

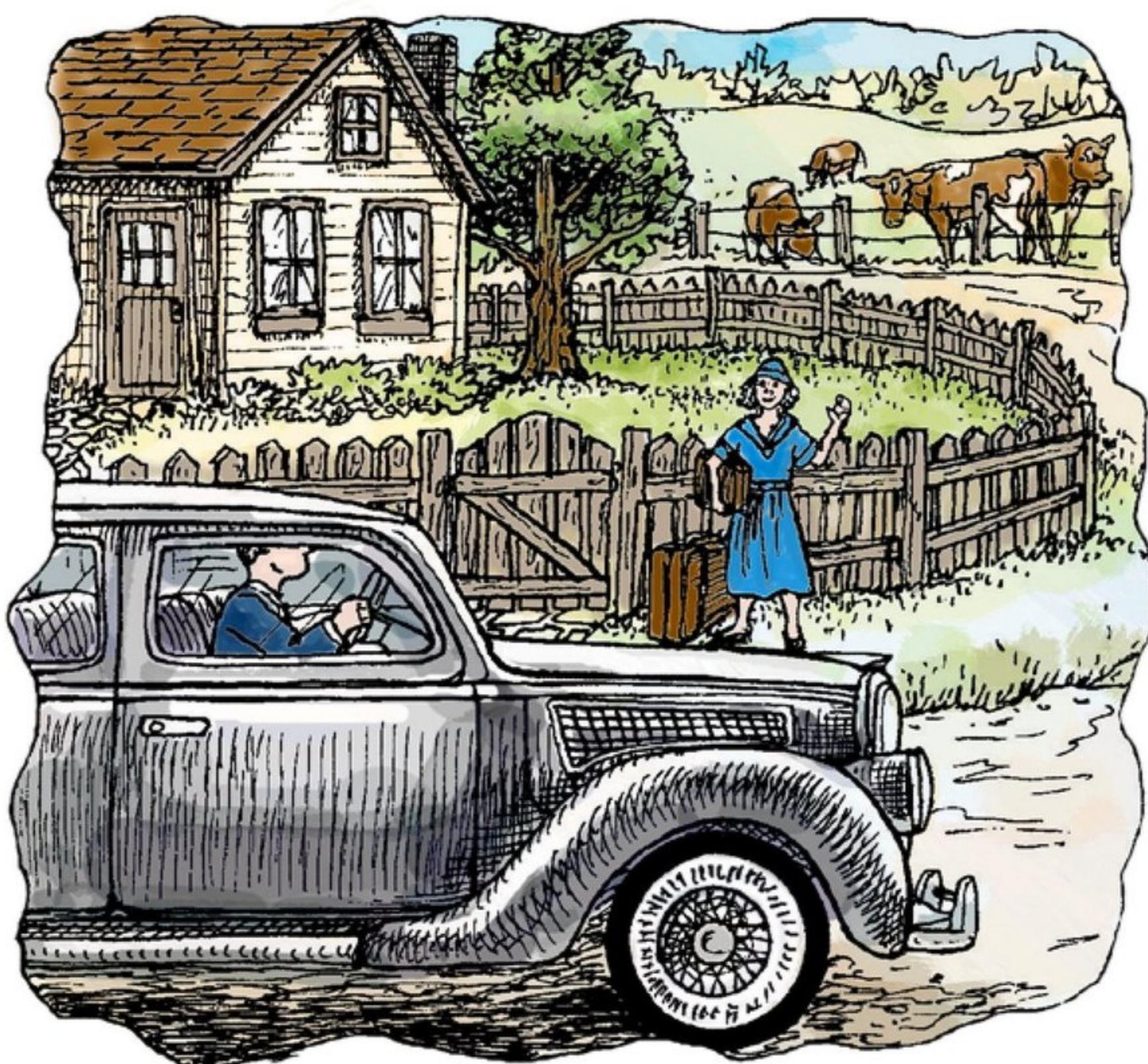
LEVELED BOOK • U

Samson: A Horse Story



Written by Katie Sharp
Illustrated by Roberta Collier-Morales

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The Letter

June 4

I can't believe I'm in the back seat of the car instead of at the pool. Who is Aunt Rita anyway? Why would she leave Dad a stinky old farm? It's sad that she died, but this woman, who I had never heard of until today, has ruined my summer.

I wish the letter had gotten lost in the mail. Then Dad would never have known that his aunt left him a farm in Kentucky. Mom and Dad are teachers. What do they know about being farmers?

June 5

I was slipping down the pool slide when I smelled something horrible. Then I saw it. The pool was filled with cow manure! I tried to stop, but I couldn't, and just as my toes were about to slip into the pool, I woke up. Whew, it was just a dream, but then the smell hit me hard. I sprang up in my seat. We were turning into the farm's driveway. I plugged my nose and tried not to breathe.



A man and a boy dressed in overalls waved to us from the front porch. The boy looked a few years older than me. Dad said that Mr. Winn and his fifteen-year-old son, Henry, would be showing us around the farm. All I wanted to do was go to bed. I grabbed my suitcase and walked inside.

Mom said I could have first pick of the bedrooms, so I dragged my suitcase up the stairs. There were three bedrooms. I chose the one that faced away from the farm. Maybe, I thought, that would help me forget where I was.

June 7

I can't believe how slow time passes around here. I've never been so bored. I miss the pool. I miss my friends. I'd rather be at school than here on this stinky old farm. I'm avoiding Dad. He's mad at me because I'm not helping out. It's *his* farm; let him do the work!





June 9

Dad yelled at me at dinner. He said I'd best stop feeling sorry for myself and start pitching in. I refused to look at him because I didn't want him to see me crying. I just stared at my plate.

Dad said, starting tomorrow morning, I have to help Henry tend to the animals. "Tend to" the animals? Dad acts like he really *is* a farmer.



Meeting Samson

June 10

Mom woke me at five this morning so I could meet Henry at six. Why do farmers wake up so early?

Henry was working in the barn when he saw me. He waved hello and said he had heard I wasn't too eager to help out, so I could just follow him around and watch. At least Henry understands me.

I trailed along as Henry cleaned out the chicken **coop**. It was disgusting! When he was done, Henry collected some eggs and dropped them gently into a basket. They were all different colors—not like the eggs at the supermarket back home.

Then we headed to a small barn. Henry opened the top half of the door, and much to my surprise a reddish-orange horse poked its head through the door. A thick, white stripe split its face in two. I didn't know Aunt Rita had a horse.



Henry introduced me to Samson and asked if I liked horses. I lied and said I thought they were okay. Actually, I don't like them and can't understand why so many girls my age do. I watched as Henry opened the bottom half of the door and led Samson to a fenced area.

He said that Samson liked to **graze** on grass during the morning, and that we would come back later and feed him some oats. He fetched a hose and brought it to a big metal **trough**, which he filled with water.

As he walked back with the hose, he tripped over a big, white block. He asked if I knew what it was. I didn't really care. He said it was a salt block and that horses need to lick salt blocks because they lose a lot of salt when they sweat.

Then Henry accused Samson of moving the salt block so he would trip on it. "Maybe he's mad because Rita died," he added. Then he grabbed a brush and began stroking the horse with it. He talked quietly to Samson as he **groomed** him. Samson didn't seem mad to me.



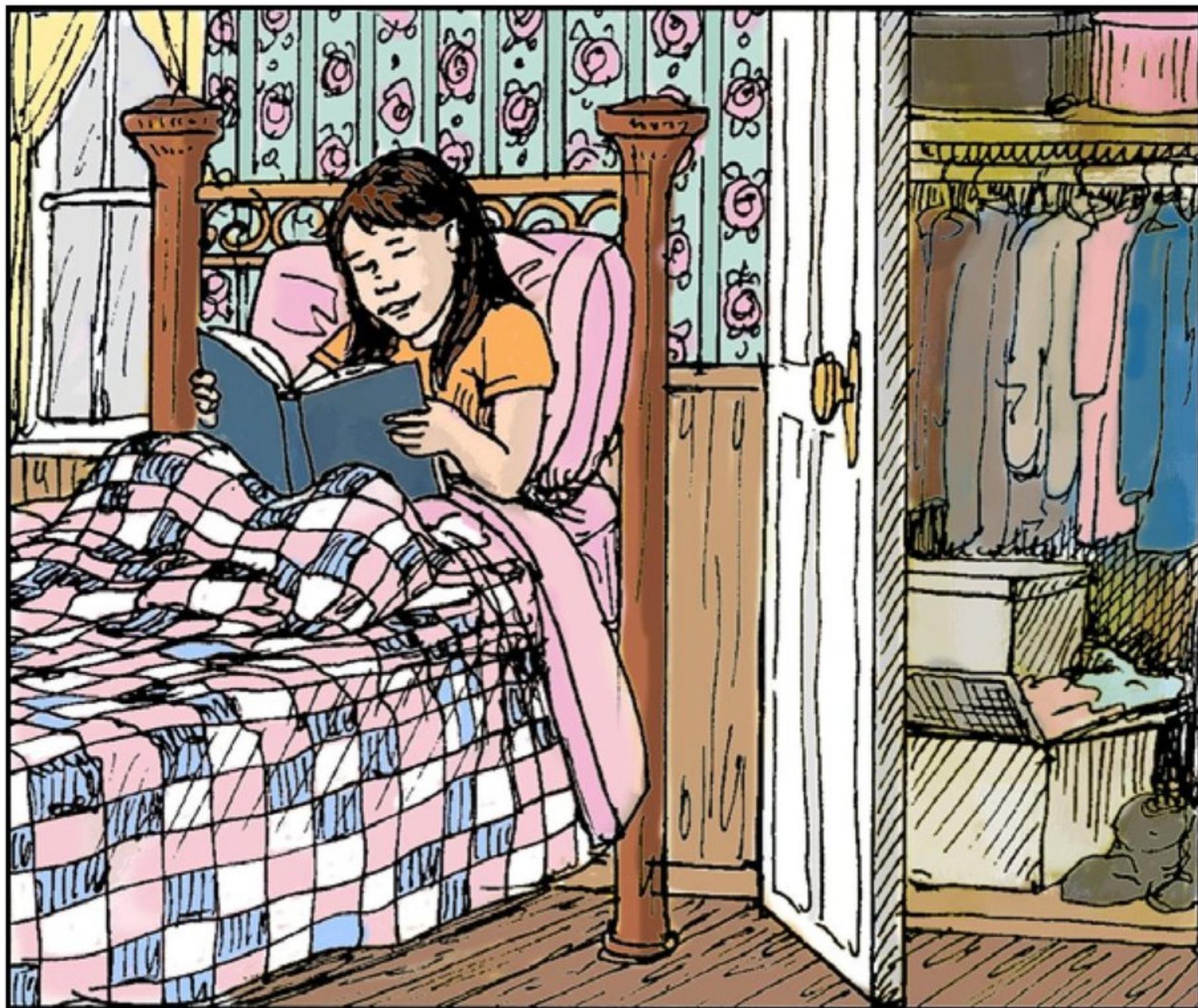
June 17

I've been helping Henry for a week now—even on the weekend. We talk a little every day. He told me that his dad and Aunt Rita were friends and that Mr. Winn helped her with the farm. But she took care of most of it by herself, which is pretty incredible since she was in her eighties when she died. Henry said he was going to miss her. He also mentioned that Aunt Rita's house is probably full of interesting old stuff.



June 18

It rained this morning, but I still had to do my chores! What a disgusting mess! Mud was everywhere, and the manure smelled worse than ever. Mom said it might rain all day. I remembered what Henry said—that there was probably interesting stuff in Aunt Rita's house. I think I'll snoop around today.



Aunt Rita's Journal

June 19

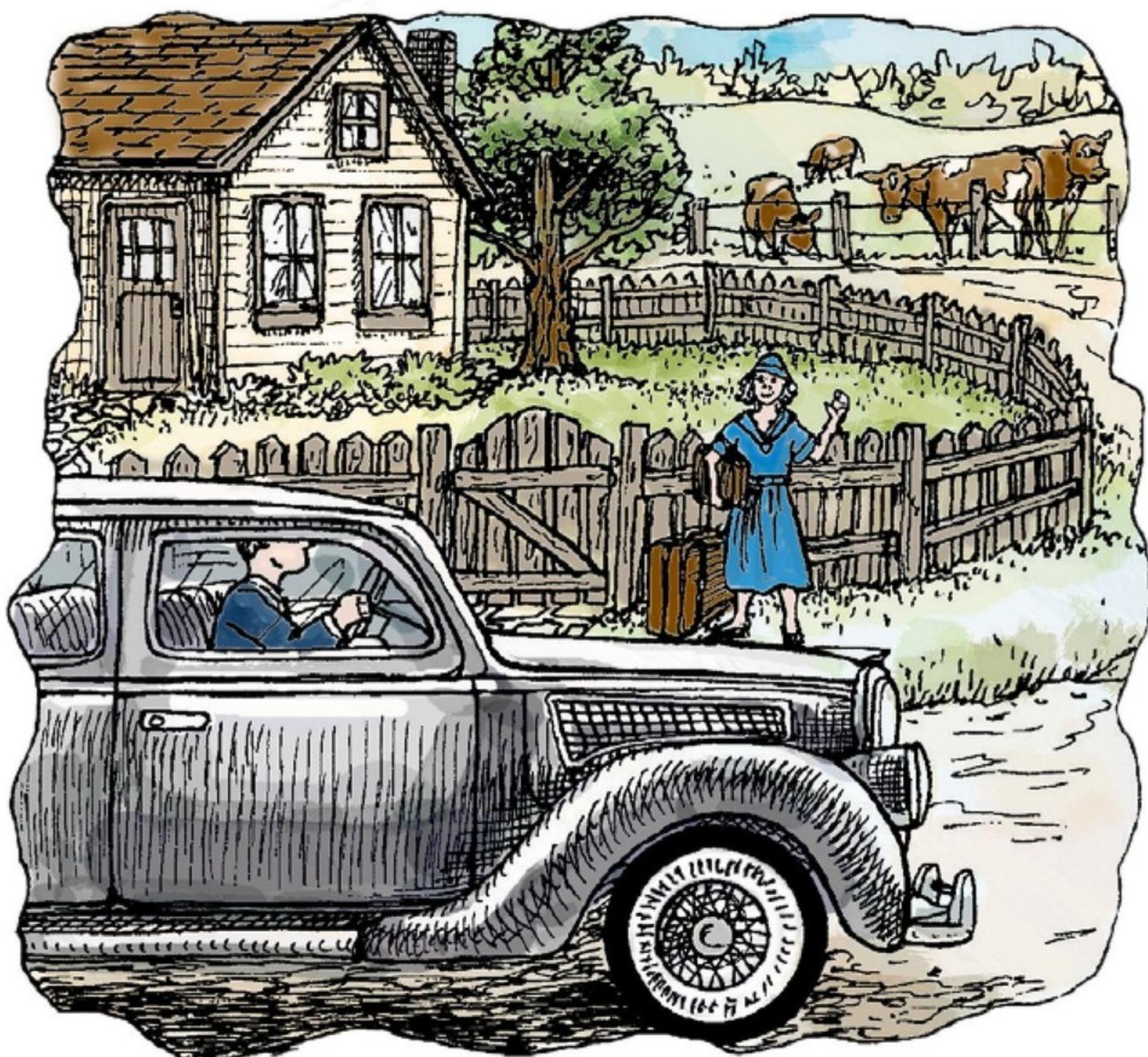
I didn't want Mom to catch me snooping, so I started in my bedroom closet. It was filled with cool stuff. I found a faded blue book that was sticking out from underneath an old box. I opened the cover and read the words "Dear Diary." I had found a journal.

I started to read, and then stopped. I wouldn't want anyone reading my journal. But I decided Aunt Rita would probably want us, her family, to know more about her.

June 20

I spent all day reading the journal. It was like reading a really good book. Aunt Rita started writing when she was twelve, after her mom died. She thought writing might ease her sadness. Her dad had to work, so he left her with neighbors who lived on a farm. She hated the smell of the farm and wished she could stay home by herself.

When Mom called me to dinner, I couldn't believe how long I'd been reading.



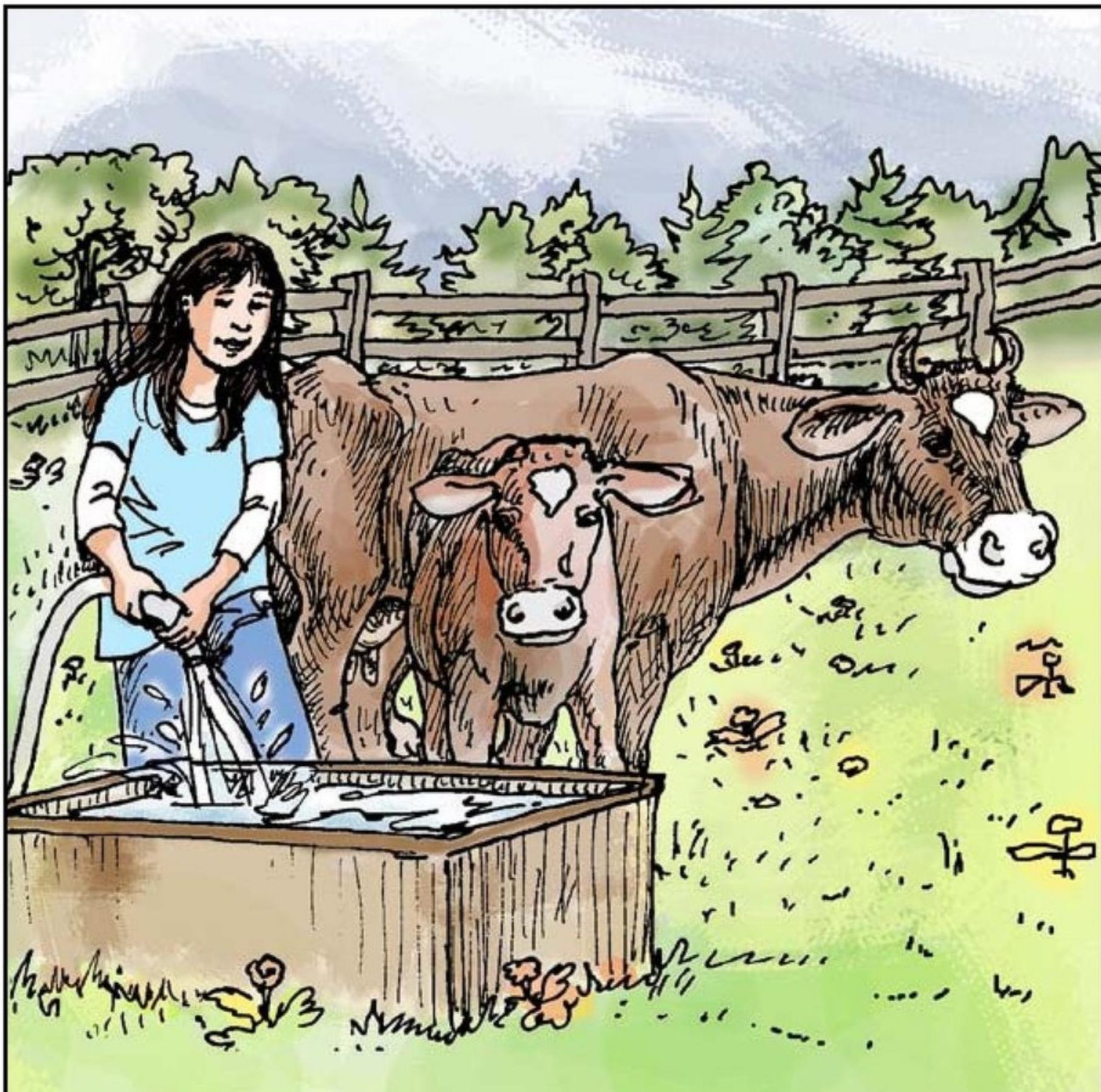
June 21

I know why Aunt Rita named her horse Samson. According to her journal, she liked a boy named James Samson who worked on the farm. She liked to watch him, but she was too shy to talk to him. One day he asked her if she wanted to ride one of the horses. She didn't like horses, but she agreed because she wanted to be friends with James.

She rode a reddish-orange horse named Jack. He had a white stripe down his nose, just as Samson does. Rita was nervous about riding, but she trusted James. She wrote all about her first ride in her journal. It seemed to change her. Riding horses couldn't bring her mom back, she wrote, but now she had something to look forward to each day.



Mr. Winn and Henry had dinner with us tonight. After dinner I asked Henry if I could ride Samson tomorrow. He said yes!



The Ride

June 22

When I got to the barn, I started helping Henry right away. I think he was surprised because I usually don't help much. I just wanted to finish the chores so we could ride.

As we headed to Samson's stall, I realized how much I had learned about taking care of farm animals. I've even gotten used to the smell. Henry asked why I had changed my mind about riding Samson. I didn't want to tell him about Aunt Rita's journal. He might not think I should be into her private things, so I told him I was bored instead.

When Henry opened the barn, Samson looked different to me. He seemed handsome. His colors were brighter. I think he even smiled at me. Henry put Samson's saddle on and dragged a stepladder next to his side. I climbed on. Henry guided my left foot into the **stirrup** and then helped me swing my right leg up and over Samson's back.

Henry gave me a few pointers about how to ride before he led me and Samson out to the **pasture**. I held onto the **reins** and the **saddle horn** with all my might as we walked along.

Riding a horse was just as Aunt Rita had described it—a little scary, but also very exciting. I kept thinking: *What if I fall? What if Samson starts galloping? What if he tries to throw me off?* Yet he was so gentle. I couldn't believe I was riding a horse and liking it. I couldn't believe I was having fun!

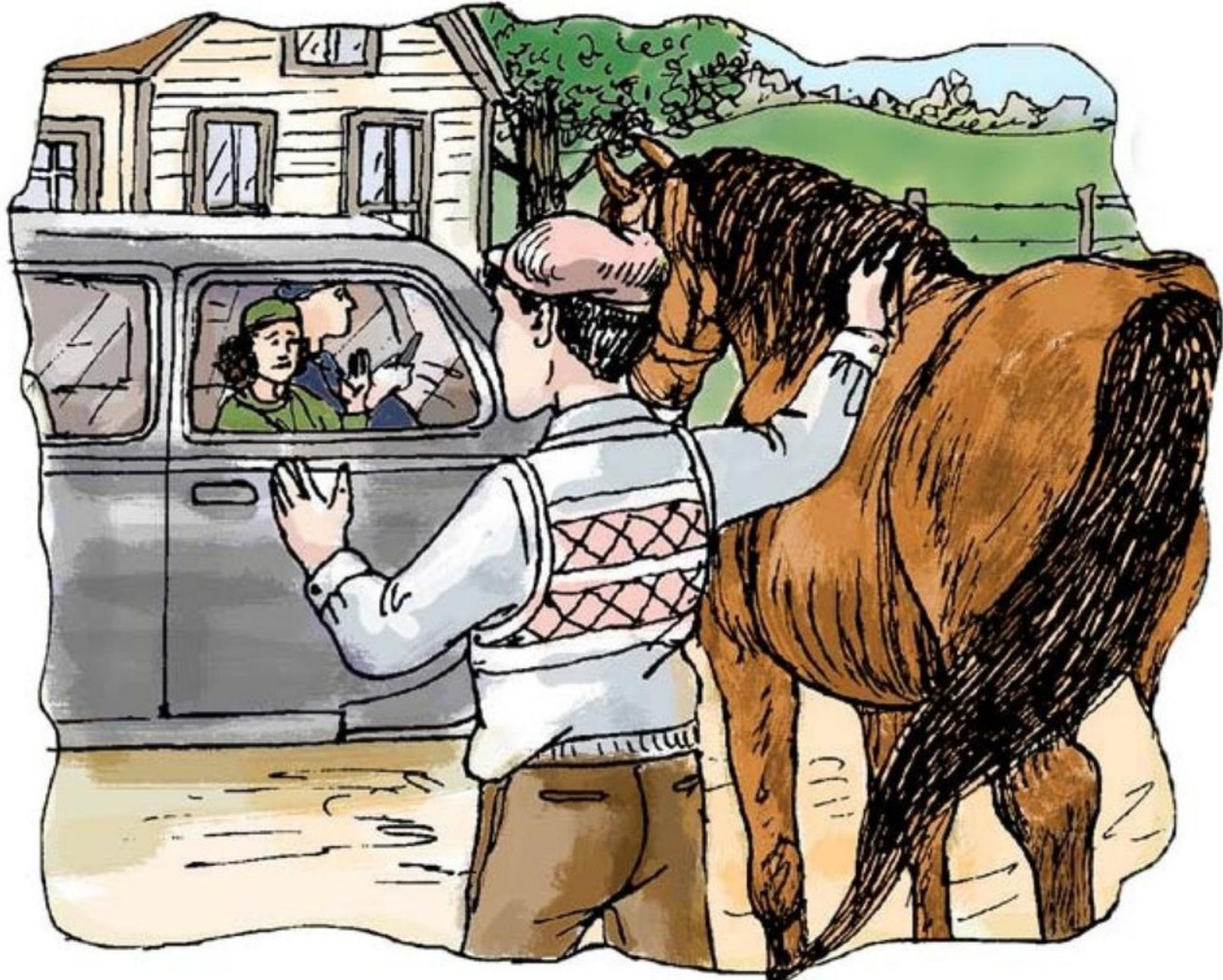


June 26

I spent the last few days taking riding lessons from Henry. But it rained today, so I read more of Aunt Rita's journal.

About six months after Rita started riding Jack, her dad announced that they were moving back to New York City. He was too sad living in the town where Rita's mom had died. Rita was sad too—and mad. She didn't want to leave James or Jack. After losing her mom, she couldn't believe she was losing everything else too.

That's how her journal ended.





I wanted to find out more about Aunt Rita. I asked Mom if the Winns could come to dinner. That's when I told them about the journal and how it ended. Mr. Winn explained that Rita never forgot Jack, and as soon as she was able she moved back to the country and bought herself another horse. And in her eighties, she was still quite the rider.

I wanted to know why she left the farm to Dad. Mr. Winn smiled and said that Aunt Rita knew about me, and she knew I was the only young girl in the **family tree**. She wanted a young girl to look after Samson.

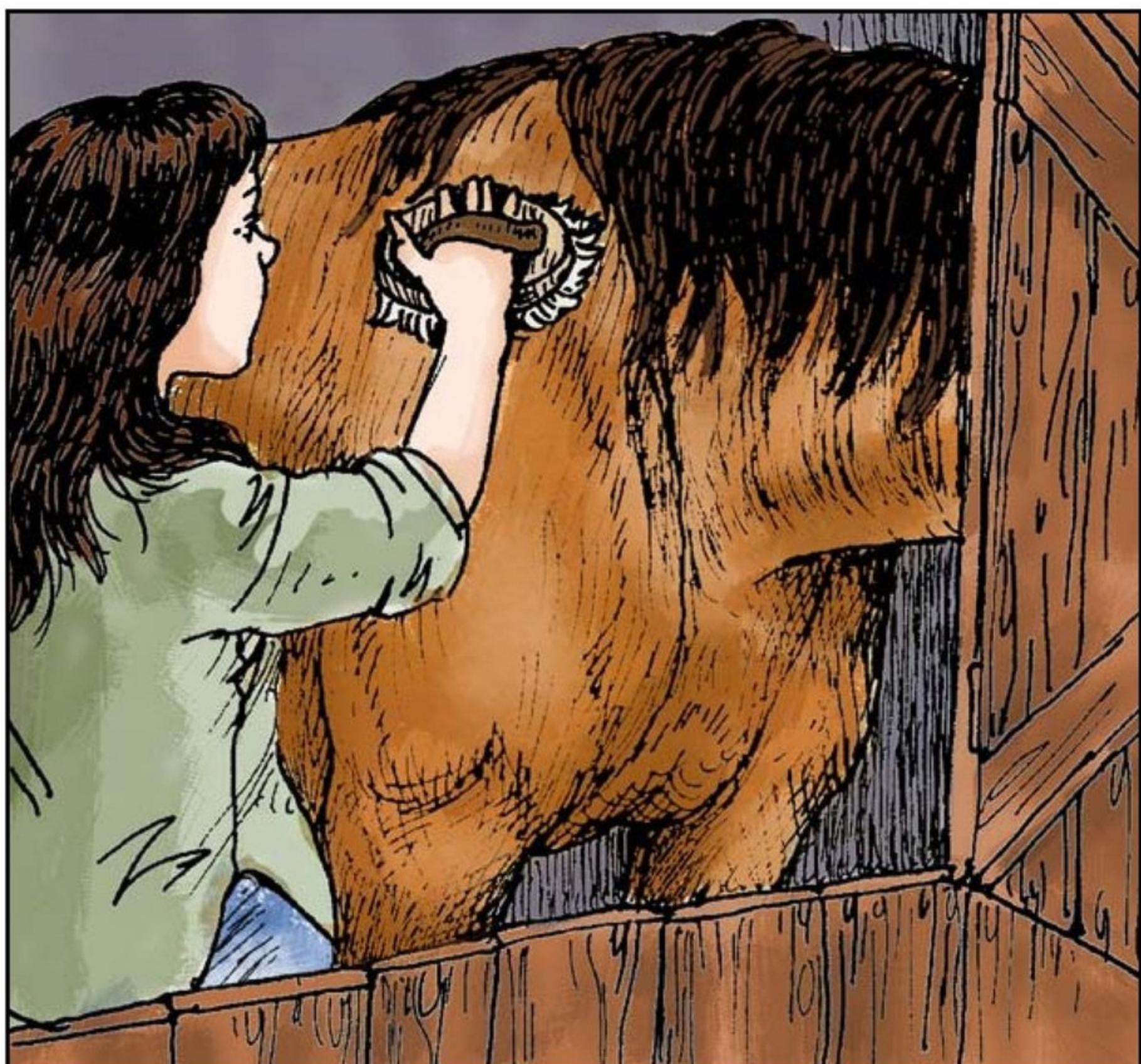
Then Dad said we needed to discuss what would happen to the farm when it was time to go back home.

Leaving Samson

June 27

Dad is actually considering selling the farm. And he says if he does sell it, he'll sell everything along with it, including Samson. He says he's just not ready to own a farm because it's too much work.

I told him that I wouldn't let him do it! After all, Samson is mine. Aunt Rita wanted me to have him. I love him. There is no way that I'll let Dad sell him.





July 1

Mr. Winn came by to see Dad and Mom last night. He offered to take care of the farm during the school year, while we're away. Dad said he'd think about it. I hate it when he says that!

July 7

It's a done deal! Dad agreed to keep the farm. He hired Mr. Winn to run it for us. I've never been so happy. As soon as I heard the news I ran out to tell Samson. I think he understood.



July 18

I can't believe I have to go home. Mom and Dad need to get their classrooms ready for the new school year. I'm sure going to miss Mr. Winn, Henry, and everything about Aunt Rita's house. But most of all, I'll miss Samson. I can't wait to get back to him and that old farm, even if it is a little stinky.

Explore More About Horses

Horses are mammals. They belong to the *Equus* family—the same family as zebras, mules, and donkeys.

Horse Talk

foal	a baby horse
yearling	a horse between one and two years old
colt	a male horse under three years old
filly	a female horse under three years old
stallion	an adult male horse
mare	an adult female horse
pony	a full-grown small horse

A mare carries her baby for 11 months. Most mares give birth in the spring to one baby, but twins are not uncommon. It takes three to four years for a horse to fully mature.

Horses generally live to be between 20 and 25 years old, although they can live for up to 30 years. The oldest recorded horse was Old Billy, an English barge horse, who lived to be 62 years old.



Glossary

coop (<i>n.</i>)	an enclosure in which chickens are kept (p. 9)
family tree (<i>n.</i>)	a chart that shows the relationship of family members over generations (p. 19)
galloping (<i>v.</i>)	moving forward in a fast, rhythmic way (p. 16)
graze (<i>v.</i>)	to eat grasses and plants in a field (p. 10)
groomed (<i>v.</i>)	cleaned or brushed (p. 10)
pasture (<i>n.</i>)	grass-covered land used for grazing livestock (p. 16)
reins (<i>n.</i>)	straps by which a horse is controlled (p. 16)
saddle horn (<i>n.</i>)	a knob on the front of a horse's saddle (p. 16)
stirrup (<i>n.</i>)	a ring with a flat bottom hung by a strap, usually on each side of a saddle (p. 16)
trough (<i>n.</i>)	a long, narrow container that holds feed or water for animals (p. 10)

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