

PONIES  
FOR A



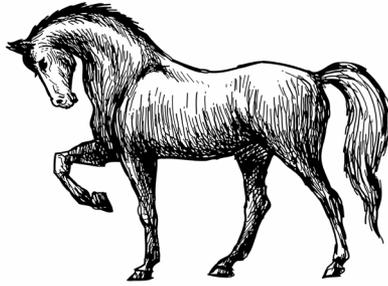
KING

Helen B. Walters

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

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### *THE TIME HAS COME*



IN THE GRAY light before dawn, Papa Morgan called Lynn outside their small house. Though only ten years old, Lynn had learned that when Papa's mouth drew to a tight line on his tanned face, it meant something serious had happened or was about to happen. Trouble was constantly at their door either from fierce, wild animals, lightning, floods, or more than all these, from that terrifying Kern family, the Morgans' hereditary enemy. So when the big man laid his heavy hand on his small son's shoulders, the boy's blue eyes had reason to widen in mounting alarm.

"Son, the time has come." Papa Morgan filled his chest, and his lips set in a grim line. He appeared almost as broad as the fireplace in his blacksmith shop. "You're now old enough to take the ponies to pasture."

Lynn almost fell over in shock. To take their two ponies and two colts to pasture meant more than going out in

the morning and coming back at night. When the people of Glastonbury Lake Village herded animals to pasture, they left in the spring and did not return until the leaves began to turn yellow and red. Lynn could hardly believe that this duty had at last come to him. Always before his older brother had had charge of the ponies. Had something happened to him? After a brief moment, Lynn managed to speak.

“What about Arturo?”

“It’s time for him to learn blacksmithing. You must guard the ponies now.”

Lynn nodded. The animals were their most valuable possessions. To be put in charge of them was a great trust. Pride struggled with fear in the boy’s heart. Above its thumping beat, he heard his father’s solemn voice.

“You’ll spend each night *inside* the corral. *Never* try to stay in the pasture. Be sure, very sure, to bolt the gate. Understood?”

Lynn could only nod. Full well he knew why the gate must be securely fastened—wolves! He swallowed. Could he endure nights alone with blood-chilling howls coming from the darkness? And yet Lynn’s father had tended the ponies when he was young, and his grandfather before him. Only once, many grandfathers ago, had a pony been lost to the wolves. The Morgan men were brave. Lynn must not fail them. He stiffened his slender body as again he heard his father’s voice.

“Mind this, Son!” Papa shook a finger grown thick

from wielding a hammer at the forge. “Talk to nobody. Understood? Nobody!”

Lynn winced. Imagine spending a whole summer without talking! And there were sure to be other boys tending ponies. Everybody at Lake Village raised animals for King Caradoc, hoping to win the special prize, the pot of gold the king offered for the finest pony. Again his father was speaking.

“Talk to nobody. Mind your own business. Take our ponies out in the morning and bring them to the corral at night.”

“Yes, Papa. When do I leave?”

“Now. Right now!”

Lynn caught his breath, then looked around as if telling everything goodbye. They were standing on a walk that circled their round house on its tiny island in Glastonbury Lake. This shallow body of water was in a part of England known as the Vale of Avalon. Lynn’s grandfather had built the house. In fact, he had even built the island. This he did by driving a circle of tree trunks into the lake bottom and then filling the center with rocks. Next, he dumped in clay and gravel until he had a surface above water. Finally he plastered the top to make a smooth floor. Of course, the floor was gradually sinking into the lake, and Lynn’s father repeatedly had to haul over more clay and plaster. But nobody worried. Everybody in the village lived in such houses. The men worked during the day on the shore. At night they rowed home and tied up their boats. Here in the middle of the



water, they felt safe from animals and enemies. It was not believed possible for families to live together on the shore. Nobody dreamed of such a dangerous thing as a city.

Since these home islands were little more than the size of the houses, there was no space to raise crops or to work. Each dawn the men paddled to shore to work in crude carpenter or iron shops under the trees. All day long they swapped their services with some suspicion, but when shadows began to thicken in the woods and fields, ancient fears returned, and no man trusted his neighbor.

These fears were born many years ago when the town's most powerful families, the Morgans and the Kerns, had clashed. The villagers had taken sides, and from that time on, suspicion, fear, and hatred had smoldered in the town. Gradually the cause of the fight had been forgotten by most of the people, but not the hatred. That was handed down from father to son as a cherished possession.

For several minutes Lynn and his father stood in silence in the dim light. Inside their hut the boy heard his mother rustling with breakfast things. His thoughts were broken by his father's voice.

"One more warning, Son. If ever you say one word to that Owen Kern, you will be punished." Papa said sternly.

Lynn twisted to dip his toe in the lake. It didn't make sense for him not to speak to Owen, who would be keeping ponies in the corral next to that of the Morgans. In fact, only a wall divided the two places, a high wall. Owen was a year older and had taken the Kern ponies to pasture last

year. He probably knew the greenest fields. Besides, when it thundered at night, or wolves howled, it was silly for two boys to stay alone. Lynn drew his body up for battle.

“Why can’t I even talk to—”

“Just because!” The man planted his fists on hips that rippled with muscles about as hard as his anvil. “If you stay by yourself, nobody can blame you should something happen to Owen’s ponies. If you’re together and something happens, those Kerns will open the feud again. I know them. That’s how they are. Your great-grandfather found it out. That’s why we haven’t spoken in years. We hate each other. Morgans will always hate Kerns. Clear?”

“Yes, Papa.” Lynn stooped to pat the hound that had swum over from the next island, which was really only an arm’s length away.

This island was about the size of a room and was used as sort of a farmyard for chickens and ducks. When the two new colts were very small, Papa kept them there at night and at dawn towed them on a flat boat to join their mothers, Star and Jet. But of late the colts were too big and too frisky. They had to stay ashore all night, tied at the side of the blacksmith shop. And Lynn’s older brother had to guard them.

“Can I take my dog?” asked Lynn.

“He must stay to protect the house and your mother while she’s alone all day. We can’t trust the Kerns.”

“Yes, Papa.” Lynn sighed.

“Go tell your mother goodbye. The sun will soon be up.”

Mama Morgan met Lynn at the door of their round

house. She had put up a lunch that was to last a week. Into a leather bag made to hang from his shoulder, she had packed a huge loaf of bread and a chunk of cheese. As a special treat, she put in dried plums.

“Had I known you were going today, dear,” she murmured, patting his cheek, “I’d have baked honey cakes. I’ll send some later.”

“Bah!” grumbled Papa. “You’ll make him into a softie.” He dropped a box of his special tools into their small boat. “Let’s go!”

Mama and Lynn hugged each other, both blinking to hold back the tears. They realized that it was dangerous to be alone in the woods. Some boys went out and never returned. Finally Mama forced a smile.

“Autumn will come,” she said bravely. “Then you’ll come home and go to school. How proud I’ll be when you can read and write! And after you finish the school here in Avalon, perhaps you can stay at the higher school in Gaul. You might even become a judge.” Love and hope glowed in her eyes.

“Come! Come!” called Papa, clomping into his boat. “The boy must get to the pasture before the Kerns get the best places.”

Obediently, Lynn climbed into the boat. The bag of food felt heavy on his shoulder. Although he was to be away all summer, he had no bag of clothing, for all he owned was on his back. However, for chilly nights, there was a blanket hidden at the corral.

# PONIES FOR A KING



The Morgan and Kern families have been enemies for generations. The families hate each other so much that they live on small man-made islands—completely separate from their neighbors. Both families are raising beautiful ponies, hoping the king will buy them. These ponies are so important that young Lynn Morgan must live on the land away from his family for the entire summer to care for the ponies. Lynn protects them from violent thunderstorms and even a hungry pack of wolves, all while living next to his enemy, a young Kern boy. When an accident threatens the boys and their ponies, they must decide how important their family feud really is.

  
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