



*by Joell Dunlap - all rights reserved by the author 2018*

The horses entered the paddock, led by their grooms. Each had a number attached to her bridle so gamblers could identify each horse before placing bets. Friday race crowds were sparse but the paddock area was always busy with spectators hanging their elbows over the fence trying to get closer to the animals.

She took a minute to size up the competition. Delacroix's filly was the one to beat. He always had good racing stock. They might not last long, but he sent them to the races with their hammers cocked, aiming towards a win.

The squealing and kicking black four year old filly was the shipper from up North. One look at her and you knew she was short on pedigree and class – not a contender. A tall, elegant gray mare caught everyone's eye. She walked regally around the paddock observing everything. Ann checked her program. Oh, she thought, looking at the owner/trainer combination, it's the new kids in town. Better keep an eye out. Nobody seemed to know where the barn came from. It was run by a young couple that she heard had come from Canada. She'd also heard that they came from Oklahoma, Seattle and Maryland. They kept to themselves, turned out beautiful

horses that ran honestly and nobody knew who the owners were. She looked forward to hearing the real story as soon as someone figured it out.

The jockey's valet showed up next with the jock's saddle. The groom brought the mare over and did his best to keep her still while she and the valet placed the numbered saddle towel, the thin pad, folded over the saddle towel and then placed the tiny vinyl saddle upon the mare's back. When the girth was tightened, the mare kicked violently with both hind feet. Ann signaled the groom to walk the mare forward and then bring her around again before they placed the over-girth around her belly that would be tighter than the first girth. Nobody chastises a professional racehorse for being tender about the girth.

All that was left to do was to tie the mare's tongue. Some racehorses suck their tongue down their throats while racing. By tying a strip of cotton around the horse's tongue and lower jaw, the possibility is eliminated. The mare was a professional and she submitted to the tongue tie without fuss.

One quick walk around the saddling paddock and the jockeys showed up. Their rider was already shaking the hands of Jude and Abe Steiner. He was handsome and hungry and thrilled to ride for a hot barn. As an apprentice, he got to ride five pounds lighter than the other riders, an advantage for a mare built like Pax Kristi. The groom brought the horse around while Abe Steiner told the jock how to ride the race.

### **Grace In The Paddock**

"You've got to gun her out of the gates you know. I mean really get her going." Abe was leaning forward and pumping his arms to show the jockey how to do it.

The jockey caught Ann's eye and gave her the quickest wink. Ann had to turn away to suppress giggles. You had to give the guy credit for grace as he listened and nodded at every word Abe said. Abe continued giving riding instruction to the professional rider who had ridden more horses than Abe Steiner had ever seen. But this guy was known for charm and skill and she was impressed with both. The paddock judge called for the riders to mount up and Jude gave a quick leg up to the rider.

## January 2019 - Pax Kristi's Race, Installment #6

Written by by Joell Dunlap - all rights reserved by the author 2018  
Thursday, 27 December 2018 22:36

---

Ann didn't hear Jude's phone ring.

"Well hello there Russ. I'm in the paddock, I can't talk long (pause).

"Yes, that's right, we had to scratch 'Dios from tomorrow's race (pause).

"Tied up, that's correct. (pause again)

" Yes I'm sure he tied up and no, he's never done it before in our barn. (waits)

"No, there's nothing we can give him that will get him to tomorrow's race. I'm very sorry. (waits some more)

"Well Mr. Wells, he is your horse and you can take him to another trainer, I can't stop you but he is officially scratched for tomorrow, the vet has signed off. (kicks dirt with his boot)

"Yes sir, I realize you pay a lot for training, there is nothing I can do, this is what happens with horses sometimes."

Ann tried not to hover over the conversation and tried harder not to rip the phone from his head and tell Mr. Russell Wells what an idiot he really was. Lots of owners got testy when they are excited about a race and then something happens and the horse can't run. But this time she'd had it with short-sighted owners acting as if their horses were machines, not living and breathing athletes.

"Okay Russ, I promise to call you tomorrow and we can settle the bill then. Cramer is a good trainer and I'm sure you will be happy with him" (he nods his head and tried to avoid looking at Ann)

“Okay. Fine. Until tomorrow then. Hmm. Yeah. Bye now.” He clicked off and immediately gave Ann a look that said Not now, not here, don't even start.

“I'm going to watch this race from the owner/trainer lounge upstairs, I'll see you all later.” Ann said.

“Oh, I'll come with you then” Julie piped in. “I need to check in anyway.”

This was not what Ann had in mind. Her plan was to duck around the corner and make a phone call of her own. She was angry beyond belief and now had to deal with Julie again. Ann wanted to scream in frustration.

Without looking back, Ann stomped toward the escalator leading up to the owner trainer lounge.

The track employee guarding the gate to the lounge asked “Can I see your license please?”

“Where the hell is Maye-Ann?” she snapped at the employee. Maye-Ann had worked the desk of the lounge since the dawn of time. Maye-Ann knew everyone.

“She's had a stroke, or that's what they tell me” replied the pale girl.

“License?” she extended her hand to receive the card.

“I've been at the track for 20 goddamn years, I never carry my fucking license.”

## January 2019 - Pax Kristi's Race, Installment #6

Written by by Joell Dunlap - all rights reserved by the author 2018  
Thursday, 27 December 2018 22:36

---

"I'm sorry then," came the timid but resolute response.

"She's with me, and if you don't know my Daddy runs this joint," Julie smiled down at the girl at the desk.

"Oh well then Ms. Ullswater. Of course, have a nice day."

"Thanks Julie," Ann sighed.



"De nada Pumpkin. C'mon, it's your turn to buy me a drink."

"Hang on, they're loading in the gates. Let's watch the race."

"That nag? She doesn't have a shot. Delacroix's filly is a lock."

“That ‘nag’ is a pretty honest mare and we’re not in the habit of running horses without a shot.” It was hard not to be snotty. She’d had it with people who thought they knew the horses that she handled every day. But Julie was not entirely wrong. Delacroix’s filly was strong. Of course, in racing anything could happen. Running five pounds lighter with the apprentice jockey was a factor not to be ignored.

### **A Three Horse Race**

The black filly from up North held up the start by refusing to enter the starting gate. She was finally loaded by four strong gate men and the gates popped open immediately. Delacroix’s filly stumbled badly at the start. The gray mare bounded away and had an entire length on the field within the first eighth of a mile.

Pax Kristi was tight in the pack between horses and running just a neck behind the second horse with Delacroix’s filly making up ground quickly. Pounding down the hill with only five lengths between the leader and the last horse, the field of horses swung around the turn as a group. Inching her way up on the leaders, Pax Kristi started to creep up on the gray mare who was still gliding over the turf.

Meanwhile Delacroix’s horse was chasing the leaders gamely from the outside. But her rider was already down and driving too soon. Most horses have one big move in a race – Move too soon and your horse won’t finish strongly, move too late and you fly by horses after the finish line where there is no money and no glory. Delacroix’s rider, a veteran should have know better. The horses crossed the main track and the gray filly threw her head in the air, surprised from the sudden change of racing surface.

Pax Kristi dug in, as did Delacroix’s filly and it was suddenly a three horse race with Pax Kristi at the rail, the surprised gray filly in the middle and Delacroix’s entry on the outside. All three riders were down and riding with one eighth of a mile to go. Arms were pumping as the horses dug in. As the horses raced for the wire, Ann’s phone lit up.