

Jeff McLean: His Courtship

Chapter One

Jeff, run! Jump the fence! Get out of there!”

There was fear in Luke’s voice. Jeff looked over his shoulder, and what he saw sent a chill down his back. An angry bull, easily weighing more than 2500 pounds, was charging directly toward him. This was truly a matter of life and death. Many farming communities have had someone killed by a bull, often a bull that the farmer mistakenly trusted as a gentle animal.

Jeff turned quickly to the left and raced for the fence. *Twenty-five feet away*, he thought. *Surely I can make it!* If he could only reach the fence, it would be easy to quickly climb over it to safety.

As he ran, he heard a terrific crash behind him. *Where’s Luke?* he suddenly thought. *Is he back there getting hurt?* Looking back, he saw that Luke, his brother-in-law, was safely on the other side of the opposite fence. Jeff’s sister Sarah was there too, her fearful eyes focused on Jeff. The bull had crashed into a temporary fence that was now nothing more than a pile of splintered boards. The bull, seemingly not fazed by the impact, had turned, and looking at Jeff, was beginning to paw at the ground.

“Run, Jeff!” Sarah screamed. “He’s coming after you again!”

Safety was only a few feet away, but as Jeff took his next step, his right foot landed in a depression in the ground. It wasn’t exactly a hole. It was just where the cows had walked during a rainy time last

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spring and had left the ground pockmarked. It was deep enough, however, to cause Jeff to twist his ankle and fall momentarily to the ground. Pain. And nausea. He was up again in an instant, but now it was all he could do to walk toward the fence, limping heavily. Sarah screamed again.

There was some commotion behind Jeff, but he couldn't be concerned about that right now. He had to make it to the fence, and fast! In what seemed like forever, he finally reached the fence and painfully maneuvered himself to the other side. Looking back, he saw Luke climbing the opposite fence quickly with the bull right on his heels. Slumping to the ground, Jeff tried to figure it all out. *How did Luke get inside the fence? I thought he was safely on the other side.*

Soon Sarah and Luke were hovering over Jeff. "Are you all right?" Luke asked, panting as if he had just run a mile at top speed.

Sarah didn't wait for an answer and was already examining Jeff's ankle and leg. "I think it's just sprained," she told her brother. Then turning to Luke, she hugged him tightly, tears filling her eyes. "Luke, that was very dangerous. You could have been killed! I was so afraid." That was all she managed to say before she broke down in sobs.

"I thought you were outside the fence," Jeff mumbled to Luke. The nausea hadn't left and the pain was getting worse, making him feel confused.

Luke didn't say anything. He just hugged Sarah, his bride of two years.

By now, David McLean, Jeff's father, had reached them. After making sure Jeff was not seriously hurt, he addressed Luke. "That was a very brave thing you

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did, Luke,” Mr. McLean said, giving Luke’s arm a squeeze. After a minute, he added quietly, “Thank you.”

“He would have done it for me,” Luke said. “The Lord gave me the strength. I didn’t know if I could make it or not. We need to thank Him.”

Suddenly Jeff’s mind cleared enough to realize that Luke had jumped into the pen to coax away the angry bull, saving Jeff’s life. “Thank You, Lord,” Jeff whispered. “And thank You for Luke,” he added.

Jeff’s mom was on the scene now, and quickly evaluated the situation. In no time, she had Jeff in the house with his leg propped up, a cold water bottle on the ankle, and had given him some strong herbs for the pain. Dad and Luke were talking about the accident.

“How do you suppose Giant got out?” Dad asked.

Luke, his son-in-law, answered. “I suppose he must have been pushing against that corral fence all morning and we just didn’t notice it. We were so busy with the other animals that we didn’t have time to check up on him. We had two young bulls in the group and I guess he felt they were too near his territory or something.”

“I suppose so,” Dad replied. “Well, I’ve got him shut back in his own paddock now, so we shouldn’t have any more problems. I’m just thankful that no one got hurt badly, or worse . . .” His voice trailed off as he thought about an accident he had witnessed as a young man on his neighbor’s farm. That one had resulted in a man spending two months in the hospital. Again, Dad silently thanked God for His protection.

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The day had started out so well. Jeff had planned to go through their herd of Polled Hereford cows to decide which he would ship and which he would keep. It was a cool September morning with a light breeze; just the kind of morning that made Jeff even more glad that he had chosen farming as his life's work.

Sarah and Luke had decided to come and spend the weekend at the McLean farm. Jeff and Luke were close friends and enjoyed working together. The plan for this Saturday morning was to get the cattle into a holding pen and then separate those they planned to ship to market. The hay and grain harvest in southern Michigan hadn't been too good this summer, and many farmers were shipping the animals that they wouldn't be able to feed over the winter.

The men had enjoyed their conversation as they worked. They also enjoyed looking over at little one-year-old Judah, who was playing near his mother, Sarah. Judah had just learned to wave, and frequently tried out the new skill on his daddy and his Uncle Jeff.

Could that have just been this morning? Jeff asked himself, thinking about how quickly things had changed. Now it looked like the rest of the cattle sorting would have to be done by others while Jeff recovered from his sprain.

Of course, Jeff was something of a hero and all of his younger brothers and sisters crowded around him, asking again and again how it had happened. Nineteen-year-old Janet asked if he had been afraid. Ben, nearly fifteen, and Steve, twelve, hoped that he would have to get a cast, and wondered how long it would be before he could walk again. His youngest

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sisters, who were nine and seven, asked the most helpful questions. Frequently either Rachel or Becky would ask, "Can I get you a drink of water, Jeff?" Three-year-old Samuel just seemed to want to bump into the sore leg. At least that's what he kept doing, accidentally of course.

"Lunch is about ready," Mom announced. "Jeff, do you think you can come to the table, or do you want me to bring it out here in the living room for you?" she asked kindly.

"I think I can make it," Jeff answered. "The pain is starting to come down a little bit. I'm not very hungry, though. I think I'll at least sit at the table so I can be with everyone."

After the blessing, the talk once again centered on the exciting happenings of the morning. Several new theories were offered as to how the bull got out of his pen. Also, a variety of reasons were suggested as to why the bull would be so angry. "That's just the way bulls are," Dad concluded. "Now you see why I tell you children never to get near them."

"Mom, do you think I can read it now?" Janet asked, looking at her mother.

"Oh, yes, I forgot you got a letter today," Mom said. "Actually, it would be nice to think of something other than angry bulls right now. Why don't you read it?"

"Who's it from?" asked Rachel. "Lydia Prevost or Cindy Hanson?"

"Neither," Janet answered. "It's from a brand new pen-pal that I met through the magazine *Young Women Stepping Heavenward*. Her name is Lisa Harris and she lives only about three hours from us,

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up in the peninsula.” Unfolding the letter, she asked, “Is everyone ready?” When she was sure that she had everyone’s rapt attention (which means she had to pass the ketchup to Becky and the beans were passed to Ben), she began:

Dear Janet,

I’m glad you have decided to be my pen-pal. As I said in my letter to *Young Women Stepping Heavenward*, I long to be able to write to someone who holds my values and convictions. It seems like there is no one up here who does, or at least I haven’t been able to find them yet. One thing you can pray for is that I would be able to find like-minded friends.

Well, I will tell you a little about myself. I just turned twenty years old last month. In your letter, you told me about your life on a farm. Well, I live a very different lifestyle. We live in town and only have a twenty foot by forty foot front yard. Dad says that is great with him, since he doesn’t have to cut so much grass in the summer. We do have animals, though. I own tropical fish and the family has a house cat. Her name is Priscilla and she has long white fur . . .

Oh, I see I’ve forgotten to tell you about my family! Sorry. My Dad’s name is Gerald and he is 47. He is a manager at the electric company here in town, and everyone thinks he is a wonderful guy (including me ☺). Mom (Joan) is 43 and so sweet to me. I have one brother, Caleb, who is 23 and is married to Christine. My sister, Nancy, is 16. She is about my size and

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always likes to borrow my clothes. Did that ever happen to you when Sarah lived at home? . . .

In answer to your question, yes, I am committed to courtship. My brother followed a Biblically-based courtship in marrying Christine. She is just as sweet as she can be. My parents are very supportive and want to find God's mate for my life. We pray about it every night . . . You said that Sarah followed courtship. Write back and tell me all about how her courtship worked. There aren't many around here who want to do it, so I am very hungry to learn about the experiences of others.

I suppose I better stop now. I promised Mom I would bake the bread for supper. Please write back and tell me more about your family, your farm, and something about your hopes and dreams. Also, pray that God would make me mature into the Christian woman He wants me to be.

In Christ, Lisa

P.S. Can you send a picture of yourself? It's not important if you can't, but I do like to have a picture of my pen pals.

As soon as Janet finished reading, Ben commented, "Dad, imagine only having to cut a yard as small as they have. That sure would be easy."

Dad smiled at the family's principal grass cutter. "Yes, Ben, it would be easier. But don't you think it would also be sort of small to do things in?" Ben

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smiled and nodded.

Janet looked at Sarah. “Do you mind me telling Lisa about your courtship experiences?”

Sarah smiled and gave Luke’s hand a squeeze. “Not at all! I’m so thankful for my courtship experience. Luke is the husband that God had planned for me. I’m not sure I would have married the right man if Mom and Dad hadn’t been involved in our courtship.”

“But don’t you miss living on a farm?” Becky asked. “You used to say how much you liked living on the farm here.”

Sarah didn’t hesitate to answer. “I do like living on a farm, Becky. But I most like living wherever my husband decides for us to live. I married a carpenter, not a farmer. I’m happy to live right where I do.”

The talk eventually turned back to the cattle and how the rest of the day should be spent. It was decided that Jeff should take it easy and that Dad and Luke would finish sorting the cattle. Of course Jeff would be on the sidelines as much as possible, giving his opinion as to which should be shipped.

All too soon, the sun began to set in the western sky. The cattle were sorted and ready for shipping on Monday morning. Jeff’s ankle started to swell which resulted in orders from Mom to sit down and stay down! Everyone settled down on the back porch to watch the colors change in the autumn sky. As they sat there talking, Jeff thought to himself about the changes in his herd. On Monday, twenty head would be shipped. He had seen all of those animals right after they were born, had nursed some to health, and had made sure they had many gallons of water over

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the years as well as thousands of bales of hay. Now they were going. Changes. Life was about changes and how you dealt with them. With God's help no change was impossible to handle, of that he was sure.

What changes would occur in his own life over the next weeks, months, and years? Where was he headed? While he was sure he wanted to be a farmer, many other questions remained. Where would he find a farm that he could afford? How would he get set up on his farm? What kinds of animals and crops should he raise? And was he to live on the farm alone, or was God going to bring a wife into his life? As he had on many occasions, once again Jeff committed all of these questions into God's hands. God would reveal His will in His timing. The sky changed from a bright pink to a soft violet. *What changes are ahead for me?* he wondered.