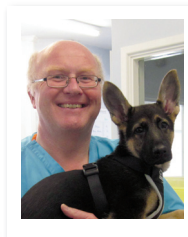


A Cruel Trick

By retired local vet Richard Huddart MRCVS



"Is that the vet?"
roared the voice on the other end of the telephone. **"What do you mean, you're not Mr Oliver? You'd better be good, and get here pronto, young man!"**

As a newly qualified vet in my first job, I was particularly nervous. It was one of my first solo nights on duty and, true to form, the phone had rung at five minutes past midnight with a particularly insistent alarm.

The caller continued in an officious, rather military tone. "This is Colonel Clapham here, from the Big House.....at Belton." He sounded very annoyed and agitated as he continued. "I've a thoroughbred mare foaling here and she's in trouble. There seems to be one foot coming through the top hole.." he said, stumbling a little with his wording, "...and another foot from the bottom hole! "So bloody well get a move on and get here **NOW!**"

If I had been nervous before, I was now terrified. Of all the possible emergencies we had been taught about at the Royal Veterinary College, a horse in labour was one of



the most urgent and fear-provoking. It was said that you had to hurry, or the foal would either be dead or have safely popped out before you got there! But this call added a new level of apprehension to my state of panic!

I ran downstairs to the surgery basement to gather implements, ropes and medications which I thought I would need, and then hastily looked at a map to find the location. Checking the list of regular horse clients, I could find nobody called 'Col. Clapham'. However, there was a big house at Belton!



Sweating profusely, I headed towards the car, intending to set off for Belton House, as this was clearly where I was supposed to go. The phone rang again.



"No need for you now, vet'nary," I heard

Colonel Clapham's voice waver slightly as he finally collapsed into a pathetic snigger. "She's had her foal.

April Fool, old chap!"

One of my fellow new graduates had gone to the trouble of looking up the name of a suitable



potential stately home in the area before dreaming up his rather cruel trick. 'Colonel Clapham' indeed. I should have recognised Simon's voice. Having been one of my pals at vet school, I knew that he had previously been a decorated officer in the British Army. He remains, to this day, a highly respected equine veterinary surgeon! He played his prank on me nearly 45 years ago, so it's probably a little late for retribution! However, I haven't forgotten.....!

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