DICK FRANCIS

SHATTERED

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Dick Francis has written forty-one international best-sellers and is widely acclaimed as one of the world's finest thriller writers. His awards include the Crime Writers' Association's Cartier Diamond Dagger for his outstanding contribution to the crime genre, and an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Tufts University of Boston. In 1996 Dick Francis was made a Mystery Writers of America Grand Master for a lifetime's achievement and in 2000 he received a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

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FIELD OF THIRTEEN
SECOND WIND

To
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother
in celebration of her 100th birthday
With endless gratitude, love and every good wish,
from Dick Francis

My thanks also to
Stephen Zawistowski, glass-blower
Stephen Spiro, Professor of Respiratory Medicine
Tanya Williams, West Mercia Police

to Matthew Francis, my grandson, for the title

and to my son, Felix, for everything

CHAPTER ONE

Four of us drove together to Cheltenham races on the day that Martin Stukely died there from a fall in a steeplechase.

It was 31 December, the eve of the year two thousand. A cold midwinter morning. The world approaching the threshold of the future.

Martin himself, taking his place behind the steering wheel of his BMW, set off before noon without premonition, collecting his three passengers from their Cotswold hills bases on his way to his afternoon's work. A jockey of renown, he had confidence and a steady heart.

By the time he reached my sprawling house on the hillside above the elongated tourist-attracting village of Broadway, the air in his spacious car swirled richly full of smoke from his favourite cigar, the Montecristo No 2, his substitute for eating. At thirty-four he was spending longer and longer in a sauna each day; but was all the same gradually losing the metabolic battle against weight.

Genes had given him a well-balanced frame in general,

and an Italian mother in particular had passed on a love of cooking, and vivacity.

He quarrelled incessantly with Bon-Bon, his rich, plump and talkative wife, and on the whole ignored his four small children, often frowning as he looked at them as if not sure exactly who they were. Nevertheless his skill and courage and rapport with horses took him as often as always into the winner's enclosure, and he drove to Cheltenham calmly discussing his mounts' chances that afternoon in two fast hurdle races and one longer 'chase. Three miles of jumping fences brought out the controlled recklessness that made him great.

He picked me up last on that fateful Friday morning, as I lived nearest to Cheltenham's racecourse.

Already on board, and by his side, sat Priam Jones, the trainer whose horses he regularly rode. Priam was expert at self-aggrandisement but not quite as good as he believed at knowing when a horse in his care had come to a performance peak. That day's steeplechaser, Tallahassee, was, according to my friend Martin on the telephone, as ready as he would ever be to carry off the day's gold trophy, but Priam Jones, smoothing his white late-middle-age thinning hair, told the horse's owner in a blasé voice that Tallahassee might still do better on softer ground.

Lounging back beside me on the rear seat, with the tip of one of Martin's cigars glowing symmetrically to ash, Tallahassee's owner, Lloyd Baxter, listened without noticeable pleasure, and I thought Priam Jones would

have done better to keep his premature apologies in reserve.

It was unusual for Martin to be the one who drove Tallahassee's owner and trainer anywhere. Normally he took other jockeys, or me alone, but Priam Jones from arrogance had just wrecked his own car in a stupid rash of flat tyres, thanks to his having tried to ignore head-on a newly installed deterrent no-parking set of rising teeth. It was the council's fault, he insisted. He would sue.

Priam had taken it for granted, Martin had told me crossly, that he – Martin – would do the driving, and would take not only Priam himself but would also chauffeur the horse's owner, who was staying overnight with Priam for the Cheltenham meeting, having flown down from the north of England to the local Staverton airfield in a small rented air taxi.

I disliked Lloyd Baxter as thoroughly as he disliked me. Martin had warned me of the Priam tyre situation ('keep your sarcastic tongue behind your splendid teeth') and had begged me also to swamp the grumpy, dumpy millionaire owner with anaesthetizing charm in advance, in case Priam Jones's fears materialized and the horse drew a blank.

I saw Martin's face grinning at me in the driving mirror as he listened to me sympathize with the flat tyres. He more than paid any debt he owed me by ferrying me about when he could, as I'd lost my licence for a year through scorching at ninety-five miles an hour round the Oxford ring road (fourth ticket for speeding) to take him

and his broken leg to see his point-of-death old retired gardener. The gardener's heart had then thumped away insecurely for six further weeks – one of life's little ironies. My loss of licence now had three months to run.

The friendship between Martin and myself, unlikely at first sight, had sprung fully grown in an instant four or more years ago, the result of a smile crinkling round his eyes, echo, I gathered, of my own.

We had met in the jury room of the local crown court, chosen for jury duty to hear a fairly simple case of domestic murder. The trial lasted two and a half days. Over mineral water afterwards, I'd learned about the tyranny of weight. Though my life had nothing to do with horses, or his with the heat and chemistry of my own days, we shared, perhaps, the awareness of the physical ability that we each needed for success in our trade.

In the jury room Martin had asked with merely polite curiosity, 'What do you do for a living?'

'I blow glass.'

'You do *what*?'

'I make things of glass. Vases, ornaments, goblets. That sort of thing.'

'Good grief.'

I smiled at his astonishment. 'People do, you know. People have made things of glass for thousands of years.'

'Yes, but . . .' he considered, 'you don't look like someone who makes ornaments. You look . . . well . . . tough.'

I was four years younger than he and three inches taller, and probably equal in muscles.

'I've made horses,' I said mildly. 'Herds of them.'

'The Crystal Stud Cup,' he said, identifying one of Flat racing's more elaborate prizes. 'Did you make that?'

'Not that one, no.'

'Well . . . Do you have a *name*? Like, say, Baccarat?'

I smiled lopsidedly. 'Not so glamorous. It's Logan, Gerard Logan.'

'Logan Glass.' He nodded, no longer surprised. 'You have a place on the High Street in Broadway, side by side with all those antique shops. I've seen it.'

I nodded. 'Sales and workshop.'

He hadn't seemed to take any special notice, but a week later he'd walked into my display gallery, spent an intense and silent hour there, asked if I'd personally made all the exhibits (mostly) and offered me a lift to the races. As time went by we had become comfortably accustomed to each other's traits and faults. Bon-Bon used me as a shield in battle and the children thought me a bore because I wouldn't let them near my furnace.

For half the races that day at Cheltenham things went as normal. Martin won the two-mile hurdle race by six lengths and Priam Jones complained that six lengths was too far. It would ruin the horse's position in the handicap.

Martin shrugged, gave an amused twist to his eyebrows and went into the changing room to put on Lloyd Baxter's colours of black and white chevrons, pink

sleeves and cap. I watched the three men in the parade ring, owner, trainer and jockey, as they took stock of Tallahassee walking purposefully round in the hands of his stable lad. Tallahassee stood at odds of six to four with the bookmakers for the Coffee Forever Gold Trophy: clear favourite.

Lloyd Baxter (ignoring his trainer's misgivings) had put his money on, and so had I.

It was at the last fence of all that Tallahassee uncharacteristically tangled his feet. Easily ahead by seven lengths he lost his concentration, hit the roots of the unyielding birch and turned a somersault over his rider, landing his whole half-ton mass upside down with the saddle-tree and his withers crushing the rib cage of the man beneath.

The horse fell at the peak of his forward-to-win acceleration and crashed down at thirty or more miles an hour. Winded, he lay across the jockey for inert moments, then rocked back and forwards vigorously in his struggle to rise again to his feet.

The fall and its aftermath looked truly terrible from where I watched on the stands. The roar of welcome for a favourite racing home to a popular win was hushed to a gasp, to cries, to an endless anxious murmur. The actual winner passed the post without his due cheers, and a thousand pairs of binoculars focused on the unmoving black and white chevrons flat on the green December grass.

The racecourse doctor, though instantly attending him from his following car, couldn't prevent the fast gathering group of paramedics and media people from realizing that Martin Stukely, though still semi-conscious, was dying before their eyes. They glimpsed the blood sliding frothily out of the jockey's mouth, choking him as the sharp ends of broken ribs tore his lungs apart. They described it, cough by groan, in their news reports.

The doctor and paramedics loaded Martin, just alive, into the waiting ambulance and as they set off to the hospital they worked desperately with transfusions and oxygen, but quietly, before the journey ended, the jockey lost his race.

Priam, not normally a man of emotion, wept without shame as later he collected Martin's belongings, including his car keys, from the changing rooms. Sniffing, blowing his nose, and accompanied by Lloyd Baxter who looked annoyed rather than grief-stricken, Priam Jones offered to return me to my place of business in Broadway, though not to my home in the hills, as he intended to go in the opposite direction from there, to see Bon-Bon; to give her comfort.

I asked if he would take me on with him to see Bon-Bon. He refused. Bon-Bon wanted Priam alone, he said. She had said so, devastated, on the telephone.

Lloyd Baxter, Priam added, would now also be off-

loaded at Broadway. Priam had got him the last available room in the hotel there, the Wychwood Dragon. It was all arranged.

Lloyd Baxter glowered at the world, at his trainer, at me, at fate. He should, he thought, have won the gold trophy. He had been robbed. Though his horse was unharmed, his feelings for his dead jockey seemed to be resentment, not regret.

As Priam, shoulders drooping, and Baxter, frowning heavily, set off ahead of us towards the car park, Martin's changing-room valet hurried after me, calling my name. I stopped, and turned towards him, and into my hands he thrust the lightweight racing saddle that, strapped firmly to Tallahassee's back, had helped to deal out damage and death.

The stirrups, with the leathers, were folded over the saddle plate, and were kept in place by the long girth wound round and round. The sight of the girth-wrapped piece of professional equipment, like my newly dead mother's Hasselblad camera, bleakly rammed into one's consciousness the gritty message that their owners would never come back. It was Martin's empty saddle that set me missing him painfully.

Eddie, the valet, was elderly, bald and, in Martin's estimation, hardworking and unable to do wrong. He turned to go back to the changing room but then stopped, fumbled in the deep front pocket of the apron of his trade and, producing a brown-paper-wrapped package, called after me to wait.

'Someone gave this to Martin to give to you,' he shouted, coming back and holding it out for me to take. 'Martin asked me to give it back to him when he was leaving to go home, so he could pass it on to you . . . but of course . . .' he swallowed, his voice breaking . . . 'he's gone.'

I asked. 'Who gave it to *him*?'

The valet didn't know. He was sure, though, that Martin himself had known, because he had been joking about it being worth a million, and Eddie was clear that the ultimate destination of the parcel had been Gerard Logan, Martin's friend.

I took the package and, thanking him, put it into my raincoat pocket, and we spent a mutual moment of sharp sadness for the gap we already felt in our lives. I supposed, as Eddie turned to hurry back to his chores in the changing room, and I continued into the car park, that I might have gone to the races for the last time, that without Martin's input the fun might have flown.

Priam's tears welled up again at the significance of the empty saddle, and Lloyd Baxter shook his head with disapproval. Priam recovered enough however to start Martin's car and drive it to Broadway where, as he'd intended, he off-loaded both me and Lloyd Baxter outside the Wychwood Dragon and then departed in speechless gloom towards Bon-Bon and her fatherless brood.

Lloyd Baxter paid me no attention but strode without pleasure into the hotel. During the journey from the racecourse he'd complained to Priam that his overnight bag

was in Priam's house. He'd gone by hired car from Staverton airfield, intending to spend the evening at Priam's now-cancelled New Year's Eve party, celebrating a win in the Gold Coffee Cup before flying away the following morning to his thousand-acre estate in Northumberland. Priam's assertion that, after seeing Martin's family, he would himself ferry the bag to the hotel, left Tallahassee's owner unmollified. The whole afternoon had been a disaster, he grumbled, and in his voice one could hear undertones of an intention to change to a different trainer.

My own glass business lay a few yards away from the Wychwood Dragon on the opposite side of the road. If one looked across from outside the hotel, the gallery's windows seemed to glitter with ultra-bright light, which they did from breakfast to midnight every day of the year.

I walked across the road wishing that time could be reversed to yesterday: wishing that bright-eyed Martin would march through my door suggesting improbable glass sculptures that in fact, when I made them, won both commissions and kudos. He had become fascinated by the actual composition of glass and never seemed to tire of watching whenever I mixed the basic ingredients myself, instead of always buying it the easy way – off the shelf.

The ready-made stuff, which came in 200-kilo drums, looked like small opaque marbles, or large grey peas, half the size of the polished clear-glass toys. I used the simple

option regularly, as it came pure and clean and melted without flaws.

When Martin first watched me load the tank of the furnace with a week's supply of the round grey pebbles, he repeated aloud the listed ingredients. 'Eighty per cent of the mix is white silica sand from the Dead Sea. Ten per cent is soda ash. Then add small specific amounts of antimony, barium, calcium and arsenic per fifty pounds of weight. If you want to colour the glass blue, use ground lapis lazuli or cobalt. If you want yellow, use cadmium, which changes with heat to orange and red and I don't believe it.'

'That's soda crystal glass,' I nodded, smiling. 'I use it all the time as it's safe in every way for eating or drinking from. Babies can lick it.'

He gazed at me in surprise. 'Isn't all glass safe to suck?'

'Well ... no. You have to be exceedingly careful making things with lead. Lead crystal. Lovely stuff. But lead is mega mega poisonous. Lead silicate, that is, that's used for glass. It's a rusty red powder and in its raw state you have to keep it strictly separate from everything else and be terribly meticulous about locking it up.'

'What about cut lead-crystal wine glasses?' he asked. 'I mean, Bon-Bon's mother gave us some.'

'Don't worry,' I told him with humour. 'If they haven't made you ill yet, they probably won't.'

'Thanks a bunch.'