



by Joell Dunlap - all rights reserved by the author 2018

Wisteria

Halfway to the parking lot, Jude Keenan's current girlfriend Julie Ullswater drove in. With the top down in the Pasadena spring air and loud pop tunes blaring from her BMW, Julie waved her shiny bleached tresses and called out;

"You aren't leaving are you?"

"Well, I was."

Julie swung the car dangerously in front of Ann in the way all blond young and beautiful women think they ought to in LA. "I so wanted to take you to Pepe's for lunch."

"Um, I really..."

"Come on, just the two of us."

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Wednesday, 31 October 2018 22:19

The last place Ann wanted to spend what might be the only remaining quiet time of her 14 hour workday was in a bar with a woman bound and determined to ply her with alcohol in order to find out what and who Jude Keenan was up to lately.

“Actually, I have a lunch date.” Ann lied.

“REALLY? When do I get to meet him? What’s his story? Or hers?” Julie was always trying to figure out which side of the field Ann played on.

“I don’t really want to say, it’s someone I met on-line.” Ann had always been a terrible liar and this lie was getting thicker by the minute.

“The ONLINE?” Everything was loud with these girls.

“Well, it’s more like a friend of a friend,” Ann stammered.

“You little liar, you are just trying to get out of this. Now get in the car, let’s get you something to eat, you are looking too thin these days.”

Busted and apologetic, Ann couldn’t think of anything else to do but reluctantly ease into the passenger seat of the gaudy car. Luckily, Pepe’s was just around the corner.

After two of Pepe’s margaritas, Ann’s phone rang.

“I gotta take this Julie,” Ann pushed back from the table.

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“Hey dad,” she answered, trying not to slur words.

“What’s up mighty mouse?”

“Um, I’m just heading over to the races, can I call you tonight?”

“I was just calling to say that I’d be in Los Angeles next week, can I take you to dinner?” He asked, ever upbeat Dad.

“You can do more than that Dad, you can stay at my place if that works.”

“No honey, I don’t want to be any trouble to you and Mateo.”

“Dad, Mateo hasn’t lived there for months. It’s just me and the dog and we’d love you to stay.”

“Well, if it’s not too much trouble, I’ll be there on the 18th and I head home on the 21st. Maybe I could stay the night of the 19th and we go to dinner?”

“That would be great dad. Kiss mom for me - okay?”

“You got it super star.” He clicked off.

Ann smiled as she mused how terrible her whole family was at saying goodbye but how fond her dad always was of inventing pet names for his two children.

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She leaned up against the side of the building and looked at the gardens that surrounded the restaurant and bar. One thing you could say for the Pasadena area, they sure knew how to grow gardens. Avocado trees with shiny green leaves surrounded camellia bushes with fat white and pink flowers that bloomed year-round.

And roses - the famous Pasadena roses. Fragrant roses, tiny tea roses, roses with variegated colors and roses with impossibly big blooms. Every local knew something about roses. But for Ann, it was the purple wisteria vines that gave her the most delight. They appeared over what seemed like every gate and doorway in late spring only to shed their blooms and fade into the background quietly until the next blooming season. For all of the freeway ugliness of the LA basin, this area exploded with colorful flowers and she didn't realize until right now how much joy the flowers brought to her.

"There you are." Julie came tottering out of the bar on impossibly high heels. Her makeup didn't look so tidy after a couple of lunchtime drinks. "I thought you were sneaking away."

"Look, I gotta be back to the races soon, can you drive me back to the track?"

"Pumpkin, I can't drive now." She pointed to her margarita tumbler. "You just take my car and I'll get Reiner or Kelly to give me a ride to the track. Park it in the owner/trainer lot - okay? Big love."

Julie reached over and gave her a sloppy air kiss on the cheek, then went back inside the bar.

A Mile?

Ann climbed into the shiny car, pushed a load of cosmetics off the seat and drove to the track. Turning her ball cap backwards to keep it on in the convertible, she arrived at the track looking like an over-aged thug. Righting her ball cap in the car's mirror and doing her best to make herself look presentable she looked up to see Jude Keenan staring bewildered at his assistant trainer driving his girlfriend's car -the girlfriend that he hadn't expected to see this day.

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“Don’t even ask” she sighed. “You’re safe for another hour until she gets to the bottom of that pitcher of margaritas at Pepe’s. Then she’s all yours. I’m finished girlfriend-sitting today.”

“I thought she wouldn’t be back in town until tomorrow. What’s up?” he asked.

Ann glared in return, ignored the question and instead asked “How’s Viya Con Dios?”

“That old man will be fine. Bummer that we’ll have to scratch for tomorrow. It was a good race for him. Of course Wells already has an allowance race picked out for him next week.”

“There’s no five furlong allowance race coming up on the grass next week.”

“He figures that the old guy could go a mile on the new track.”

“A MILE? He’s out of his head! A mile would kill that horse!”

“Don’t worry, we’ll come up with something. Maybe we can send him down to Los Alamitos and run him next week.”

This was her worst fear for the horse. The night races at Los Alamitos were cheap and fast. The purses were small and the only reason to send a horse there was to get them claimed in a race so that they weren’t your problem anymore.

There was a time and a place to get a horse out of your barn. But this horse needed to retire and he deserved the retirement that she planned for him. With close to a 50 horses in and out of their barn every year, some horses worked their way under your skin, no matter how tough you

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thought you were and this horse was one of them. It went against her philosophy to interfere with the business end of the barn, but she felt even more responsible that she had something to do with him tying up this morning and the pain he was in right now. She mustered up all the strength she could and said; "Look, I managed your girlfriend for you today, you owe me one. I'm gonna talk to the Wells' today and just ask them to donate that horse this week to my friend up North."

"Like your friend needs another broke down old racehorse that doesn't know how to be anything but a racehorse. You both know you can't put little kids on a tough old campaigner like him. Be reasonable. He's probably got five or six races in him and the Wells' are loving being in the winner's circle for a change after that ratty mare they tried to run for years."

He knew she was right, but her back was up and she was ready to play dirty. "Well, maybe I'll just go and pick up a certain someone in her car and bring her over to the races. She and I didn't have much of a chance to catch up in that noisy bar today."

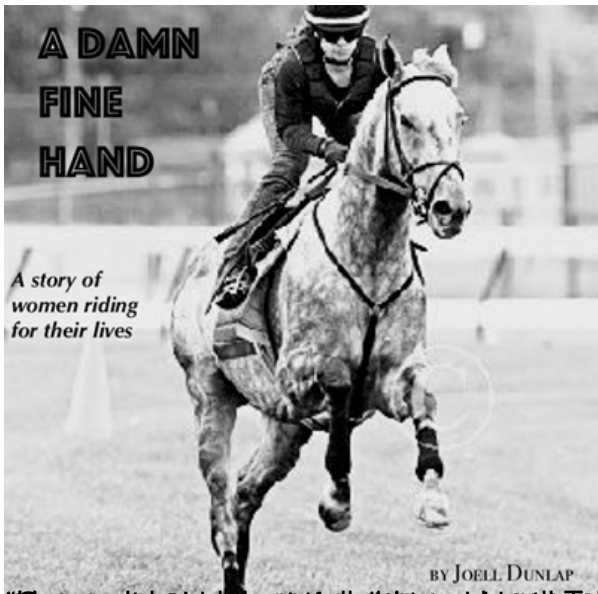
Jude's surgically crafted nostrils flared and his pupils dilated. She could have sworn that one of his perfectly coiffed hairs jumped out of place "You wouldn't."

In response, she cocked her hip and dangled the keys with the pink sparkly "Julie" written in script in his face.

"Jeezus you're a bitch," he replied. "I'll call Wells myself. Tell the van to pick him up on Sunday."

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