

KISSING CUP'S RACE

Campbell Rae Brown

You've never seen Kissing Cup—have you?
Stroll around the paddock, my Lord;
Just cast your eye over the mare, sir—
You'll say that, upon your word,
You ne'er saw a grander-shaped 'un
In all the whole course of your life.
Have you heard the strange story about her,
How she won Lord Hillboxon his wife?
No? Well, if you've got a few minutes,
I'll tell you why Kissing Cup, here,
Has lived in this lazy grandeur
Since the first time they let her appear
On a race course—to run for a wife, sir,
The loveliest girl in the land.
My gad! 'Twas a heart-thrilling moment
For them as stood on the stand.
And knew the high stakes that were pending
On Kissing Cup's winning the race—
She ran for a woman's heart, sir,
To save an old name from disgrace.
Here she is, sir—now look her well over—
There isn't a fault to be found;
See her going—magnificent action!
You're right, sir; the mare is as sound
As she was on the day I rode her
Just ten years ago last June;
I'll never forget how they cheered us,
The mare, and her jock, Bob Doon.
He was always a reckless youngster,
My master, Hillboxton, you know;
And when the old Marquis died, sir,
He seemed—somehow or other—to go
Right fair clean away to the bad, sir,
And being a fresh 'un, you see,
The "bookies" just fleeced him a good 'un.
I knew, sir, quite well how 'twould be!
I saw he would go down a mucker—
Be ruined, sir, sure as fate,
In his careless, boyish folly
I saw that the fine old estate
Would be gambled away, the title
Be sullied, perchance, with shame.
I said to myself, "Bob Doon, boy!
You must save your old master's name."
He'd loved a quiet bit o' racing—
I'd been his head jock for years.
I remember the night he died, sir;
His bright eyes filling with tears,
He told me to mind the youngster,
To see that he didn't begin
To gamble—and always remember
The Hillboxtons rode to win.
He told me above all to see, sir,
That no scandal e'er touched the stud,
To be sure that our stables harbored
None but the purest blood.
He took my rough hand as he finished,
In the same old well-known grip,
As hundreds of times I'd seen him
A-grasping the ribbons and whip,
He didn't last very much longer—
I stood by the bed, as he died,
And watched my old master's spirit
Start on its last long ride.
One night—I remember it well, sir,
It must have been just nigh four years,
After the old Marquis left us—
Very heavy at heart with fears,
I was sitting in one of the stables,
Not dreaming as no one was near,
A-thinking of how things were looking
A mighty sight too deuced queer.
I had turned around my head for a moment
To see as the nags were all right,
When I saw the young master a-standing
Behind me. I started! The sight
Of his face, pale and haggard,
Sent a rush of blood to my heart.
I knew, sir, that something had happened,

"Doon, Doon my boy! Why so you start?
Don't you know me?" he said. "Have I
altered?
Have I changed so since yesterday?
No wonder good God! I am ruined!
I've gambled the old home away.
But the worst—the poor girl, Lady Con-
stance!
You know how she loves me, old friend—
What will she think of me now, Bob?
—For pity's sake, Heaven defend
And keep her," he cried, "true as ever!
But no, no; I never can wed
You now, God bless you, my darling!
Forget me as if I were dead."
He wept like a child in his sorrow.
"Be a man! Be a man, sir," said I;
"Trust to me. I can yet pull you through,
sir;
There's a mare in your stud that can fly,
I've kept her—I knew you were playing
Too fast, far too reckless a game;
But there's Kissing Cup ready to run for
And save a Hillboxton's name."
When I saw that the lad was collected
I asked him to turn and look
At the very first bet he had entered
On the very first page of his book.
He looked at me—eyes full of wonder—
"That's three years ago! What d'ye
mean?"
"My lord, you'll forgive me," I answered;
"Forgive me, I know you have been
Too hot, aye, too headless by far, sir,
In your youthful and reckless career;
You've forgotten—just read for a moment
The words that you see written here.
The foal, Kissing Cup, here is ready
And fit, sir, to run for a life;
In the big race next week she will save you,
Will win you a fortune—and wife."
The boy couldn't speak for a moment,
His pallid lips moved in a groan;
Then he rallied, and, grasping my hand, sir,
Held it just like a vise with his own.
The day of the race was a grand one,
But few knew the issue at stake;
We'd tried hard to keep it a secret,
For the splendid old Marquis's sake,
As we cantered away past the stand, sir,
To give the "big swells" all a view,
Hardly one of 'em dreamt what 'twould
mean, sir,
If the Hillboxton "chocolate and blue"
Were beaten—none guessed that the girl
there,
With her beautiful face, worn and thin,
Was murmuring a low prayer to Heaven
That her young lover's colors might win.

"All ready"—a beautiful start, sir!
The line was as straight as could be;
"They're off!" the shout rang for a moment
Around us, and then seemed to me
As dying away in the distance.
While we scudded along the course
At a pace that was far too killing
To last; so I kept my horse
Well back in the rear to the "Corner."
Then I let the reins loose on her mane.

She passed through them all but just one,
sir,
Lord Rattington's colt, Sugar Cane.
Then I saw there would be a struggle;
I had known it for months back,
That all as I need be afraid of
Was the old Baron's flying "crack."
'Twas a terrible moment for me, sir;
The colt was three good lengths ahead.
I whispered a word to the mare, sir;
'Twas enough—she knew what I said.
Sweeping on down the hill like a rocket,
She got to the girths of the colt;
My heart gave a great throb of pleasure,
I made sure that he'd shot his bolt.
But, no; his jock hustled him up, sir,
His whip swishes fell like rain.
And the cry ran like fire up the course, sir,
"It's thousands on Sugar Cane,"
The stand was reached, Sugar Cane leading;
Two seconds and all would be o'er,
'Lord Rattington wins!' 'No, not you
though
We're neck, sir, to neck—two strides more.
I saw in the great sea of faces
A girl—pale, white as the dead.
I cried, "For her sake, Kissing Cup, now!"
'Twas over—we'd won by a head!