

1. *Race in the Pasture*

The wind whistled past Joel's ears as he ran, pumping his legs harder and harder. His elbows worked like pistons. His breath came in gasps. His heart seemed almost to burst from his chest.

But it was no use. Lady and Jim were far ahead of Joel, and they knew it. Down the pasture raced Lady, her mane and tail streaming in the wind, her hooves pounding. Beside her ran Jim, as only a dog can run, his legs first splayed out front and back, and then doubled beneath him.

Joel fell into a panting heap on the grass. Seconds later, his brother Elam landed almost on top of him. They rolled on the soft grass, laughing in sheer joy. "I guess we'll never win a race with Lady and Jim," gasped ten-year-old Joel.

"No, but I couldn't care less. It's the race—not the winning—that's fun," Elam replied wisely. He was two years older.

Joel sat up and gazed down the pasture towards the creek. The horse and the dog were still going flat-out, each trying to win. Joel laughed, "Lady and Jim take the race seriously."

Elam sat up too. "How can they expect to stop before they get to the creek?" he cried.

At that moment, Lady lurched back on her haunches, coming to an abrupt halt. The dog didn't bother to stop, but bounded into the creek, throwing

up a geyser of water, thoroughly soaking his good friend Lady.

Elam hooted, "I guess Jim figures he won the race because he went farther than Lady."

Joel was shaking with laughter. "See, now he doused Lady again when he shook himself. Lady must be insulted. Watch her toss her head!"

"They're coming back our way now," Elam said. Once again there was the muted thunder of hooves as Lady flew towards them over the turf. Soon she and the dog slowed to a walk. Jim romped up to Elam, wagging his tail. His golden coat was still soggy. The pleased look on his sharp collie face seemed to say, "Did you see that? I won the race with Lady."

Lady lowered her head and sniffed at Joel's shirt. A slim brown horse with graceful limbs, she was a lady indeed.

"Hey, you're tickling me," chuckled Joel, wriggling away from Lady's muzzle. "What do you want me to do, race you again? I'm tuckered out. You and Jim will have to race without Elam and me."

Lady seemed to understand. She tossed her head and stamped her hooves in a challenge to Jim. Then she was off across the pasture again with the dog in hot pursuit.

"It's harder going uphill," observed Elam as he watched the pair heading up towards the barn.

Joel squinted against the evening sun. "Lady is definitely winning this time. See? She reached the gate before Jim."

Elam nodded. He was pulling out his watch. "I guess it's time we were going up to the house. Mom will have supper ready."

The two boys trudged side by side up the hill. The evening was quiet except for birdsongs and the clink of harness from the field beside them.

“Harvey is still cultivating his corn in our field,” Joel remarked. His eyes followed the team of heavy work horses as they plodded between the rows of waving corn.

“I guess it’s just as much Harvey’s land as ours, since he’s renting it,” Elam corrected him.

Joel felt slightly irked. Sometimes it seemed to him that Elam’s chief pleasure in life was correcting him. He persisted, “But the land is still ours. And maybe one day it will be yours—or mine.”

“Okay, okay. It’ll probably be mine. At least Mom keeps talking about how it will be once I’m big enough to run the farm,” Elam replied.

Joel nodded. “But that’s still a long way off.”

“Yes. So in the meantime, we’ll keep on gardening!” Elam motioned towards the acre of land Mom had kept after Dad died.

Joel sighed as he looked at the rows and rows of strawberries, tomatoes, and other vegetables. “We’ll probably spend most of the summer bent double in the garden,” he said glumly.

Elam looked at him sharply. “What’s so bad about that? We need something to do, don’t we?”

“Yes, but I’d rather be driving a team for haying, like Harvey’s boys,” Joel replied.

Elam said nothing more. He bounded up the porch steps calling, “Supper ready, Mom?”

“You’re right on time,” beamed Mom as she placed a bowl of potatoes on the table. She watched fondly as her two golden-haired boys hurried to wash up at the sink. Mom’s own hair had once been

golden. But now, though she was only thirty-five, there were streaks of gray.

After prayer, they began eating in silence. Often the boys chattered during mealtime; but tonight, Joel was busy thinking. He pictured how it probably looked over in neighbor Harvey's kitchen at this moment. The ten children would be gathered around the table with their mother and father. After supper the boys would help do chores in the barn—in two barns, actually, because they kept some livestock in Mom's barn too.

How would it be, Joel mused, to have both a mother and a father? He had been only a year old when his father, Lester Stutzman, died. "How long," he asked, suddenly breaking the silence, "was Dad sick before he died?"

Mom looked startled. She had been thinking about Dad too. "Three years," she answered softly. "Elam was just a baby when we discovered Dad had cancer."

"He took treatments too, didn't he?" asked Elam. They had discussed most of these questions before, but every now and then it felt good to talk about Dad again.

"Yes, he had radiation treatments. For awhile we thought he was better. Then when Joel was six months old Dad became very sick again," Mom replied.

"Did he have a lot of pain?" Joel couldn't remember asking this before. He wouldn't have thought to ask it either, except last Sunday they had visited an elderly grandmother with cancer. Mom had said she was taking medication for pain.

Mom's eyes were moist as she turned to look at

him. “Joel, your dad always said the pain wasn’t too bad, that he could endure it without medication. But I think—in fact, I know—the pain was often worse than he admitted.”

“How did you know?” wondered Joel.

Mom stared unseeingly out the window. “Dad spent many hours reading. Often he read the Bible. Sometimes he read the *Martyrs Mirror*, you know, the big book that tells of our Christian forefathers who were tortured and killed for their faith. Once Dad said to me, ‘I haven’t suffered anything like those early Christians suffered.’”

Mom turned again to Joel. “That told me a lot about Dad’s suffering.”

Joel nodded. Silence descended on the kitchen again, broken only by the ticking of the clock. Even though he didn’t remember his dad, Joel had a warm feeling inside as he thought of him now—Dad had faith in God . . . in spite of the pain.