George along just in case he and Freda needed protection.

They lived in a tack room in the shedrows. Albert walked hots, mucked stalls, and galloped horses at dawn. Pregnant with their first child, Freda hauled a hamper of dirty clothes daily to the shedrow laundry.

Albert and George teased her for waddling like a duck.

"One of these days," she told them, "I'll put a bushel basket on *your* waist, fill it with rocks, and see how *you* walk."

There had been no sign of Big Mooney or the fixers. He had probably fled, Albert decided, to escape his own reputation in California for being a crooked gambler. Or maybe he was in prison somewhere else, serving time for having finally carried out one of his threats.

At Pleasanton a few grooms recognized Albert and pestered him: wasn't he the same Albert Siler who had been such a sensational apprentice rider before the war at Hollywood Park and Del Mar? Where had he been? And what was he doing in Pleasanton, walking hots, mucking out stalls, and galloping rank colts? He had once been headed for the top, as good a rider as George Woolf and Ralph Neves. Railbirds who recognized him stuck programs in his face and asked for his autograph.

It had encouraged him to believe that he could return to riding and enjoy success and fame again. He began a crash program to lose weight. He would swaddle himself in three pairs of pants, layers of sweatshirts, and an exercise suit. Then he would sit for an hour in his brother's car parked in the hot sun. After he had cooked himself he would stumble out and jog the alleyways between the barns, grunting and wheezing and stirring up the high-strung horses. Finally, Freda and George would

strip him and wring a gallon of water out of his clothes. At night he would drink Pluto Water or the foul emetic that he and Raymond Adair had invented.

In late 1945 Albert and Freda became the proud parents of Margie, whose innocent, chirpy face made him more determined than ever to return to the glories of racing. But no matter how much weight he lost, it would come right back, as if weight sought its own level like water. Gaining weight made him silent and moody. At night, to strengthen his hands, he sat squeezing a rubber ball and drinking beer while he quietly cursed the courts, racing officials, and most of all the gangsters and gamblers who he said had corrupted racing. It was as if Big Mooney was to blame for the inevitable growth and explosion of weight that most jockeys suffered and struggled against during their careers. And for the rest of his life, each new pound he gained, each new inch he added to his chest or waist was a painful reminder to Albert Siler of how he had struggled to hold off Big Mooney, and it was all cause for another beer and a new round of quiet cursing.

Four F-80 Shooting Star jets zoomed over the Pleasanton Fairgrounds after performing a formation pass over Oakland's Lake Merritt for Fourth of July ceremonies in 1946. The roar, trapped and magnified by the Pleasanton Valley, woke up Albert. He had broken Jet Pilot at dawn. Now the four passing jets signaled the end of an era of hardscrabble farming and endless searching for a new Eden. It had all been the soil for his dreams of horseracing fame. He was only twenty-six-years-old, but it was time to give it up. His big chance had come and gone as quickly as the opening between horses during a race. You either went for it and shot through to victory, or the opening closed on you and you finished far in the rear. For him the opening had closed. The race was over.

He got dressed and found Freda and told her he wanted to go out and watch the races. Even if he was only standing at the rail with all the railbirds, he said, it gave him the same thrill he had always experienced at Hollywood Park, when he straightened out his mount for the stretch run and the roar of the crowd washed over him like surf.

There were no seats left in the grandstand, so they made their way into the center of the mob of railbirds packed in front of the grandstand. The noisy chatter of the crowd made his back tingle, as if he were in a post parade again at Hollywood Park, and the nervous excitement of the crowd carried onto the track and made jockeys as well as horses skittish.

The call to the post had just sounded when Albert spotted him.

"Oh, oh," Albert said.

Freda took his arm. "What is it?" she said.

"Be on your guard!"

That morning, while Albert slept, a team of FBI agents had swept into the shedrows and arrested a groom for murder. They had dragged him off in handcuffs, and it had taken the rest of the morning for the grooms and hot walkers and horses to settle down. Now Freda wondered if those same FBI agents were back to arrest more murderers.

"Al," she repeated, "what is it?"

"It's him," he whispered. "Mooney."

"—'Mooney'?" She couldn't recall ever having heard the name. But she assumed it was one of Al Capone's henchmen, heading straight for them.

Big Mooney held his head high and wore his smart fedora. His tie was as flashy as the one he had worn in court. He had the same

strut and bounce with which he swept into gaming parlors and set up the house with champagne after winning a big bet.

Even if he hadn't just won a big bet, he had every reason to strut. As soon as he had served his short sentence in the Los Angeles County Jail, he had been turned loose and returned to his life as a gambler of consequence. He promptly appeared as the prosecution's chief witness against Irving Sangbusch, who was on trial for trying to bribe Big Mooney. It had taken the jury only twenty minutes to convict Sangbusch. It left Mooney feeling vindicated. Sangbusch had been the crook, not him.

Despite the jaunty hat, despite the strut, despite a broad, toothy smile, to Albert the Big Mooney who approached him was the same menacing figure who had threatened to kill him that dark night in the apricot orchard overlooking Del Mar. But Mooney wouldn't dare do anything violent in the middle of a crowd, Albert hoped. Yet, why wouldn't he? This was the same volatile Mooney who had waited to accost him in the crowds pouring out of Del Mar after he had failed to pull Omelet and Pinkus. This was the same reckless Mooney who had stung mobsters. This was the same nervy Big Mooney who in broad daylight had commandeered a gambling ship with a gang of pirates. This was the same murderous Big Mooney who had stabbed him with a deadly glance in a Los Angeles courtroom. He probably would have killed him if he hadn't been surrounded by bailiffs with guns. It was as if Big Mooney's worst violence and anger needed an audience. Now, a crowd of helpless railbirds would be the perfect stage on which to shoot him and then disappear.

As Big Mooney drew near, Albert dug one hand into his pocket and gripped a small penknife. It wasn't much, he told himself, but it was at least something. Then, with the other hand, he

pulled Freda's arm. "Just walk straight on by," he whispered to her. "Don't say a thing."

It was Big Mooney who caught Albert's eye. Whatever malice had once been reflected in that courtroom glance was gone. He smiled broadly at the jockey whose promising career he had ruined. If he felt remorse, there was no sign of it. Albert Siler was just another squirrel who had passed through his gambling life.

"Well, hello, Al," he said.

Albert met his eyes briefly. "Hello, sir."

Mooney glanced at Freda and touched the brim of his hat. Then he disappeared in the crowd.

Albert and Freda were heading quickly back to the shedrows and about to turn the corner at the end of the grandstand when a railbird recognized him and stopped him.

"Aren't you . . . Albert Siler?"

"Yes, sir," he said. "I am."

"I saw you ride at Del Mar a few years back. Can I get you to sign my program?"

He signed it simply "Al Siler." He was no longer the Peewee from Lowden or even the boyish Prince Albert. He was the seasoned "Al Siler," whose wistful face reflected not just his lost youth, but his lost fame.

The railbird studied the signature on his program. "Are you riding today?"

"Well, no, sir. Not anymore."

SOURCES

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92 *eighth and final race of the day.* "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each"; "Horse Too Smart"; "Del Mar Track Entries," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1939; "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, August 13, 1939; CHRB Transcript, 46–47.

93 *Ward began desperately using the reins.* "Stewards Approve Bad Ride," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 31, 1940; "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Jockey 'Pulls' Horse—Stewards Laud Ride!" *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1940.

94 *Ward glanced behind him.* "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Hard to Fool Horse."

94 *Eye Jay closing with a rush.* "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Hard to Fool Horse."

94 *agonizing photo finish.* "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, August 13, 1939.

94 *"lost by a dirty nose."* "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Hard to Fool Horse."

95 *"his troubles winning."* "Vedette Post Wins," *San Diego Union*, August 18, 1939; "Ed Goes Long Way but Wins," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 1, 1939.

10. Pinkus and Omelet

96 *a quagmire of liquid mud.* "Poland's Mud May Stop Hitler," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 17, 1939.

96 *His whole stable of horses.* "Carmenita Does Capers at Del Mar," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1939; "14 Thoroughbreds," *San Diego Union*, August 21, 1939; "Agua Caliente," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1939.

97 *"might be included in the transaction."* "Carmenita Does Capers at Del Mar."

97 *Whitehill had discovered George Woolf.* "Woolf Was as Cool as They Come."

98 *his lead in the jockeys' race.* "Del Mar Handicap Lures Impressive Field"; "Ariel Time Goes."

98 *Big Mooney wanted to see him.* "'Unsanitary' Rides"; "Rider Couldn't Pull 'Em"; "Technique in 'Pulling' Plot Related."

98 *Omelet. Answer True. Pinkus.* "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, August 18, 1939.

99 *San Francisco businesswoman.* "3-Year-Olds and Juveniles Meet in $2000 Events," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1939; "Carmenita Wins 2-Year-Old Title," *San Diego Union*, September 3, 1939.

99 *an "unsanitary" ride.* "'Unsanitary' Rides."

100 *"don't make no mistakes."* "Trap Setting in 'Race Fix' Case."

100 *Only two weeks earlier.* "Chronicle Hollywood Park Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 1939.

100 *failure to keep his mount straight.* "Stewards Crack Down," *Los*

Angeles Times, August 18, 1939; "Jockeys Punished by Del Mar's Stewards," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1939.

100 *"conduct detrimental to the interests of racing."* "Stewards Crack Down."

100 *the jockeys' room.* Jimmy Dubois interview.

100 *He had a mount in every race that day.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939.

101 *She broke slowly.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939; "Vedette Post Wins."

101 *Then he glared at the camera.* "Draws Sternest Test in Turf Career at Del Mar," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1939.

102 *one of the yellow umbrellas.* "Bing's Baby," 58.

102 *the horse crossed the finish line.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939.

102 *Pinkus broke from an outside post position.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939.

103 *He instructed the valet.* Freda Siler interview, July 5, 2004.

104 *winning the Del Mar riding title.* "Bing Crosby on Albany Race Board," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 22, 1939; "Even the Best of Jockeys Have Trouble Picking the Winners," *San Diego Union*, August 22, 1939.

104 *"Portuguese Pepperpot."* Hillenbrand, *Seabiscuit*, 75–76; "$3000 Handicap Rings Down Curtain at Del Mar Today," *San Diego Union*, September 4, 1939; "Six Del Mar Choices Score," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1939.

104 *"You cost me thirty thousand dollars!"* "Riders Couldn't Pull 'Em"; "'Unsanitary' Rides"; "Jockey Tells of Gambler's Threats"; Albert Siler scrapbook.

105 *"I've thrown boys in the ocean for less!"* "Riders Couldn't Pull 'Em"; "'Unsanitary' Rides"; "Jockey Tells of Gambler's Threats."

105 *Day Dawn.* "Horse Too Smart"; "Race Track Scandal Here Involves Trio"; "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each"; "Del Mar Track Results," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1939.

105 *All the jockeys in the race except Knapp.* "Horse Too Smart"; "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 1939; CHRB Transcript, 47.

11. English Harry

107 *The next afternoon in the seventh race.* "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each"; "Pala Squaw Wins Del Mar Sprint Race by Six Lengths," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1939; "Horse Too Smart"; "Big Shots Sought in Race Fixing," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 29, 1940.

108 *Miss Amie suddenly had no more run in her.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939.

108 *Celer d'Or.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1939.

108 *Los Angeles and West Coast bookmakers.* "Another Jockey Suspended"; "'Fix' Group Mulcted Bookies," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 30, 1940; "Bookmakers Victimized by High-Powered Gambler," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 30, 1940; "Horse Racing Scandal to Be Given Grand Jury."

109 *bookmakers in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago.* "Seven Named by Jurors in Track Fixing," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1940; "Sol Greenberg, Einstoss, 5 John Does Listed," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 31, 1940.

109 *the fixers had bet.* "Race Ring Cost Fans Million."

110 *how desperate he was for money.* "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Bookmakers Victimized by High-Powered Gamblers"; "Owners Blamed When Kid Riders Go Wrong," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 30, 1940; "$37,000 Suit"; "Jockeys Parents Ask Cash; Son's Corruption Charged," *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1941; "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each."

110 *state steward Edwin Brown had announced.* "Here and There," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 24, 1939.

110 *He was to break poorly and take English Harry wide.* "Horse Too Smart for Rider"; "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each"; CHRB Transcript, 48; "Del Mar Racing Entries," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1939; "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, August 24, 1939; "Jockey Testified Horse Crossed Up Race Fixers by Running Wild," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 16, 1941.

111 *when he paid Ward two hundred dollars.* "Trio's Bribing of Jockeys

Alleged in Track Expose," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 27, 1940.

111 *called to the stewards' office*. "Trio's Bribing of Jockeys."

112 *Bobby Rousseau*. "Youth to Stay at Border Oval," *San Diego Union*, August 18, 1939; "Sprint Handicap, Rousseau's Riding Vies for Interest," *San Diego Union*, August 20, 1939; "14 Thoroughbreds," *San Diego Union*, August 21, 1939.

112 *Neves was winning steadily*. "Six Del Mar Choices Score," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1939.

112 *his last warning*. "Another Jockey Suspended."

112 *Albert could not stop the runaway horse*. "Wedding Call Wins Del Mar Handicap," *San Diego Union*, August 27, 1939; "Obstinate Teddy Kerry," *San Diego Union*, August 27, 1939; "$3000 Handicap Rings Down Curtain at Del Mar Today," *San Diego Union*, September 4, 1939; "Whitehill Hot," *San Diego Union*, August 29, 1939; "3-Year-Olds and Juveniles Meet in $2000 Events," *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1939.

113 *the "straight and narrow."* "12 Horses Go to Post in $5000 Del Mar Handicap," *San Diego Union*, August 27, 1939.

113 *He was a journeyman rider*. "Siler Cools Off," *San Diego Union*, August 30, 1939.

114 *seven wins in three days*. "Six Del Mar Choices Score."

114 *"high-class skippering."* "Siler Cools Off."

114 *Bachelor Tom*. "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse."

115 *forty thousand dollars worth of bets*. "Seven Named by Jurors"; "Horse Crossed Up Race Fixers."

115 *he sailed off the horse*. "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse"; "Amazing Scandal"; "Jockeys Tell of Statewide Payoff"; "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1939; CHRB Transcript, 48–49.

12. Testa

116 *Hoover sat waiting in a black limousine*. Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 89–100; Summers, *Official and Confidential*, 234–36; "Lepke, Boss Racketeer with $50,000 on His Head, Surrenders to Hoover," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 25, 1939.

116 *Hoover had* personally *arrested Lepke*. "Lepke, Boss Racketeer"; "'Lepke Surrendered to Me,' Winchell Claims," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 26, 1939; Don Whitehead, *The FBI Story* (New York: Random House, 1956), 131.

117 *"making the underworld squirm."* "25,000 Watch Caliente"; "G-Man to Remain Here Few More Days," *San Diego Union*, September 5, 1939.

117 *standing before the two-dollar window*. Summers, *Official and Confidential*, 236.

117 *The story in the corridors of the FBI Building*. Summers, *Official and Confidential*, 236.

117 *cost him eighty thousand dollars*. "Seven Named by Jurors."

117 *picked the fourth race*. CHRB Transcript, 49–50; "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 5, 1939.

118 *Wallace Leishman*. "Leishman Killed at Bay Meadows," *San Francisco Chronicle*," October 21, 1939.

118 *a very big win bet*. "Seven Named by Jurors."

118 *Ward's reluctance*. "Jockey Testifies Horse Crossed Fixers."

119 *"If you decide to do it."* "Jockey Testifies Horse Crossed Fixers"; "Hard to Fool Horse."

120 *Albert had learned*. "Jockeys Punished by Del Mar's Stewards."

120 *"tough sledding."* "Ed Goes Long Way but Wins," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 1, 1939.

120 *Harry Warner*. "Siler, Robison Are Suspended," *San Diego Union*, September 5, 1939.

121 *carrying the whip in his left hand*. CHRB Transcript, 50; "Hard to Fool Horse."

121 *a quarter of a million dollars*. "Sol Greenberg, Einstoss, 5 John Does Listed"; "Seven Named by Jurors."

121 *Leishman got him out of the gate quickly*. "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 2, 1939.

122 *He cracked his whip once*. "Hard to Fool Horse."

122 *Dandy Vale almost bolted sideways*. "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 2, 1939; "Hard to Fool Horse."

122 *The photo showed Testa by a head.* "Chronicle Del Mar Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 2, 1939.

122 *Dandy Vale could have won.* "Jockey Says He Leaped Off Horse."

123 *exercising Whitehill's horses.* "Two Jockeys Feuding with Their Bosses," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 5, 1939; "Siler, Robinson Are Suspended," *San Diego Union*, September 5, 1939.

124 *"for leaving his contract employer without his consent."* "Two Jockeys Feuding with Their Bosses."

124 *"not to employ or harbor said jockey Al Siler."* "Two Jockeys Feuding with Their Bosses."

124 *calling Ward's ride "another lulu."* "Del Mar Stewards Crack Down; Ward Draws Suspension," *San Diego Union*, September 3, 1939.

124 *"You won't need to weigh in."* CHRB Transcript, 52; "Del Mar Stewards Crack Down"; "Horse Too Smart for Rider"; "'Indifferent' Riding Grounds Jockey," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 3, 1939.

125 *His lead in the jockeys' race did not last much longer.* "$3000 Handicap Rings Down Curtain at Del Mar Today," *San Diego Union*, September 4, 1939.

125 *Omelet broke poorly.* "Del Mar Form Chart," *San Diego Union*, September 3, 1939.

126 *the Portuguese Pepperpot would have the championship.* "$3000 Handicap Rings Down Curtain."

126 *a suspension for one year from racing.* "Horse Too Smart."

127 *"I'll see that you get a couple of new suits, too."* CHRB Transcript, 51.

127 *Hoover, whose presence that Saturday.* "G-Man Chief to Remain Here," *San Diego Union*, September 5, 1939; "25,000 Watch Caliente Races."

127 *headed for refuge in Oregon.* "Jockey Siler Finally Is Straightened Out," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 13, 1939.

13. Gate Breakin' Adair

128 *No one in racing knew where he had gone.* "Jockey Siler Finally Is Straightened Out."

129 *remote farmland along the Snake River on the Oregon-Idaho border.* George Siler interviews, July 28, 2004, May 5, 2005; Jim Siler interviews, August 17, 2004, September 18, 2004; "'Gentleman' Jock."

129 *a small trailer.* Jim Siler interview, August 17, 2004.

130 *"There's nothin' much for us here anymore."* George Siler interview, July 28, 2004.

130 *Albert counted out $2500 in cash.* Jim Siler interview, September 18, 2004.

130 *He had to go before Edwin Brown.* "Jockey Siler Finally Is Straightened Out."

131 *he had finally gotten himself "straightened out."* "Jockey Siler Finally Is Straightened Out."

131 *Santa Anita. Tanforan.* "Rider Purge Is Threatened," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 28, 1939; "Anita 'Snubs' Gray, Gilbert and Corbett," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 31, 1939; "Here and There," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 5, 1940.

131 *Irving Sangbusch standing with the railbirds.* "Jockey and Trainer Barred from Track," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1940; "Westrope is Heard; Probe Continued," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 1940; "Amazing Story Told"; "Former Defendant at Trial."

131 *the Sir Francis Drake Hotel.* "'Fixer' Had Office in S.F. Hotel," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 22, 1941; "Race-Fixing Witness Reports Death Threats," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1940; CHRB Transcript, 73, 90.

131 *Mooney had a private phone line installed.* "'Fixer' Had Office in S.F. Hotel"; "Death Threat Story Given To Race Board," *San Francisco News*, October 26, 1940; CHRB Transcript, 11–17, 73, 90.

132 *Then Freddie Miller was suspended.* CHRB Transcript, 72; "Tanfo-Rules Off Miller," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 19, 1940.

132 *Freddy Scheih would take over as Mooney's new bagman.* CHRB Transcript, 13; "Race-Fixing Witness Reports Death Threats"; "Jockey Tells of 'Fixed' Tanforan; "Jockey Tells of Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1941.

132 *he went around complaining.* "LaSalle to Witness Stand in Race-Fixing Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1941.

132 *"I've tried to go straight."* "Stewards Praised Ward? Never!" *San Francisco Examiner*, November 1, 1940.

132 *"Gate Breakin' Adair."* Notes of telephone interview with Raymond Adair, September 27, 2004; "Most Formful Tanforan Meeting Comes to Close," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 1940.

133 *They shared an apartment in San Bruno.* Adair interview; "'Gentleman' Jock."

133 *he had been approached about fixing races.* Adair interview.

133 *"I don't ride for no associations."* Adair interview.

133 *Once in the room.* Adair interview.

133 *"I just hope you don't give me no trouble."* Adair interview.

134 *one night in mid-April.* Freda Siler interview, July 5, 2004.

134 *The "sharpshooters."* "Most Formful Tanforan Meeting."

135 *he packed up again and fled in his green coupe.* Jim Siler interviews, August 17, 2004, September 18, 2004.

14. Ned and Scotty

136 *Ned Merritt.* "Jockey Bares Trap at Race Fix Trial," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 19, 1941; "Jockey Escapes Death in Spill," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 29, 1938; CHRB Transcript, 38.

136 *"easy money."* "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 19, 1941; "$500 Offer for 'Fixing' Feature Race," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1941.

136 *"Say you're 'Bob.'"* "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers"; CHRB Transcript, 90–91.

137 *Sonny Greenberg had also approached Merritt.* "Jockey Bares Trap"; "$500 Offer"; CHRB Transcript, 90.

137 *Brown and several other CHRB officials.* "Jockey Bares Trap"; "$500 Offer."

138 *"those contests of speed and endurance of man or beast."* "Transcripts of Proceedings," CHRB Records, F3635:29, California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento.

138 *he had called in Miller.* CHRB Transcript, 77–79.

138 *"Leave! Go someplace else!"* CHRB Transcript, 77.

139 *Ned Merritt agreed to alert Brown.* "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers."

139 *from the stewards' Tanforan offices.* "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers"; "$500 Offer."

139 *a second steward eavesdropped.* "$500 Offer"; "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers"; "Jockey Bares Trap."

139 *Ned Merritt had been taken off his mounts.* "2 Ousted in Racing 'Fix' Plot."

140 *"2 Ousted in Racing 'Fix' Plot."* "2 Ousted in Racing 'Fix' Plot"; "Jockey and Trainer Barred from Track," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1940.

140 *a stranger pounded on the door.* "$500 Offer"; "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers"; "Hollywood Names Brought into Fixing Case"; "Chronicle Hollywood Park Charts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1940; CHRB Transcript, 91.

141 *"Look, you want to do business or not?"* "Jockey Bares Trap"; "$500 Offer."

142 *Leonard Scott.* "Rodeo Horse Rider Scores Initial Wins," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 1938; "Race-Fixing Witness Reports Death Threats."

142 *"You're getting pretty big to ride."* "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; "Jockey Bares Death Dare in Fixing Race," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 18, 1941.

143 *"If you want to make some money."* "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; "Jockey Bares Death Dare"; "Jury Told of Trap for Fixers."

143 *Greenberg met Scotty and Freddy Scheih.* "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; "Asserted Phone Codes"; "How Jockey Rode Horse in 'Fixed' Race," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 18, 1941; "Transcript of Race 'Fix'"; CHRB Transcript, 11–27.

143 *so undisguised and clumsy.* "Most Formful Tanforan Meeting."

144 *a "little business" at Hollywood Park.* "Transcript of Race 'Fix'"; CHRB Transcript, 25.

144 *Did Scotty by chance know him?* CHRB Transcript, 24, 25.

144 *"Where is he living?"* CHRB Transcript, 24.

144 *he would not pull any more horses for Mooney.* CHRB Transcript, 25.

144 *Scotty introduced Big Mooney to Steve Packer, Tommy Mansor, and Ellis Gray.* CHRB Transcript, 53–67; "Transcript of Race 'Fix'"; "Racing 'Fix' Plot"; "Brown Praises Jockey Sensation," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 1940; "Trio of Riders Waiting to Testify Before Grand Jury," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1940.

145 *Packer, Mansor, and Gray began running for Sweeney.* "Jockey Tells of 'Fixed' Tanforan"; "How Jockey Rode Horse in 'Fixed' Race"; "Asserted Phone Codes"; "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; Indictment #83490, *The People of the State of California v. Bernard Einstoss et al*, Los Angeles Superior Court Archives.

146 *Edwin Brown issued warnings to Packer, Mansor, and Gray.* "Another Jockey Suspended."

146 *he drove up to a grassy park in Inglewood.* "Jockey Bares Death Dare"; "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; "Transcript of Race 'Fix.'"

147 *"Don't call me no thief!"* "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup"; "Jockey Bares Death Dare"; "Transcript of Race 'Fix'"; "How Jockey Rode Horse in 'Fixed' Race."

15. "Get Giesler"

148 *Jerry Giesler.* Jerry Giesler, *The Jerry Giesler Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 1–4, 14–39, 40, 228–29, 236, 243, 260–61, 270, 308.

149 *appointed chairman of the California Horse Racing Board.* Giesler, *The Jerry Giesler Story*, 228; "Canadian Racing Plans Go Forward Despite War," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 22, 1940.

150 *"I don't know anything about horse racing."* "Meeting of July 19, 1940," CHRB Records, F3635:22, California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento.

150 *"pour out its guilt in shame."* Giesler, *The Jerry Giesler Story*, 145.

151 *He was the first to pour his heart out to Giesler.* "Ward, Reinstated, Rides at Del Mar," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 1940; "Big Shots Sought"; "Intensive Inquiry Promised by Fitts," *Los An-*

geles Examiner, October 29, 1940; "2 Caliente Riders Barred," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 28, 1940; "Law Steps into Racing Scandal," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 28, 1940.

151 *next to meet with Giesler.* "Five Riders Out of Meet," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1, 1940.

151 *"noses caught in a bear trap."* "Make Pleas Today," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 17, 1940.

152 *he had gone back to the bush leagues.* "'Gentleman' Jock"; "Jockey Set to Tell of Race 'Fix,'" *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, March 29, 1941; George Siler interview, July 28, 2004; "Baker County Fair Crowds Set Records," *The Record-Courier*, September 5, 1940; Albert Siler scrapbook.

153 *he had wound up face down in the mud.* "'Gentleman' Jock."

153 *"He'll be dead before we get him to the hospital."* "'Gentleman' Jock."

153 *"How about a drag?"* "'Gentleman' Jock."

154 *ready to ride at the Baker County Fair.* "Baker County Fair Crowds."

154 *Chairman Jerry Giesler called the meeting.* "Prosecutions Expected in Race Fixing," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1940; "Both Barrels," *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, October 26, 1940; "Jerry Giesler Will Speak," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 25, 1940; "Weather Report," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 26, 1940.

155 *"come and sit in the front row."* CHRB Transcript, 2.

155 *Leonard Scott was Giesler's first witness.* CHRB Transcript, 8–27.

156 *Then it was Willis Ward's turn.* CHRB Transcript, 27–53; "Testimony by Seven Jockeys," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 27, 1940.

157 *Giesler addressed them all.* CHRB Transcript, 93–96.

158 *"a snake in the grass."* CHRB Transcript, 94.

158 *"These boys, I feel sorry for personally."* CHRB Transcript, 95.

159 *The real culprit in the whole affair.* CHRB Transcript, 96.

16. The Big Shots

160 *"Amazing Scandal Rocks Turf World."* "Amazing Scandal"; "Race Track Scandal Here Involves Trio"; "Prosecutions Expected";

"Jockeys Tell of Statewide Payoff"; "Jockeys Begin Telling All in Race Probe," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 29, 1940; "Ferrell Ready to Take Action."

161 *"prosecution to the hilt."* "Prosecutions Expected."

161 *He had fled to Reno.* "Law Steps into Racing Scandal."

161 *his office had been praised.* "Fitts Reelection Predicted," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 28, 1940; "Buron Fitts' Record," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 2, 1940.

162 *John Dockweiler.* Parrish, *For The People*, 200; "Dockweiler Wins in Weird Campaign," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 6, 1940; "New District Attorney Seen as Leader in L.A.," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 6, 1940; "Dockweiler Praises Aides," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 7, 1940; "Dockweiler Beats Fitts for District Attorney," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1940; "Clinton Due Back on Air in Fitts 'War,'" *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 28, 1940; "Bowron Raps Fitts in Radio Address," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 30, 1940; "Cooper Assails Fitts in D.A. Campaign," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 31, 1940.

162 *"than any other major U.S. city."* "Dockweiler, Fitts in Last Appeal," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, November 4, 1940.

163 *"seen their opportunities and took 'em."* Leland Baldwin, *The Flavor Of The Past* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969), 57–60.

163 *Dockweiler was reported to be too ill.* "Dockweiler Wins."

163 *his reelection was necessary "now more than ever."* "Fitts Reelection Predicted."

163 *"The time has come to clean house."* "Horse Racing Scandal to Be Given Grand Jury."

163 *"Mooney is the front man for higher-ups."* "Big Shots Sought"; "Big Turf Scandal," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 28, 1940; "Glamour Girls Alleged to Have Corrupted Jockeys," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 5, 1940; "Jurors to Hear Charges," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 6, 1940; "Jockeys Begin Telling All"; "Evidence Is Sought on 'Big Shots,'" *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, October 29, 1940; "Black Sox Gamblers Linked to California Racing Scandal," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 2, 1940.

163 *He had assigned a special team of investigators.* "Intensive Inquiry Promised"; "Grand Jury to Probe."

164 *Fitts's investigators found.* "Three Jockeys Arrested Here," *San Mateo (CA) Times*, October 29, 1940; "Race-Fixing Witness Reports Death Threats"; "L.A. Grand Jury Grills 3 Riders," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 30, 1940.

164 *Tommy Mansor and Ellis Gray were picked up in San Diego.* "Race-Fixing Witness Reports Death Threat."

164 *eight jockeys began appearing before the grand jury.* "Trio of Riders Waiting"; "'Fix' Group Mulcted Bookies"; "Riders Leave S.F. for Jury Quiz," *San Francisco Examiner*," October 30, 1940; "Evidence Is Sought on 'Big Shots.'"

165 *some of their stories began to change.* "Riders Leave S.F. for Jury Quiz"; "Evidence Is Sought on 'Big Shots.'"

165 *the grand jury issued criminal indictments and subpoenas.* Indictment #83490, "The People of the State of California v. Bernard Einstoss et al," December 30, 1940, Los Angeles Superior Court Archives; "Jockey Fixing Charge Revised," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1940; "Accuse Seven"; "'Big Shots' Sought in Race Fixing."

166 *"I don't know anything about this."* "Seven Named by Jurors."

166 *"I am innocent of any wrongdoing."* "Race Ring Cost Fans Million"; "Key 'Fix' Figure Surrenders," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 1, 1940; "Film Executive Bilked of $200,000 on Race," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1940.

166 *Big Mooney was in San Francisco.* "Death Threat Story Given"; "Seven Indicted at L.A. in Race Fix," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1940; http://Neverpleadguilty.com.

167 *Mooney arrived at the Hall of Justice.* "Albany Gets Permit for Winter Racing," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 3, 1940; "Fixer Suspect Surrenders," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1940; "Einstross [*sic*] Posts $3000 Bond; 5 Sought," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 3, 1940; "Film Executive Bilked"; "Race Fixing Star Suspect Surrenders," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, November 2, 1940.

168 *they posed for a picture.* "Einstross [*sic*] Posts $3000 Bond; 5 Sought."

168 *on election day, Tuesday, November 5.* "Fitts Reported Gaining Favor," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1940; "Fitts Reelection Predicted."

169 *"We are after the higher ups."* "Evidence Is Sought on 'Big Shots'"; "Black Sox Gamblers"; "New 'Big Shot' Names to Be Told in 'Fixing'", *Hollywood Citizen-News*, November 7, 1940; "Phone Calls Aired."

169 *had won the election by 180,000 votes.* "Dockweiler Beats Fitts"; "District Attorney Buron Fitts—Out," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 6, 1940.

170 *"I have done the best I could."* "Fitts Will Practice Law," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 7, 1940; "Dockweiler Takes Office as Prosecutor," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1940; "Dockweiler Becomes District Attorney Today," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1940.

170 *"I have only one boss."* "Victor Thanks Campaign Aides," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1940; "Dockweiler Pledges Shake-Up of D.A. Investigators Staff," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, November 6, 1940.

17. The Dictograph Machine

171 *"The next time I see you."* "Death Threats Related"; "Death Threat Charged by Race 'Fixer,'" *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 4, 1941; "Death Threat Bared in Race Bribe Trial," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 4, 1941.

171 *It was New Year's Day, 1941.* "Broadway Jammed by Huge Throng," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1941; "Electrical Storm Sweeps Foothills," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1940; "Defendant Freed, Aids Race Fix Prosecution," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 1, 1941.

171 *he had gone before the grand jury.* "Inside Story of Racing Ring"; "Second Indictment in California's Horse Racing Scandal Returned," *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1940; "Details Given in $20,000 Race Corruption Charges," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1940; "Death Threat Charged by Race 'Fixer'"; "Track Scandal Details Told," *San Mateo (CA) Times*, November 16, 1940.

172 *He was prepared to give Sangbusch two thousand dollars.* "Trap Setting in 'Race Fix' Case"; "Inside Story of Race Fixing Told"; "Death Threat Charge by Race 'Fixer'"; "Details of Race 'Fixing' Told at Conspiracy Trial," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 2, 1941.

173 *bring the letter to a hotel room.* "Witness in Race Case Convicted," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1941; "Star Witness in 'Race Fixing' Goes on Trial in Bribe Case," *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1941.

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176 *a Dictograph machine*. "Death Threats Related."

176 *a squad of sheriff's deputies suddenly surrounded him*. "Star Witness."

179 *Two process servers from Los Angeles*. George Siler interview, May 5, 2005; "Jockey Arrives for Fixing Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1941.

18. "The Fateful Day"

180 *April 16, 1941*. "'Unsanitary' Races"; "Rider Couldn't Pull 'Em"; "'Pulled 12 Horses' Jock Admits," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 17, 1941; "Jockey Room Talk of Pulling Horses Told," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 17, 1941; "Technique in 'Pulling' Plot Related."

181 *Barnes had introduced the rattlesnakes*. Parrish, *For The People*, 80–81.

182 *Albert's father sat in the back row of the courtroom*. George Siler interview, May 5, 2005; "Jockey Set to Tell of Race 'Fix.'"

182 *the family's understanding*. Freda Siler interview, July 5, 2004; Jim Siler interview, May 6, 2005.

182 *the "mystery witness."* "Jockey Arrives for Fixing Trial."

182 *Albert wore a fedora*. "Jockey Set to Tell of Race 'Fix.'"

183 *Barnes had been officially appointed by John Dockweiler*. "Dockweiler Attacks New Duties."

183 *the Alexandria Hotel*. "Jockey Reverses Story, Denies Riding to Lose," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 30, 1941.

183 *numerous witnesses to the bookmaking activities*. "Racing Bribe Trial Opens"; "Fixing Trial Bogs Down"; "Bookie Office Raid Related"; "Bookies Tell of Operations"; "Hollywood Names Brought into Fixing Case"; "Inside Story of Race Fixing"; "Wild Parties."

184 *disappear in the Peruvian jungles*. "Rider Ward."

184 *made the courtroom rock with laughter*. "Wild Parties."

184 *a parade of Hollywood witnesses*. "Producer Stromberg"; "Bettors Talk in L.A. 'Fix.'"

184 *dropping water balloons and sailing paper airplanes*. "Court Row in Jockey 'Fix' Case," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 9, 1941; "'Horse Play' at Race Trial," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, April 9, 1941; "Jockeys Tell Jury"; "Horse Too Smart for Rider"; "They 'Fixed' Hollywood Races"; "Horses He 'Pulled' at $200 Each"; Freda Siler interview, July 5, 2004.

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185 *"I didn't give the horse a sanitary ride."* "'Unsanitary' Rides."

186 *the attorneys at the table with Big Mooney*. "Continual Jockey Talk of Pulling Horses Told."

186 *August 16, 1939, had been his "fateful day."* "Rider Couldn't Pull 'Em."

187 *a fluted lamppost*. Parrish, *For The People*, 130.

19. The Percentages

188 *"I never asked any jockey to pull a horse."* "Big-Time Gamblers Tell Winnings at Fixing Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1941; "Tells Buying Tips"; "Gamblers, Yes, But Honest, Defense Plea," *Los Angeles Examiner*, May 3, 1941; "'Went Broke' Says Einstoss," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 8, 1941.

189 *"Percentage has got to win in the long run."* "Gambler Shows Jurors."

190 *"I got lots of tips."* "Gambler Shows Jurors"; "Tells Buying Tips"; "Payments for Race Tips Told at Trial," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, March 31, 1941.

190 *"a thing called 'the battery.'"* "Gambler Shows Jurors."

191 "Jockey Tells of Gambler's Threats After 'Fix' Failed." *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 17, 1941.

191 *Leonard Scott had taken the stand.* "Jockey Tells of 'Fixed' Tanforan"; "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup."

191 *Freddie Miller had taken the stand.* "Jockey Tells of 'Fixed' Tanforan"; "Near Clash in Race Fixing Setup."

191 "*Honest Ned Merritt.*" "Jockeys Set to Tell Jury"; "Jury Told of Trap for 'Fixers'"; "$500 Offer."

192 *The defense called jockey Steve Packer.* "$500 Offer"; "Experts Heard in Fixing Case," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1941; "Jockey Changes Testimony at 'Race-Throwing' Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1941; "Jockey Bares Death Dare"; "Jockey Letter Said Not by Packer's Hand," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, April 21, 1941.

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192 "*Mooney never told me to pull no horses.*" "Jockey Changes Testimony"; "Hotel Stakes Deal."

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193 *William E. Simpson.* Parrish, *For The People*, 129, 199.

193 *Simpson tore into Mooney.* "'Gamblers of Consequence'"; "Jockeys Paid for Race Tips"; "'Race Fix' Man Says He Ran Police 'Smokers'"; "Gambler Says He Ran 'Smokers' for Police," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, May 12, 1941.

195 "*How many times did you pay Al Siler?*" "Jockeys Paid for Race Tips."

196 "*When you paid the money for tips?*" "Jockeys Paid for Race Tips."

196 *In its closing statements to the jury.* "Racial Angle Enters Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1941; "Final Race 'Fix' Pleas Heard," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, May 22, 1941.

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198 *"contaminators of the sport of kings!"* "Fixing Case Goes to Jury."

20. July 4, 1946

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