

The Horse That Came Home

Nine days after the storm, Grandfather was still going outside at first light.

7 min read

Before you read

- **steppe** — a huge flat grassland with few trees
- **ger** — a round felt tent that a herding family lives in
- **herd** — the animals a family keeps and moves together
- **blizzard** — a storm of wind and heavy snow
- **lee** — the sheltered side of something, out of the wind
- **silhouette** — a dark shape seen against a lighter background
- **mane** — the long hair along a horse's neck



A ger on the winter steppe after a blizzard

- ¹ The storm came in from the north on the second day of winter and stayed for two nights.
- ² When it cleared, Tuvshin's father went out to count. Eleven horses stood in the lee of the hill where they had turned their backs to the wind and waited it out. The twelfth was not there.
- ³ The twelfth was a grey mare called Sarnai. She was seventeen years old. Grandfather had ridden her for nine of those years and had not ridden anything else since.
- ⁴ "She will have gone with the wind," said Father. On the steppe, horses do not stand against a blizzard. They turn and walk with it, sometimes for forty or fifty kilometres, until it lets them stop.

⁵ They rode out for three days. They found a frozen well, two families who had seen nothing, and the tracks of a herd that turned out to belong to somebody else.

⁶ On the fourth day Father said what everyone had been thinking. A horse of seventeen, alone, in that cold, with the grass under half a metre of snow. He did not finish the sentence.



Tuvshin and his father riding out across the snow to search

⁷ Grandfather said nothing at all. He did not argue, and he did not agree. But every morning after that he was up before anyone, standing outside the ger with his back to the door, looking north. He did it on the fifth day and the sixth and the seventh. Nobody asked him why. In that family, you did not.

⁸ Tuvshin began getting up early too, and standing beside him, and saying nothing, which he discovered was harder than it looked.



A lone grey mare appearing on the ridge at first light

⁹ On the ninth morning there was a mark on the ridge that had not been there the day before.

¹⁰ It did not move like a rock, and it was the wrong shape for a person. It came down the slope slowly, stopping often. By the time it reached the fence it was a silhouette with its ribs showing and ice in its mane, and Grandfather was already walking out to meet it with his hands open and empty.

¹¹ He did not say her name. He put one hand flat on her neck, and kept it there a long time, and then led her in.

¹² She lived another four winters. Grandfather never rode her again — he said she had done enough walking — and in the mornings, for the rest of that winter, he went back to getting up at the ordinary time.

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. Why do horses on the steppe walk away during a blizzard?
 - A they are looking for grass under the snow
 - B they move with the wind instead of standing against it
 - C they follow the family's herd dogs
 - D they are searching for other herds
2. What did the family find during the three days of searching?
 - A Sarnai's tracks heading north
 - B a frozen well and another herd's tracks
 - C nothing at all
 - D two of their other missing horses
3. What did Grandfather do every morning after the fourth day?
 - A he rode out alone to search further
 - B he stayed inside the ger by the fire
 - C he stood outside at first light, looking north
 - D he asked the neighbours for news
4. What happened to Sarnai after she came home?
 - A she was ridden again the following spring
 - B she was sold to another family
 - C she lived four more winters and was never ridden again
 - D she went missing a second time

Part B Write your answer

Answer in two or three sentences.

5. Father never finished his sentence on the fourth day. Explain what he was about to say, and why he stopped.

6. Grandfather said nothing, but the family understood what he thought. Explain how they knew.

Part C Think deeper

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and show where in the passage it comes from.

7. Grandfather stopped getting up early once Sarnai was home, and never rode her again. Using two details from the story, explain what this tells you about him.

8. In this family, some things are understood without being said. Is that a good way for a family to be? Give your view, and use something from the story to support it.

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. B — they move with the wind | 2. B — a frozen well and another herd's tracks | 3. C — stood outside at first light, looking north | 4. C — lived four more winters, never ridden again

Part B

5. He was about to say that Sarnai must be dead — too old, alone, in that cold with no grass. He stopped because Grandfather was there and the words would have hurt him. Accept any answer that supplies the unsaid meaning and gives a reason for the silence.

6. Because of what he did rather than what he said: he did not agree, he got up before everyone, and he stood facing north every morning. That is someone still expecting her back. Accept any answer reading his actions as the message.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. Strong answers draw a conclusion and tie it to both details — he was stubborn or hopeful while there was something to hope for, and once she was safe he asked nothing more of her. Prompt with: why did he stop getting up early?

8. Mark the reasoning, not the verdict. A strong answer names a moment from the story — Father's unfinished sentence, nobody asking Grandfather why, Tuvshin finding silence hard — and explains what it cost or saved. Prompt rather than correct.

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