

THE STAR AND I
CHAPTER 11: Sour grapes

That sun-drenched day at Sandown Park when Sea The Stars had eye-balled Rip Van Winkle and then seen off that challenge to win the Eclipse Stakes was still a vivid memory.



Sea The Stars had eye-balled Rip Van Winkle to win the Eclipse Stakes



Such a beautiful eye!

Well, so was the immediate aftermath. But enough of that. Since then, it began to seem that the English summer might have started and finished on that Saturday in July. Broken weather once again threatened to prevent the Star's running in the Juddmonte International Stakes at York.



Broken weather threatened to prevent the Star's running in the Juddmonte International Stakes at York

By then, my mother and I had learned which racecourses can absorb rainfall without unduly affecting the going and which could not. York comes into the latter category. Not for nothing is it called the Knavesmire. A 'mire' means a stretch of swampy or boggy ground. As for the knaves, it used to be customary to hang convicted felons on the racecourse before the real day's sport took place. Grizzly carry on. Of course the bodies were cut down before racing began, lest they interfere with the viewing. Fortunately, Britain abolished the death penalty some fifty years ago.



Knivesmire, place where convicted felons were to be hanged on the racecourse

The week leading up to the Juddmonte International was like the prelude to the Irish Derby. It saw me opening every weather forecast website I could find. Inevitably, they all gave conflicting predictions, a bit like racing tipsters actually.

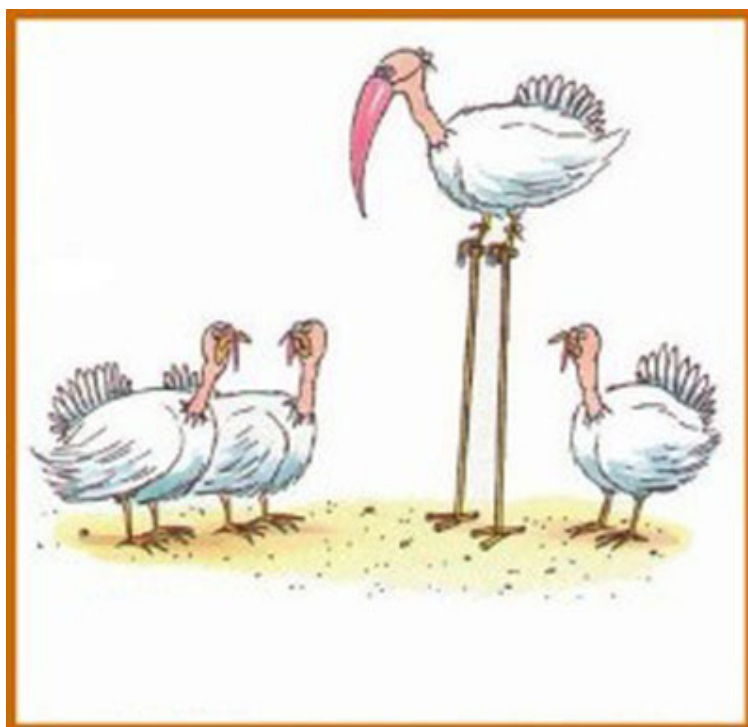


Weather forecast gave conflicting predictions



Weather forecast, financial adviser, racing tipsters who should we trust?

However, on this occasion the racing media all sang from the same hymn sheet. Sea The Stars only had to turn up to win. His Eclipse win had confirmed him as the best in the business. He is 'vraiment le sans-pareil'.



He is 'vraiment le sans pareil'

As soon as we received the 'all clear' from Mr Oxx, I packed my 'lucky items' as usual. I landed in London the day before the race at York, figuring to reach the famous cathedral city by train, refusing John Clarke's suggestion to pick me up by limousine.



I have refused John Clarke's suggestion to pick me up by limousine

Pursuing me by mobile telephone, my mother ordered me to take my breakfast in the Sheraton Park

Tower hotel where I had been staying during my trip. She gave no reason for this peremptory command. As I could find nothing 'auspicious' or otherwise in this choice of breakfast venue, I decided to ignore it. Instead, while waiting for the train to depart, I reverted to my student haunts, grabbing a Coca-Cola and a bargain sandwich from the station kiosk.



My Coca-Cola and my bargain sandwich from the station kiosk

To my surprise, a complete stranger approached me, asked me if I was the owner of Sea The Stars and wished me good luck. When others did likewise on the train, I began to comprehend the reflected glory that now lay in owning the most famous racehorse of his era. Did that feel good? You bet!



To be famous is a "Hard Day's Night"

This particular Juddmonte International promised to be a peculiar affair. The 'Star' faced just three rivals, all of them owned by Coolmore and trained by Aidan O'Brien in Ballydoyle. The papers said that it was the first time since pattern racing had been instituted over thirty years ago that a British Group 1 was to take place without a single British-trained runner.



For the first time, a British Group 1 race without British-trained horse

My team and I elected to watch the big race on the big screen in the parade ring, close by the winner's circle. Hubris? Sure looked that way for several deathless seconds. As we had anticipated, the Coolmore pacemakers parted to let Mastercraftsman through once their job was done. Michael Kinane immediately slipped the 'Star' through in his slipstream, before the gap could close. But he did not want to get into a long drawn out battle, so he appeared to take a little pull. Okay, the 'Star' seemed to respond. If that's the way you want it. . .



A small gap

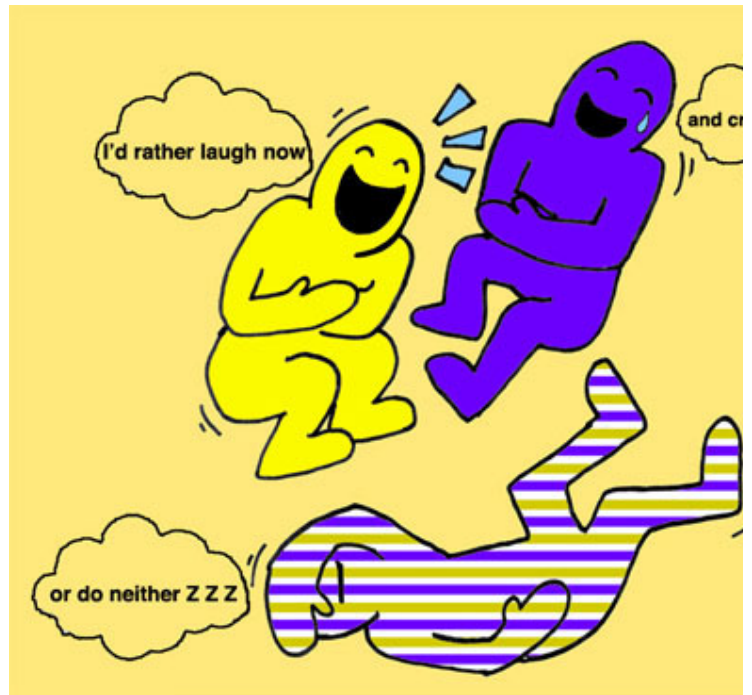


Kinane slipped the 'Star' through in his slipstream before the gap could close

I was shouting at the big screen. The 'Star' could not betray me now. He must not shatter my dreams, dash my belief in his invincibility, show the world that he, too, had his Achilles heel. He could not! Perhaps the 'Star' has a sense of humour. Having shortened all our lives by innumerable years, he simply changed gear, surged past Mastercraftsman and won with who knows how much to spare. The joker! I didn't know whether I wanted to laugh or to cry, or do both, or do neither.



Perhaps the 'Star' has a sense of humour



Laugh, cry or neither

But one thing was sure. I was not going to fall in another heap, no way. Mr Oxx admitted that he had also had a bad fright. However, he added that as long as Sea The Stars kept doing it, his way, that was cool by him. Michael Kinane simply said that the best horse he had ever ridden would never win by more than he absolutely needed to. That was just him. Whew!



Sea The Stars won the Juddmonte International at York with courage and intelligence

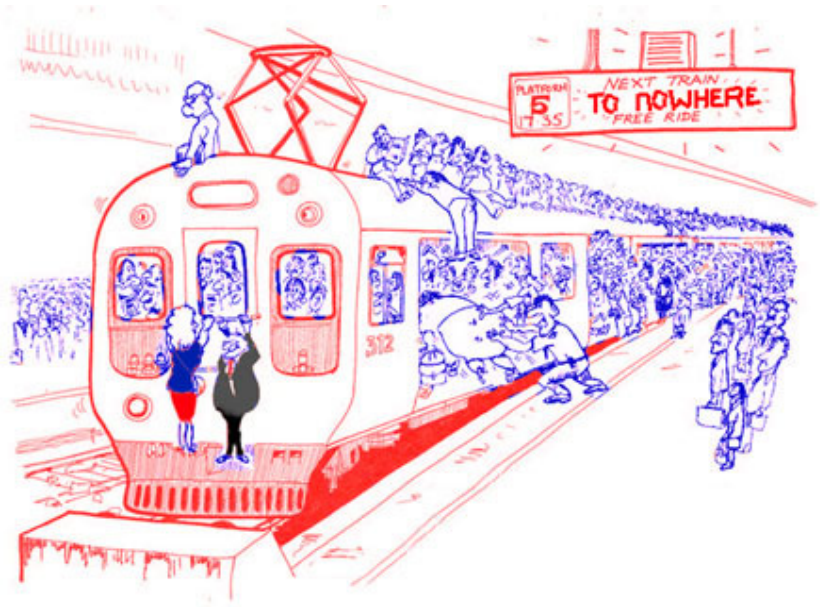


Sea The Stars applauded warmly by the British public

The return train journey was embarrassing, what with the enormous boxes containing the trophies that I had to carry everywhere with me, accepting congratulations from people who presumed themselves on quite intimate terms with me now. I made a mental resolution not to use public transport any time my 'Star' ran again.



The enormous boxes containing the trophies that I had to carry



I would not use public transport any time my 'Star' ran again

On my return home to Hong Kong, my mother had seen a 'blog' note posted by a girl. In it, she had written that her mother had recommended she marry Christopher Tsui. He owned the world's best racehorse, had his PGA qualification, plus his MBA from CASS, the top London business school. He was a mark!



Christopher- a prime marriage prospect



He had his PGA qualification



He had his MBA from CASS, the top London business school

It seems her daughter had her doubts. Christopher, she wrote, could be a weirdo.

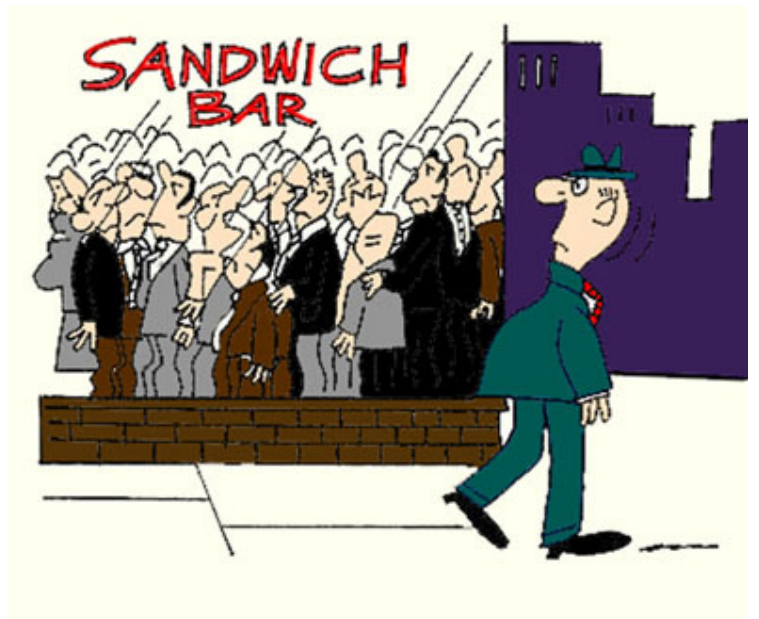


Christopher could be a weirdo

What was she to make of a character who fainted when his horse won a race, who fed himself on discount railway station sandwiches before another big race and celebrated yet another big win with a margarita pizza?



He fainted when his horse won a race



He fed himself on discount railway station sandwiches



He celebrated his win with a margarita pizza

Christine, my sister, dismissed this canard in two words: "Sour grapes".



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