

Bethenny at the Races:
All Bets Are Off

by Corey Podell and Jamie Silberhartz

She knelt down and fingered the dirt. The conditions were a little too muddy for her liking. The horse's natural glide would be compromised. Bethenny wasn't planning on telling her customers about this though. Besides they didn't care about the details. They cared about winning, power, and, most of all, money.

She dusted off her Keds and began toward the stables. Crowds of people were already setting up blankets and cracking open Fantas in the "backyard." Bethenny walked along the fence, her hand tracing its outline. It was a nice place for a boring family to spend the day, she thought. All these parents—unpacking picnics, opening their kids' juice boxes, applying Copper Sun to their bums. Meanwhile she was hard at work. What a life these other 9-year-olds have! Bethenny was lifting a Capri Sun from one of the coolers when she heard her name.

"Yo Bethenny!" an older man yelled from the entrance, motioning for her.

He was standing in a group of men, all donning what Bethenny referred to as "the Long Island": white tank top, neck chains, and the faint smell of Marlboro Reds.

Bethenny walked up and put her hands on her hips—her Wonder Woman pose. "How can I help you gentlemen?"

"This is John's kid, the one I told you about," the man said about her as he patted his friend's chest. He pulled a 5 out of his sweatpants pocket.

Now she knew where she recognized this schlub! It was Tommy the Fish. She'd made the Fish some cash in Belmont last week. A happy customer, back for more. This was what she liked to see.

Her client retention rate was up 9% over the last quarter.

Before she could speak, the men barraged her with questions.

"How's the turf looking?"

"Is Tootsie Roll really gonna take it?"

"What's the best lane today, inside or outside?"

Bethenny pulled up her trousers and sized them up. Besides the Fish, there were four others, but the only one she recognized was Mortadell. Certainly a pretty penny could be made off these yucks, but they'd have to follow the same rules as everyone else.

"First off, thanks Fish for the referral. But ONE, I don't talk unless I get paid FIRST. TWO, I only do deals in my office outside the second floor food court. I don't do business just anywhere."

The men were speechless. How could such a scrappy, skinny little girl have such nerve?

"Well, uh, tell your dad I said hi," said a deflated Tommy the Fish.

Bethenny gave a nod and spun around. She smiled, puffing her fake cigar as she walked past the stables.

John wasn't actually her dad; he was her stepfather. But just like her biological dad, John was also a legendary horse trainer. The racetrack was Bethenny's second home. She felt more comfortable here than she ever did in school. Besides horses sucked way less than any human she'd ever met, including her family members. Just because she knew how to take care of herself didn't mean she wanted to.

But being a kid at the track had its perks. The adults would talk freely around her, never expecting her to listen. Bethenny soaked up everything she could learn about horses, gambling, and, most importantly, human nature.

As she passed the ticket office, she nodded at the head of security, Ronnie Eleven Toes, who tipped his fedora and said, "Miss Frankel." Ronnie knew what was going on in Bethenny's "office," but he let the kid have her fun. What's the harm anyhow?

Bethenny scooped an unmanned cheeseburger from the Grandstand buffet and settled at her usual two-top table in front of the Sbarro. This table was always empty; people knew it belonged to her and her alone. There was already a line forming around the garbage can.

Clapping her hands together, Bethenny got to business. "Alright let's go! Don't be animals. Who's first?"

Bethenny doled out her wisdom one at a time, talking odds, wind patterns, jockey weights, and hunches. After seven customers, Mortadell cut the line.

"Get to the back!" screamed a granny, hitting his back with her purse.

Goddamn Mortadell, always making a scene! Bethenny was about to send him away, but caught sight of the crisp \$20 bill in his hand.

"Sorry guys," she said, hopping off her stool. "I'm taking lunch."

"You kidding me kid?" said the granny, looking ready to raise her purse to Bethenny.

The crowd started to get angry, but Bethenny raised her hand, which immediately silenced the irritated crowd. "Come back in five and it's free."

That sure shut 'em up. She knew it wasn't professional, but it was a good business move. The dough she could make off Mort was more than any of these cats would cough up. And the 10-speed Schwinn she saw at Modell's wasn't going to pay for itself.

Once the crowd dispersed, Mort and Bethenny took a seat.

"You know the drill," she said, putting her hand out for payment.

He handed her the 20.

"Now that's just insulting," she said, disgusted by the gesture. "I'm gonna need an extra five for every person I just sent away."

She could tell he was doing the math in his head. After what seemed like eons, he slapped a 50 on the table.

"That'll do. Alright who's my mark?"

Mortadell looked around and lowered his voice. "Joe Salavo: fat, bald, and a piece of shit. He's betting on Sultan of Swing. Sorry for saying 'shit.' I should watch my language."

"Oh fuck off," she scoffed. "Joe Salavo—got it. Now scram old man."

Mortadell patted her head and walked away. She hated when he did that. Like she was a puppy.

Bethenny scanned the crowd, zeroing in on Joe Salavo. Poor guy. About to lose all his cash because a 9-year-old was paid to give him bad advice. Mort sure had a lot of enemies for someone who

owned a bagel shop.

Sure enough, Joe Salavo paid top dollar for some of the worst tips Bethenny had ever given. She told him that the turf was dry, that Sultan of Swing looked limp in the stables and that he should go all in on the first-timer.

He believed every word she said. Maybe she could be an actress someday. She almost felt bad, but figured he deserved to learn a lesson in trust today. Once Salavo finally left to place his bets, she welcomed her clientele back.

Bethenny more than made up for turning them away earlier. She gave them all her intell, and even threw in some fun facts about the history of racing. She wanted to keep them happy and coming back.

Suddenly the bell sounded and the horses were off. That was her cue to leave. In fact, she usually got the hell outta there before the races began. Although it rarely happened, she didn't want to run into any unhappy customers, especially ones who spent a lot of dough like Joe Salavo. Grabbing her knapsack, Bethenny ran to the exit toward the stairs.

That's when she heard Joe Salavo running after her. "Hey kid! Someone stop that kid!"

Hopping the banister, she slid down and landed by the exit.

"I'm gonna get you kid! Did Mortadell put you up to this?!" huffed Joe as he shook his finger, looking down at her. "You're nothing but a little skinny girl."

Bethenny stopped in her tracks.

"You know what mister? I may be a skinny little girl, but this skinny girl is gonna be something big someday."