

A Reader's Theater adaptation of Alison Hart's *Gabriel's Horses*

By Dorcas Hand

February 2008

***Gabriel's Horses* © 2007. Script used in conjunction with The Texas Bluebonnet Award with permission from Peachtree Publishers.**

Approximately 5 minutes.

Readers:

Pa

Gabriel

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Narrator 5

Jackson

Master Giles

Narrator 3: This scene is taken from Chapter One of *Gabriel's Horses* by Alison Hart.

Pa: The wrap goes like this, Gabriel.

Narrator 1: Pa tugs the strip of rag around the horse's front leg. Gabriel watches with hawk eyes. When Pa shows him something, he takes note.

Gabriel: Pa's the best horseman in Kentucky, and I aim to follow in his path. Besides, any fool knows that wrapping a racehorse's legs proper is almost as important as riding him right.

Pa: Keep the cotton wadding smooth. That's what protects the legs.

Narrator 2: Pa's forehead is as wrinkled and brown as a furrowed field.

Gabriel: Yes, sir.

Narrator 3: Gabriel felt a warm tickle on his neck. Tenpenny's nipping his hair.

Gabriel: *(smiling)* Get away, horse.

Narrator 4: Gabriel swatted Tenpenny's muzzle playfully. Tenpenny is one of Gabriel's favorite horses.

Narrator 5: Tomorrow, Master Giles is racing Tenpenny in Lexington. Since Gabriel is the lightest boy at Woodville Farm, he gets to ride him the eight miles to the track.

Gabriel: At the thought of the journey, my belly churns. Sure, it ain't as exciting as jockeying Tenpenny in a race. That's Jackson's job. But this trip has got me plenty stirred up.

Narrator 3: Gabriel's never been to the big city of Lexington, or a racetrack either. Pa and Jackson have told him lots about both places, but that ain't the same as seeing with his own eyes.

Narrator 2: Pa does the last wrap, then he rises.

Pa: Finish grooming Penny. Make him shine the way Mister Giles likes. Then get ready to go. We head out after sunrise.

Narrator 4: Using the softest bristles, Gabriel polishes Tenpenny's gray flanks.

Narrator 5: Pa was born free, so he calls Gabriel's Master, Winston Giles, Mister Giles, not Master Giles.

Gabriel: When I ask Ma why I have to call him Master, she tells me it's 'cause I'm a slave chile. I ain't no chile. I'm almost thirteen-- a man.

Narrator 4: Ma chuckles. Like Gabriel said something funny. Then Gabriel smiles, too, 'cause he likes making Ma laugh. Since Mistress Jane, Master Giles wife, caught the fever, there ain't been much joy in Ma's heart.

Narrator 3: Standing back, Gabriel eyes Tenpenny. He gleams as bright as Mistress Jane's silver tea tray.

Gabriel: You gonna win this race, Penny.

Narrator 2: Gabriel strokes Penny's silky neck.

Narrator 1: Outside the stall, Gabriel hears Jackson whistling. Jackson is Woodville Farm's jockey. He's so good that Gabriel is sure Jackson could ride a hog and win.

Narrator 3: All spring, Jackson has been teaching Gabriel to race. He says Gabriel has talent, too, so Gabriel practices every morning, hunching low over the horse's neck when he gallops the grassy track that winds through Master's fields.

Jackson: You got my hose ready, Gabriel?

Narrator 2: Jackson throws open the stall door. He's short and bandy-legged with a chest like a rain barrel. He's chewing on a stalk of hay. A checked cap slants low on his head like he's some Louisville dandy.

Gabriel (*sassily*): Who wants to know?

Jackson: You best show respect to the world's greatest jockey.

Narrator 4: Jackson stuck his thumbs in his vest and puffed out his chest.

Gabriel: You ain't the world's greatest jockey. That title belongs to Abe Hawkins.

Narrator 5: Many nights, Gabriel has heard the story of how Abe Hawkins, an ex-slave from the South, beat the famous white jockey Gilpatrick in St. Louis. Last May, Pa and Jackson traveled to St. Louis with Master Giles to see the races. Jackson said Hawkins even had his name "Abe" mentioned in an article in the *New York Herald*.

Gabriel: When you beat Gilpatrick, *then* I'll show you some respect.

Narrator 1: Jackson chuckles at Gabriel's joshing. Then his face grows serious. Jackson knows horses better than he knows himself. Thumbs still hooked in his vest, he walks around Tenpenny.

Narrator 4: Gabriel follows behind like his shadow, trying to see with his smart eyes.

Gabriel: Pa's got him wrapped for the walk to Lexington.

Jackson: Tenpenny looks fine. Gabriel. Should win tomorrow, I reckon.

Narrator 2: Gabriel grins proudly. When Jackson calls him Gabriel, the boy knows he's mighty pleased.

Narrator 5: Master nods approvingly when Tenpenny prances toward the wagon.

Master Giles: Horse looks fine.

Narrator 3: Pa hoisted Gabriel up onto Tenpenny's bare back.

Master Giles: Morning, Mister Ham. Glad you and your sons are riding with us. Reports from Georgetown aren't good. Yesterday, One Arm Dan Parmer and his Rebel Raiders robbed the citizens and burned the telegraph office. Union soldiers chased them out of town, but lost them in the hollows. I've left armed guards here at the farm in case they ride this far.

Gabriel: At the thought of meeting One Arm and his men, a shiver sweeps through my bones. Tenpenny dances beneath me, eager to go. Only now I ain't so sure about this journey.

Narrators ALL: Read *Gabriel's Horses* by Alison Hart for the rest of this exciting story.