

## **A Pair of Binoculars**

The racetrack is crowded. Men are going about the serious business of gambling, there is shouting, smoking, and drinking. Amongst the hatted, tweedy, dun and heather-coloured male attire there is the occasional faded plumage of a woman similarly engaged. Youth is not commonly found, but on the steps of the grandstand a little girl gazes through a large pair of binoculars.

For as long as she keeps them over her face no one can see her, and they will leave her alone.

Horses stretch their thin legs down to the start as over-dressed men wave their tick-tacking arms.

They're under starters orders.

There is a surge in the mass of people to the rails, leaving large areas of empty tarmac spotted with torn tickets like white bird-shit under a roost. Through binoculars she sees, in the distance, the pinched faces of jockeys above gaudy silks balance precariously, jogging nervously behind the wire, waiting.

And they're off.

She catches the charging field far away, fleet-

footing silently through the green lanes between white fences. Closer she hears metallic commentary from a man echoing over multiple loudspeakers. He is calm at first then carefully builds his own excitement to join the swelling noise of the desperate crowd. Then in the smell of hoof and turf it's over. By keeping the binoculars raised she remains invisible as they turn away in disgust and tear up their tickets for dropping on the ground.

She feels a shadow and opens her eyes. Darkness where there had been movement. Someone tugs at the binoculars.

‘Only three more races. Want some pop? If you’re a good girl, I’ll get you crisps. You must promise not to tell Mummy. We’ve been to the zoo, haven’t we? Seen the animals.’

‘Yes Dad.’

She puts the field glasses back into a drawer, shabby with broken promises. They may come in handy one day.