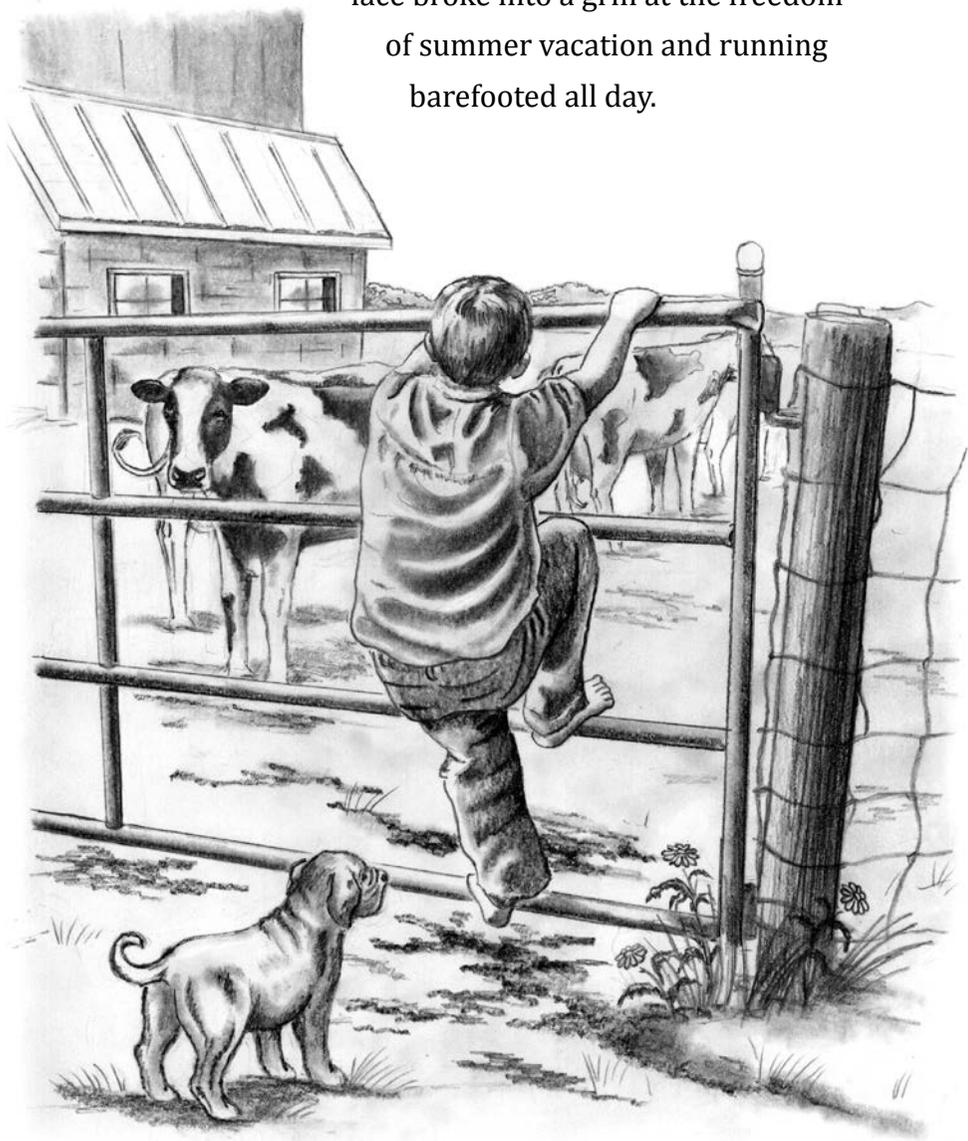




Joel ran his hand through his tousled hair as he listened to Daddy pray, “Dear Father, please watch over our family today.” As Daddy finished, Joel got up from where he had knelt by the rocking chair. Daddy looked from one to the other. “No matter what happens today, remember, God is with us,” he reminded them.

The morning seemed perfect to ten-year-old Joel. It was very warm for early May. No breeze stirred the young maple leaves outside the open kitchen window. A robin's cheery song floated on the still air. Red and yellow tulips bloomed brightly in Mama's flower bed, and a lazy bumblebee buzzed among the fragrant lilacs. Joel's freckled face broke into a grin at the freedom of summer vacation and running barefooted all day.



“Joel,” Daddy interrupted, “I want you to take the cows back to the pasture. You may take Trixie along.”

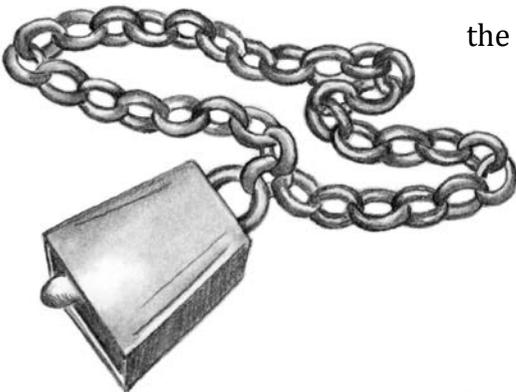
This was one of Joel’s favorite jobs. There was so much to see along the pasture lane in the springtime. Maybe he would find some early spring mushrooms or a bird’s nest with speckled eggs in it.



He let the screen door slam behind him. “Trixie!” he called. The puppy bounded eagerly from the barn. She jumped up and down, licking Joel’s hand, excited about running after the cows. Joel patted Trixie’s head. “Come on, girl, let’s get those cows started,” he said.

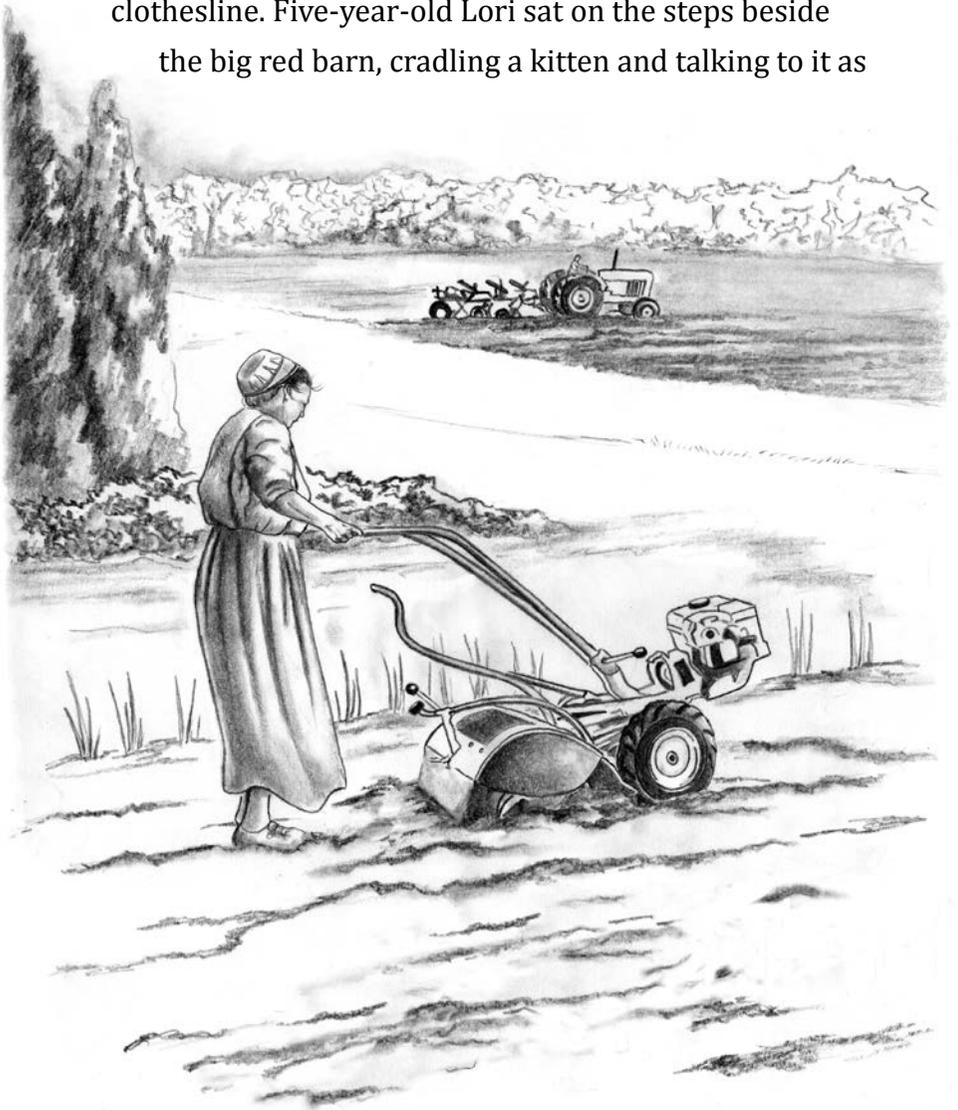
He climbed over the barnyard gate while Trixie slipped underneath. “Shoo, Bossy and Pansy. Shoo, Buttercup!” Joel urged the cows. As usual, Miss Muffet, his brother Adam’s pet cow, led the herd down the path to the pasture. The bell around Miss Muffet’s neck tinkled as

the rest of the cows straggled along behind her. Joel stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled a merry tune. He waited, digging his bare toes into the dust as Bossy



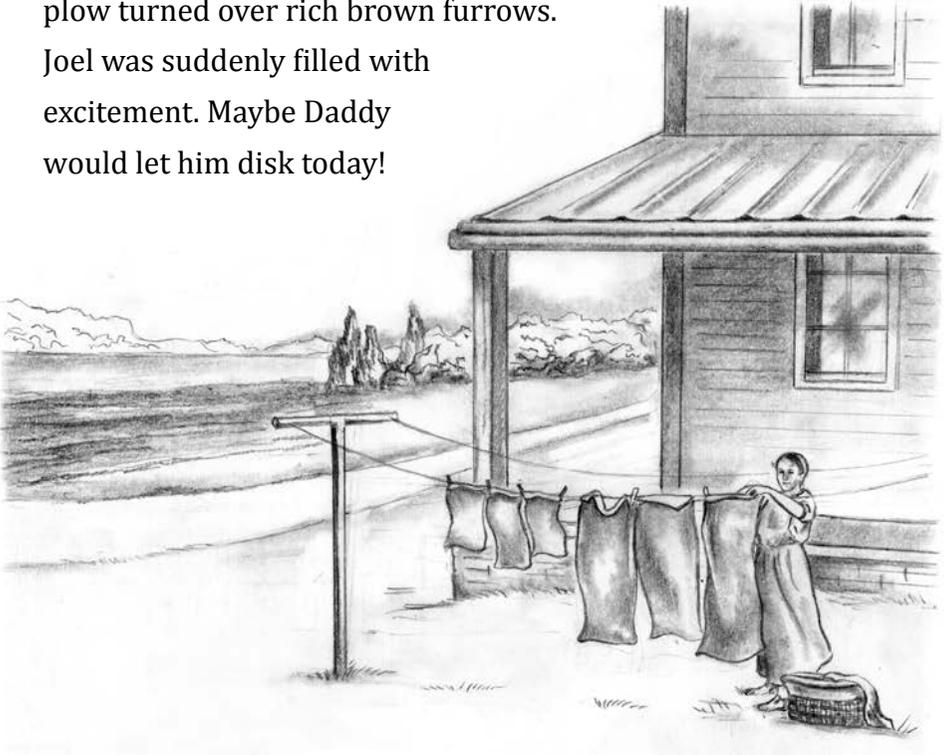
pulled at a clump of juicy grass along the fence. Trixie chased after a butterfly that had lighted on a dandelion.

The cows reached the pasture and began munching the long grass. Joel closed the gate and trudged back up the lane. His big sister Jessica was singing “God Will Take Care of You” at the top of her voice as she pinned laundry on the clothesline. Five-year-old Lori sat on the steps beside the big red barn, cradling a kitten and talking to it as



if it were a real live baby. Joel chuckled to himself. What a wonderful morning!

In the field across the road, big brother Adam was plowing. The tractor hummed steadily as the plow turned over rich brown furrows. Joel was suddenly filled with excitement. Maybe Daddy would let him disk today!



He trotted past the barn, pausing to watch Mama guide the tiller through the garden.

The weather had been very dry lately.

This morning at the breakfast table

Mama had said, "We could sure use a warm, gentle rain to help the garden grow."

Jessica pinned the

