



Joe and The Gladiator | The Nipper | Lanky Jones

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News & Choice:

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Catherine Cookson's novels are popular throughout my school, especially since the televising of **Our John Willie** earlier in the year. I can well see why, for the stories are exciting and well developed. Here are two paperback reissues where the characters are utterly credible and engaging, whether they be Tyneside shipyard workers or members of an 1800s mining community.

Joe is on the threshold of a working life as an apprentice marine plumber. Things are fraught with bullying at work and family conflicts at home without being left a rag-and-bone man's horse, *The Gladiator*, in a will! However, Joe rises to the challenge, despite the hardship, with some very surprising results for everyone who becomes involved.

Sandy is similarly bound to a horse, this time *Nipper* the galloway of the title. Amidst the tensions between miners and coalmasters early in the last century and the unrelenting poverty and hardship that was rife, Sandy tries to retain the deep mutual feeling that he shares with *The Nipper*, even if it means forsaking the open-air life that he loves for the barbarity of the coal-face.

Both books deserve a place on library and bookshop shelves but don't let unsuspecting readers think that they are just horse stories. They are more than that and as such thoroughly worthwhile reads.

Reading **Lanky Jones** as an adult I found that it fell rather unsatisfactorily between two stools. What started out as a promisingly acceptable look at such realities as the effects upon the children of separated parents, death of a parent, adoption and coping with a sibling who is 'different' - in this case an epileptic, reverted mid-way into a fairly mundane kidnapping and sheep-rustling tale, which bore only a passing relationship to the earlier concerns.

On the other hand, fourteen-year-old Claire, a Catherine Cookson devotee, judged it to be 'great after the first three pages, which were boring'.

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