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Francie stood at the counter of Willy Walsh's Bookmakers looking up at the odds, a sea of numbers stealing hypnotically across a green screen. It was then it struck him: he needed a fair-weather friend, an all rounder, strong-footed but light on her heels, one that could cope with all the hurdles, every last one of them.

The 12.45 was running in fifteen minutes. The rain had started and lines flowed down the glass frontage. He hadn't brought a coat.

But there was lots of kissing in the winners' enclosure. A lady in white on the corner screen caught his eye. Her turquoise plumes brushed past an Irish trainer's bald head. He didn't mind. In fact he was sure the bald trainer kind of liked it. That did it for Francie.

'Twenty quid on Hairy Molly to win', he said to Maggie behind the counter.

'Are ye sure now Francie?', she said to him, knowing that once he had made his mind up there would be no backing down.

'You'd take the shirt off my back Maggie, but I won't let ya...not today darlin'', he replied.

But the lady in the winners' enclosure still caught his eye. She looked up from her champagne flute as though she were staring straight at him. He could have sworn she was winking at him.

Francie was wearing a blue shirt and black trousers. That was the uniform at Cassidy's Bar. But the week before he had been badly caught, helping himself to the takings and the security cameras had caught up with him. Not that this was going to deter Francie from his routine and besides it would be difficult to explain to his wife about the CCTV cameras. Anyway, she often said how much he suited that uniform.

His thoughts were happily interrupted by the commentator's stern voice as the horses lined up for the County Hurdle.

'Sea-Drifting and Emotional Moment also have a look in, as they take their places folks for one of the greatest shows on the turf...'

There were two screens at the bookmakers covering racing at Saddlewell. The main screen on the right covered the races and the horses' form whilst the left-hand screen focused on highlights and behind the scenes. It was from that screen that the bald Irish trainer looked him straight in the eye whilst lighting a cigar.

'Are you mad, Francie? That lame one Hairy Molly hasn't a hope', said the trainer.

'Yes she does. I can feel it in me waters.' Francie replied.

'You should have gone with your gut, Francie. This one's an Emotional Moment.'

A few of the punters had noticed Francie looking intensely at the screen in the corner. It wasn't unusual to hear strange outbursts now and again, unconsciously spilling from the mouths of the gamblers in Willy Walsh's. So they didn't take much notice. The race had started.

'Religiously, followed by Hairy Molly on the outside...Sweet Sixteen and Nifty Mayor in front over taken by Emotional Moment...Sea-Drifting in the lead as they get to the first hurdle. All clear...

Nifty Mayor on the inside followed by Sweet Sixteen...Oh,

Religiously down at the second hurdle as Sea-Drifting holds the lead. Hairy Molly coming up on the far side but it's Emotional Moment and Sea-Drifting battling it out as they get to the third hurdle...'

Francie's hands started to shake. He tried to keep track of Hairy Molly. Her jockey wore a red vest with white polka-dots but it was no good. She was going out of sight. Francie looked around at the rest of men chuntering under their breath, their fists clenched, squeezing white pieces of paper with all their might.

Suddenly, 'Run Hairy Molly...run', roared the old man in the flat cap beside him.

There was no doubt, Francie saw this as his cue and so he took off. Bolting out the door he flew down Delby Street, past the telephone boxes, 'round the statue of the King George slaying the dragon, jumped over a puddle outside Billy's Butchers. Onto Park Street down Grinders Hill, skidding at the corner as he brushed through shoppers outside Hanley's Off Licence. On the home straight now with not much in it. With a spurt on he leapt over a busker on Fish Market, turned left at Daisy Lane, easing up at the finish he strode down Leaf Street and at number 21 drew to a halt.

Francie hadn't run like that in years. Taking a moment to catch his breath and find his keys he eventually unlocked the door and sauntered into the living room.

Margaret, his wife wasn't surprised to see him home so early. She was mixing egg whites in a bowl and waited for him to come to the kitchen before she greeted him.

Francie couldn't help himself, grabbed the remote control on the sofa and switched to Channel Five to see the results. Sure enough, it was as the trainer had predicted; Emotional Moment first, Sea-Drifting a close second, followed by Nifty Mayor.

'Hello Margaret,' he said.

'Hello Francie...where've you been?', she replied.

Margaret didn't want to hear the truth but something was pressing her so she continued.

'Francie, you've been acting awful strange lately.'

'Aw you know the way Margaret you have good days and bad days', he replied.

'Francie I wish you'd cut to the chase.'

The runners for the 1.15 Champion Cup flashed up on screen distracting him from their conversation. Francie was wet through. He couldn't bear to look at her. He should have gone with his gut.

He read them to himself; Swift Shandy, Lady Bell, Northern Star, Righteous Boy...Baked Alaska.

'Francie, listen to me, I'm making your favourite...Baked Alaska.'

Like lightning he jumped off the sofa. 'That's it Margaret, she's the one.' He ran up and kissed her on the cheek.

'If I run, I'll probably make it'.

And with that the door slammed shut and he was gone for dust.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Derville Quigley.