

PATHWAY TO STARDOM  
CHAPTER 12: Tomorrow is Mystery

Back in 1991 I was in my Paris office one day, engrossed in a meeting with the Chinese Minister of Aerospatiale, Professor Sun Jiadong, when I received an urgent telephone summons from my lawyer, Patrick de Watrigant. Puzzled, but of course curious, I arranged a visit (down below our office) to the Champs Elysees for the Minister – inventor of the first Chinese satellite named “Orient is red” – giving myself the opportunity to respond swiftly to Monsieur de Watrigant’s emergency call.



Ling Tsui in her Paris’office with  
Minister Sun JiaDong

Not knowing what to expect, I was taken aback by being greeted by M. Watrigant, who had a large, very emotional Frenchman already in his office. M. Watrigant explained that his client – one Mr. Lesbordes, a racehorse trainer – had been instructed by a liquidator to sell 26 yearlings (18-month-old horses), few three and four year-old racehorses and few jumpers not individually, but as a lot of 45 horses. They belonged to a Japanese patron, Mr. Sawada, whose business had dramatically collapsed.



Jean Lesbordes, a French countryman

Mr. Sawada was a Japanese billionaire. He had appointed Mr. Jean Lesbordes to set up a classic stable for him in Chantilly.

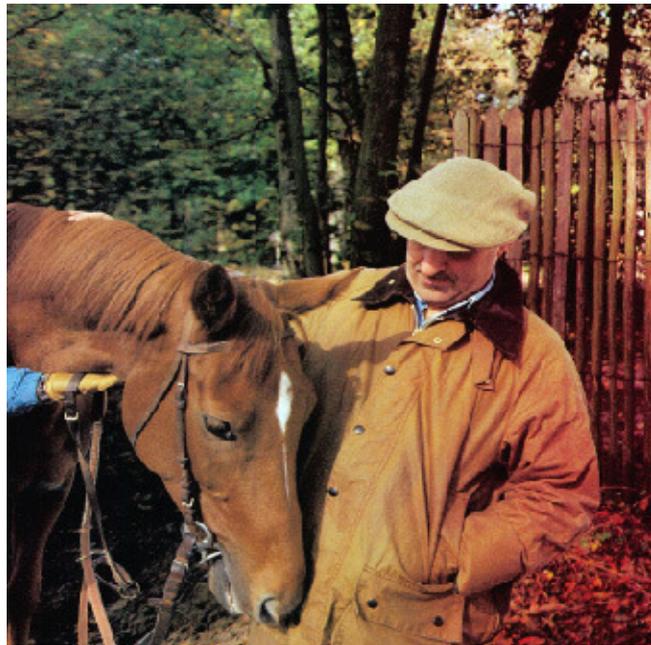


Chantilly training centre



Chantilly castle

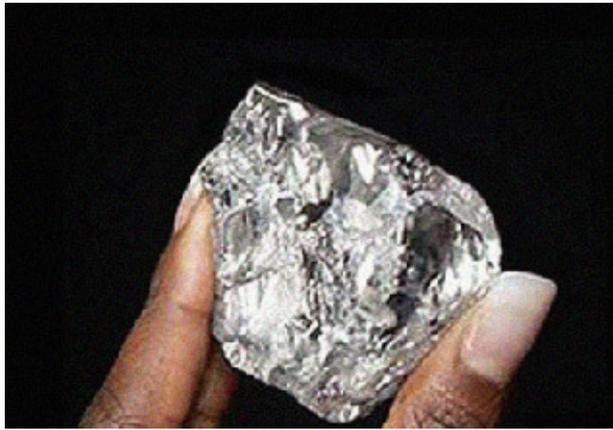
Mr. Lesbordes had bought 26 yearlings for him in Deauville and some jumpers. Among those horses, there was Urban Sea, Immediately after her arrival at the stable, Mr. Lesbordes was attracted by her good temperament. She slept all the time and ate a lot but was very brave. She became very quickly Mr. Lesbordes' favourite horse. As he had rented the former stable of Patrick Biancone (former trainer of ALL Along, Champion filly of Mr. Wildenstein), Mr. Lesbordes had put Urban Sea in All Along's box instinctively.



the discovery of Urban Sea by Jean Lesbordes

A year after those installations, some of the 2-year-olds were ready to race. However Mr. Sawada was faced with bankruptcy.

The liquidator had decided to sell all the horses through an auctioneer sale organization. Mr. Lesbordes was very desperate that he might lose Urban Sea so he went to see his friend Mr. Patrick de Watrigant. He asked his friend to find a buyer who would agree to take the entire lot of 45 horses because he said that there was a diamond among them. Mr. Lesbordes seemed completely devastated, not saying a word all the time while we were in Patrick's office.



Mr. Lesbordes compared Urban Sea to the biggest unpolished diamond



A difficult choice : the diamond or Urban Sea

My lawyer explained to me that the trainer did not want to separate himself from his lot of horses, So maybe we could find a way to negotiate with the liquidator and buy the whole lot at a very reasonable price? I had no idea how this happened: Taking over a horse business involves a lot of money. In addition, why would I take 45 horses at once if there were only a few good horses among them? However, Mr. Lesbordes insisted that he had asked the liquidator to sell the horses as a lot and one could not choose only one or two. The mystery deepened. What on earth could Mr. Lesbordes' problem have to do with me? I had never even seen a thoroughbred racehorse in my entire life. Curiously, M. Watrigant was insistent that this extraordinary development represented an opportunity for me, his Chinese female client.



How Mr.de Watrigant had turned his client from a socialite to a horse lover



What to chose? career woman or farmer?



Mr. Yasuo Hattori (on the left), Vice-Chairman of Seiko and Epso, Corporation, Mrs. Tantoco, Mrs. Ling Tsui and Alain Perrin, President of Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art

Thrusting a magazine article on Mr. Lesbordes into my hand, he urged me to go away and read the piece before getting back to him. Setting aside my bewilderment, I returned to my own office, where I concluded my interrupted meeting with Professor Sun Jiadong, unable to offer any real explanation for my abrupt disappearance.



Ling Tsui with Minister Sun JiaDong at Xi Chang satellite launch site

That day was the turning point in my career and marked the beginning of my adventure into the horse milieu which has led to owning the best mare in the world. Thinking back, there is a mystical aspect in what happened to lead me there as if all these events were interrelated. I did not fully understand the extent of my decision but felt pushed by an invisible force to comply and accept what had been granted to me by serendipity.



The Fairy decided to touch me with her magic wand



The beginning of my Adventure into the horse milieu

Only later that evening, when sleep refused to come, did I get round to reading the article on the life and times of Jean Lesbordes, a native of Bordeaux and a provincial racehorse trainer in the southwest of France since 1968. He had no previous background in racing or racehorse training. Life, it seemed, had had its ups and downs – more downs than ups. At times Mr. Lesbordes had

gone hungry so that his horses might eat. By this account, Jean Lesbordes was closer to his horses than he was to his fellow human beings. In short, he lived for his horses. It seemed that his son Clement shared his father's passion for the horses in their care.



Clement with Urban Sea



Clement with Urban Sea

Jean Lesbordes got his long-sought breakthrough in 1986 when asked to move up to Chantilly to train for one M. Georges Blizniansky. Within two seasons they had come close to carrying off the most coveted prize in French flat racing when their Boyatino – a complete outsider – left all previous form behind him by finishing third to Tony Bin and Mtoto in the 1988 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, the all-aged European middle-distance championship, run at Longchamp on the first Sunday in October each year. The following year they had combined to win the prestigious Prix du Cadran – the French stayers' championship – with Trebrook, ridden by Eric Legrix. That Group 1 success had attracted the attention of Japanese high roller, Masahko Sawada.