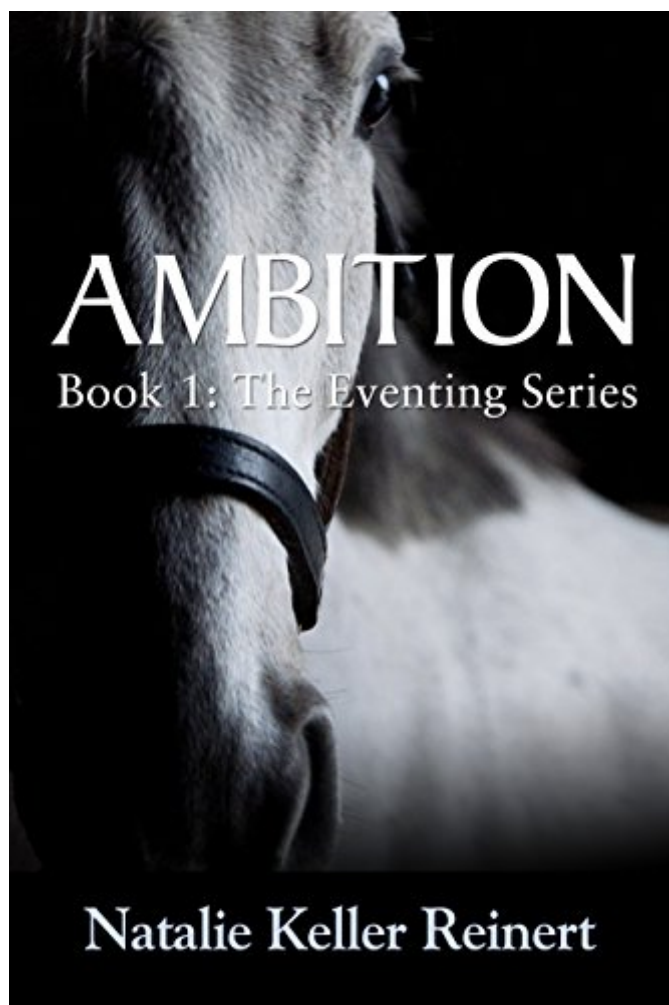


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Ambition (The Eventing Series Book 1)



Synopsis

"Natalie weaves the story of Jules, her horses, and their uncertain road to the upper levels of eventing with realism and detail." - The Equine Insider" 'Ambition' is one of the good ones." - Susannah St. Clair (Vine Voice Reviewer)"This all felt very real to me." - Karen McGoldrick

Jules Thornton didn't come to Ocala to make friends. She came to make a name for herself. Young, determined, and tough as nails, she's been swapping stable-work for saddle-time since she was a little kid - and it hasn't always been a fun ride. Forever the struggling rider in a sport for the wealthy, all Jules has on her side is talent and ambition. She's certain all she needs to succeed are good horses, but will the eventing world agree? On her own at last, Jules is positive she's poised to become eventing's newest star, but soon finds she's making more enemies than friends in the close-knit equestrian community. Little mistakes cost big -- her students are losing faith in her; her owners are starting to pull their horses. And then there's the small matter of Peter Morrison, the handsome, on-the-rise event rider who keeps showing up when she least expects him. Jules is convinced that all she needs is good horses -- not friends, not romance, not anyone's nose in her business. But it's just the beginning of the long, hot, Ocala summer, and as Jules tumbles through the highs and lows of a life with horses, she might find she'll need help after all to weather the coming storm. In the equestrian literary tradition of Jane Smiley (Horse Heaven) and Sara Gruen (Riding Lessons, Water for Elephants), Natalie Keller Reinert takes readers into the riding life as only a horsewoman can.

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Customer Reviews

It's with great relief that I can give Natalie Keller Reinert's *Ambition* three stars and wish I could give it three and a half. I was worried for a while. For the fact is, this book starts on Chapter 13. I did need a lot of the information in the first 12 chapters: the source of Jules's maniacal drive for success, where she got the money for her farm, what her days were like. Obviously I needed a lot of the early information: the meeting with Peter and Jules's first disaster, and I needed to meet Mickey, of course. I didn't at all mind being taken back to some of the atmosphere of an outdoors working life in Central Florida, having ridden and taught riding in Tampa for 23 years. But by Chapter 13, I was skimming the text, muttering, "I know this already!" I was thinking, "When is something going to happen in this book?" Fortunately, it did. Peter showed back up, Jules went to a show, we found out a little of the challenge she faced in Mickey, and we saw just how ferociously she sabotaged herself. I got caught up in Jules's struggles, even though I kept wanting to give her a body shake and shout, "Girl, get a read on yourself!" Despite my impatience with her, I found Jules well-drawn, believable. I had a little more trouble with Peter, who comes across as flatter, more of the Good-Looking Guy Who Is Misunderstood requisite in romances than a flesh-and-blood person. I couldn't understand why he kept coming back to someone who treated him so brutally. He wasn't painted as a masochistic type. The writing is lively, capturing the train wrecks so often characteristic of a life with horses with humor and insight. I know whereof Reinert speaks when she takes us through a horse person's learning curves: For example, like Jules, I somehow internalized the idea that it was my job to place the horse's feet at exactly the right take-off spot. The day the trainer I'd found late in life (too late) said to me, "Your job is to set the tempo, pace, and frame; it's his job to jump the fence" was the beginning of one of the most unsettling psychological leaps I could imagine. As a confirmed control freak, letting the horse make his own decisions? Really? Reinert knows her stuff; all the horse-handling in this book rings true. I did raise an eyebrow once or twice. Two women taking full care of 13 horses, riding 9 a day? A trainer as far along as Jules not recognizing a bad shoeing job and a sore-footed horse? On the former point I'll have to cede to Reinert; she's been around a lot more than I have and maybe people can manage that schedule. The latter point I attribute to poetic license; it gives Peter a chance to show his stuff. But still. That said, the completion of Jules's

character arc was fitting and worked well. Anybody who has been where Jules and I have both been, watching other people ride while we clean stalls, trying to negotiate personal relations when differing views of what ought to be done with a horse intervene, hanging on to a precarious dream without the basic wherewithal it requires, will have a lot of fun with this book. As will those who dream of being rescued by Peter.

I am most familiar with Natalie's writing through her blogs and articles on horses and racing, so even though eventing is not my sport by any stretch I decided to take a stab at reading "Ambition" (in part because the cover caught my eye.) I ended up being sucked into the story enough I finished reading in two days! The good: Natalie knows horses and it shows without being obnoxious. You almost never have the feeling that something is being explained rather than the narrator's logical internal monologue. The characters are engaging (except see below) and the horses are probably the most realistically-drawn I've read in a long time. I even love the evil pony. Yes, I know "evil pony" is redundant. There's a definite art to writing a character who isn't generically likable or supposed to be likable BECAUSE they're bitchy and Jules is well done for the most part. She has legitimate reasons for her temperament, but we aren't supposed to applaud her as a 'strong female character' simply BECAUSE she's got a bad attitude. Her determination and love of horses is admirable and makes you want to root for her, and you understand her reasons for her 'go it alone' attitude. Up to a point. The bad: I took away one star for two reasons. Jules is a well-rounded character, and we're not supposed to be entirely supportive of her voluntary isolation (emotional and literal.) But the unrelenting nature of her attitude does start to grate after a while. She's so negative at times it becomes hard to sympathize, especially when she is in so deep over her head with a horse and will not ask for help, the hallmark of a good horsewoman. Also, Peter sticks out among the characters as being so perfect it's 1. hard to believe and 2. hard to understand why he's so extremely persistent (nicely!) in pursuing Jules when she's at best terse with him. The other reason is the rather abrupt ending. First, the build-up lead me to expect more to the accident than a minor fracture that's hardly worth mentioning. Second, as other reviewers have noted, the leap from the chapter-ending accident to "weeks later" in the last chapter is very abrupt. Of course, it's also a good sign, as I wasn't really ready for the book to be over!

This is one of the most accurate horse books out there. The author so clearly knows horses and the eventing world, which is very refreshing. Even better, she can really write and creates interesting, well developed characters. She also is great at descriptions (the Ocala weather is almost its own

character) and realistic dialogue. Jules is a complicated person and it was great fun to go along on the journey with her as she matures and grows into herself. While Jules falls into the category of riders without trust funds who break into the big time, it's believable (unlike some other riders in books), because she does have some money from a relative to buy her farm. This is thankfully not one of those annoying books where a rider with no money and no training finds an amazing horse in some unlikely scenario and goes on to win at a national competition. It's also nice that the ending didn't tie everything up in a perfect bow. I'd recommend this book for any reader of horse books who likes a realistic, well written story.

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