

## PEGASUS

RON BASS 10/16/21

As our story begins, Grace is a 7-year-old living in South Florida near Gulfstream Park. Her father Carl is a horse trainer, and their home is attached to a small stable. Grace suffered an injury when she was four and wears leg braces. She is cheerful, hard working, and completely ignores her disability. Her parents are having trouble making ends meet, because the horse racing business is going downhill. Especially for the little guy.

Grace's mother Elissa is sick and dying, She and her 7-year-old are incredibly close. One of their mares is about to foal, and Elissa promises Grace that the foal will belong to her. That foal is born just as Grace's mother is dying. The foal is a filly that Grace names Epona, mother of the mother of the fabled Pegasus. The girl is obsessed With Greek mythology, and believes that her beloved mother's spirit is in this filly.

Grace is now 14, Epona gives birth to a filly, large and gawky and pure white. But deformed. Just behind the withers on each side there is a growth that looks like a large pointy chicken wing. No one has ever seen anything like it. The chicken wings mark the filly as Pegasus to our girl. Vestigial bony folded wings may not be leg braces, but Grace sees her filly to be a kindred spirit, each carrying a deformity that may affect their lives, but Grace vows that they will never be defined by this; We see that Grace loves Pegasus with all her heart, and the filly becomes her confidante, every secret thought and feeling shared with her.

Three years have passed Grace is 17, and she rides the horse every morning in the mist before anyone else on the track, rides alone so the horse won't be ridiculed.

William, 19, is a groom. Grace is attracted to him, they've known each other a long time. He's working a horse for a wealthy owner, turns in 6 furlongs at a really great time. Our horse watches the fast workout of the groom's horse and suddenly, Pegasus begins to RUN FAST, once around the track and KEEPS GOING, Grace HANGING ON and beaming with delight. The speed of the filly dazzles William. He takes out a stopwatch.

When the horse finally slows, Grace rides over to the groom who is blown away: I caught your horse in 1:09 for 6 furlongs That's maybe four or five lengths from the track record at Gulfstream. That's not really possible. As they're talking, Pegasus takes off with Grace again. This time, 1:08.7 Three lengths off the track record at the nearby legendary Gulfstream Park.

They run to get Carl. The horse has run two blazing works, maybe tomorrow, but Pegasus TAKES OFF with Grace once more.. William hands the watch to Carl, and he catches the horse in 7 furlongs at 1:21.2, four lengths off the track record.

There is resistance to letting Pegasus run in even a small race because of the deformity. But Carl persists. The bloodlines are pure thoroughbred, and of course there is no specific disqualification for chicken wings.

Pegasus will let no one but Grace on her back. After three jockeys are immediately Thrown. William gives our girl a leg up and only then will Pegasus run. And run she does, mesmerizing with fluid power and sheer speed.

Her first race, Pegasus cruises 26 lengths off the pace, Grace in her leg braces, riding without a whip, hands caressing the broad neck of her pal, she leans close and murmurs too low to hear: I think maybe now. And Pegasus TAKES OFF, sweeping around the far turn, running them down at the head of the stretch, and they are GONE to the gasp of the small crowd.

We'll see her in a blur of races prepping for the Triple Crown. Every race is a new thrill as Pegasus spots the field longer and longer leads and at the whisper of the girl on her back she just mercilessly runs them all down as the crowds scream.

We'll linger on Gulfstream's Holy Bull, on the Fountain of Youth. But Pegasus doesn't travel, so the world comes to her. The beautiful flawed horse with its beautiful flawed writer becomes the first national article. Grace gets a chance to smile and say the truth, neither horse or rider are flawed in any way. Just ask everyone eating their dust.

Florida Derby at Gulfstream which has national and international telecast because of the magical wonder horse. When the race is run, Pegasus drops back 30 lengths, waiting for her sister to whisper to her. And when she does, the acceleration creates a GASP from the capacity crowd. Down the stretch they come, eating up the distance to the leaders, then sailing free with the crowd on its feet screaming. Everyone checking the time, the track record is not the point. This is the third fastest 1 1/8 ever run by any horse in any race anywhere. Ever. Two lengths back of the legendary Secretariat.

The Kentucky Derby. Pegasus and Grace leave South Florida for the first time. There has never been such a buzz as swirls around this astonishing closer, the filly who looks like she could run any speed at all. And of course she can.

Race day, heavy security no one can get to Grace and Carl and William who never leaves the horse's side. Alone with Grace just before Riders Up, he whispers a thought he's carried with him. Would Grace ride without the braces? He would bring them to her at the dismount. No, she'll be in the Winner's Circle, it will only call attention to her condition. He tells her for the first time how very

beautiful she is, he wants the world to realize it. Today has nothing to do with appearances, and William is ashamed because he sounds oblivious to the substance of this woman he's fallen in love with.

She doesn't want to hurt his feelings and this surprise confession of love actually throws her, takes her concentration away. Pegasus senses something is wrong as William gives her a leg up. But at the parade to the post, with the world watching, she leans to whisper that today is different. Today is special. This is the day that everyone will remember. Whatever her dear pal has in reserve, today is the day Grace wants all of it.

As the race starts, Pegasus drops back, 25, 30, 40 lengths. Is there anyone in this throng that doesn't own a ticket on her? And as they round the far turn, Pegasus swings WIDE for the first time, The chicken wings pull from her side and UNFOLD into SHINING WHITE WINGS. You can almost hear the planet earth GASP as one.

Pegasus never rises an inch above the track. The exquisite wings never flap or move. Outstretched they only tilt slightly with aerodynamic efficiency, like a jet plane. She doesn't fly, but she may as well have. With the world cheering in a hundred million places, she runs as no one has seen before, and at the wire, as they CHEER themselves hoarse, their eyes are fixed on the time.

Pegasus has covered a mile and a quarter in 1:56.4, smashing Spectacular Bid's world record by the equivalent of seven lengths. They can't scream louder so they begin to stamp their feet and we fear that Churchill Down's grandstand may just collapse.

At the winner's circle, Pegasus has long since folded her wings back in, With a blanket of roses across her lap, Grace is asked if she believes in miracles, Grace answers that she has always lived with the humility that we don't have every answer to existence. Some may call it faith, Grace simply calls it the humility that will always allow her to accept.

The world may be thrilled. But the competition and the traditionalists are not. This so-called 'World Record' must be stricken. This horse must never be allowed to run again, especially in the Preakness. God forbid this horse wins the Triple Crown. Whatever this animal is, it is for science to examine. She is not a horse.

And they take it to court. They get an injunction from a favorable judge. This would ruin the sport forever. This magnificent animal should be only be allowed to run in exhibitions. Carl should be required to have science gently and respectfully examine this beast. Because miracles sell,

but truth must be served. And there is a truth in that animal somewhere.

Carl says innocently that he doesn't own this horse. They'll have to come to Grace. She will not turn Pegasus over to anyone. Grace will fight for Pegasus' right to run in the Belmont.

The Preakness goes off without Pegasus and the world screams FOUL. The race is boycotted. Worst TV ratings ever. And Pegasus' detractors are defeated by the very reality they said they wanted. Their sport is in decline, some say dying, this has brought the eyes of the world to them. It would be insanity, suicide, not to beg Grace to run the Belmont.

In the showdown meeting, surrounded by the suits, Grace herself offers the compromise. Pegasus will not use her wings in the Belmont. How does she know this? Because Grace will tell her not to.

Belmont day is bedlam. Everywhere. What will Grace do? We alone see Grace's midnight talk with Pegasus. Her message: the horse should do whatever she wants. Grace will handle the world. Pegasus will handle the race.

The bell SOUNDS, the gates CLANG OPEN. And THEY'RE OFF. Pegasus has one last surprise for the world. Something she's never done before. To Grace's astonishment, she breaks to the FRONT. Chicken wings tight to her body so far.

It's a mile and a half, the horse has never run this distance. Not only in front, she starts pulling away. Five lengths, ten, she doesn't know how long this is, she'll never last, she'll lose her finishing kick. Will she use her wings after all?

AND DOWN THE STRETCH THEY COME. No wings to help her she just keeps pulling steadily away 25 lengths, 30, and Grace leans to Pegasus' ear and Pegasus finds ANOTHER GEAR. You can hear the woosh, as she SPRINTS toward the wire, 50 lengths, 60, up on the board, Secretariat's untouchable world record of 2:24 is posted, Pegasus and Grace a BLUR at the wire. The time: 2:19.8. The record no horse could ever come near, crushed by the equivalent of 22 lengths.

A nation, a planet, humanity united in one impossible moment. Is it for an animal the world has never seen before? Is it for the slender girl in the leg braces? Or is it for miracles themselves, and the humility that lets them reach us?

Our story is nearly done. Midnight at the old stable, back home. Grace and Pegasus actually alone together. We see Grace talking from distance. What is passing between these two? And then...

Grace begins to walk away. In a few feet Pegasus follows, catches up. They walk to an open field in moonlight. Grace tells Pegasus that they have to say good-bye. The horse has to leave, she doesn't really belong here. The world would never let them be together. Tears on her face, she kisses Pegasus' muzzle for the last time. Grace steps back. We hold CLOSE on Grace, only HEAR the WHOOSH OF HUGE WINGS, as they fade farther and farther away, into forever.

Grace sits down on the grass in the moonlight, and for the first time in our story, she gives way completely to sorrow. Her shoulders trembling as she sobs so piteously that she can't really catch her breath, and then..

Something POKES over her shoulder and she SCREAMS, SCRAMBLING AWAY, before she and we realize that the something was a great white muzzle. She SWATS at the horse, who easily slips the punch: YOU GAVE ME A DARN HEART ATTACK!!! Pegasus tilts her head, yep, I did.

The girl gets to her feet: No, no, you don't understand. It's funny because you always understand everything. I know it's hard on you, too, but it's like every mother has to do with her children, has to cry and kiss them good-bye and send them off to live the life they are meant to live.

And on these words, for the first time, the horse actually nods. Grace repeats just above a whisper: The life they are meant to live. And now...

Pegasus looks in her eyes, leans her muzzle down and..

NUZZLES one leg. And then the other. Her meaning is clear. Slowly, holding eye contact, Grace...

UNBUCKLES HER BRACES. They FALL to the earth. Pegasus BACKS AWAY. Farther, farther. Farther. And Grace..

RUNS TO HER, LEAPS ON HER BACK. THE WINGS ARE OUT, THE HORSE TAKES THREE STRIDES AND...

FLIES OFF, SO FAST GRACE HAS TO HANG ONTO THE MOONLIT MANE, CIRCLES THE STABLE, THE TRACK, THE ONLY HOME THIS GIRL HAS EVER KNOWN AND SUDDNENLY...

THEY FLY STRAIGHT TOWARD THE MOON ITSELF.

Maybe they'll make it.