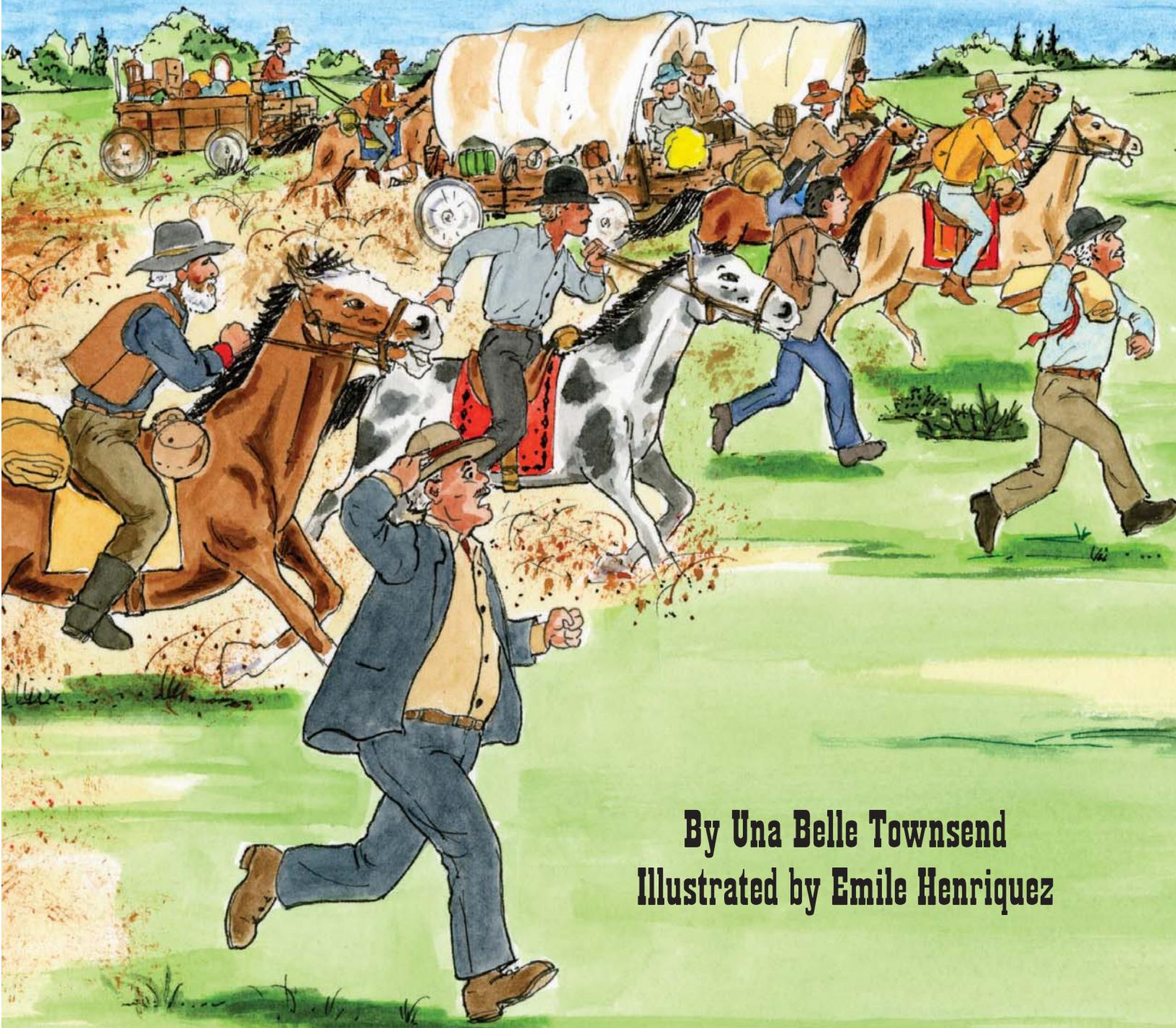


The Oklahoma LAND RUN



By Una Belle Townsend
Illustrated by Emile Henriquez

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The cannon explodes at high noon and the horses spring forward. In the midst of the noise and excitement, nine-year-old Jesse holds the reins of his father's team. So much could go wrong: the horses may spook, the competitors may get rough, and he may not be able to claim the land they need, but Jesse is the only chance his family has.

Two million acres of "unassigned lands" in Oklahoma went up for grabs on April 22, 1889. Jesse's family is just one of thousands who hope to start a life out west, but Pa's dream of pounding a stake into the ground and making a new home are all but shattered when he gets injured and is unable to drive the family's wagon. All would be lost . . . if it weren't for Jesse.

With Pa sitting beside his son, guiding him, there is no doubt that the two have already accomplished something important. Above the sound of the pounding hooves is Pa's voice: "Hold her steady and keep her straight. You'll be all right." Come what may, they will face it together as they search for a future on the Oklahoma prairie.

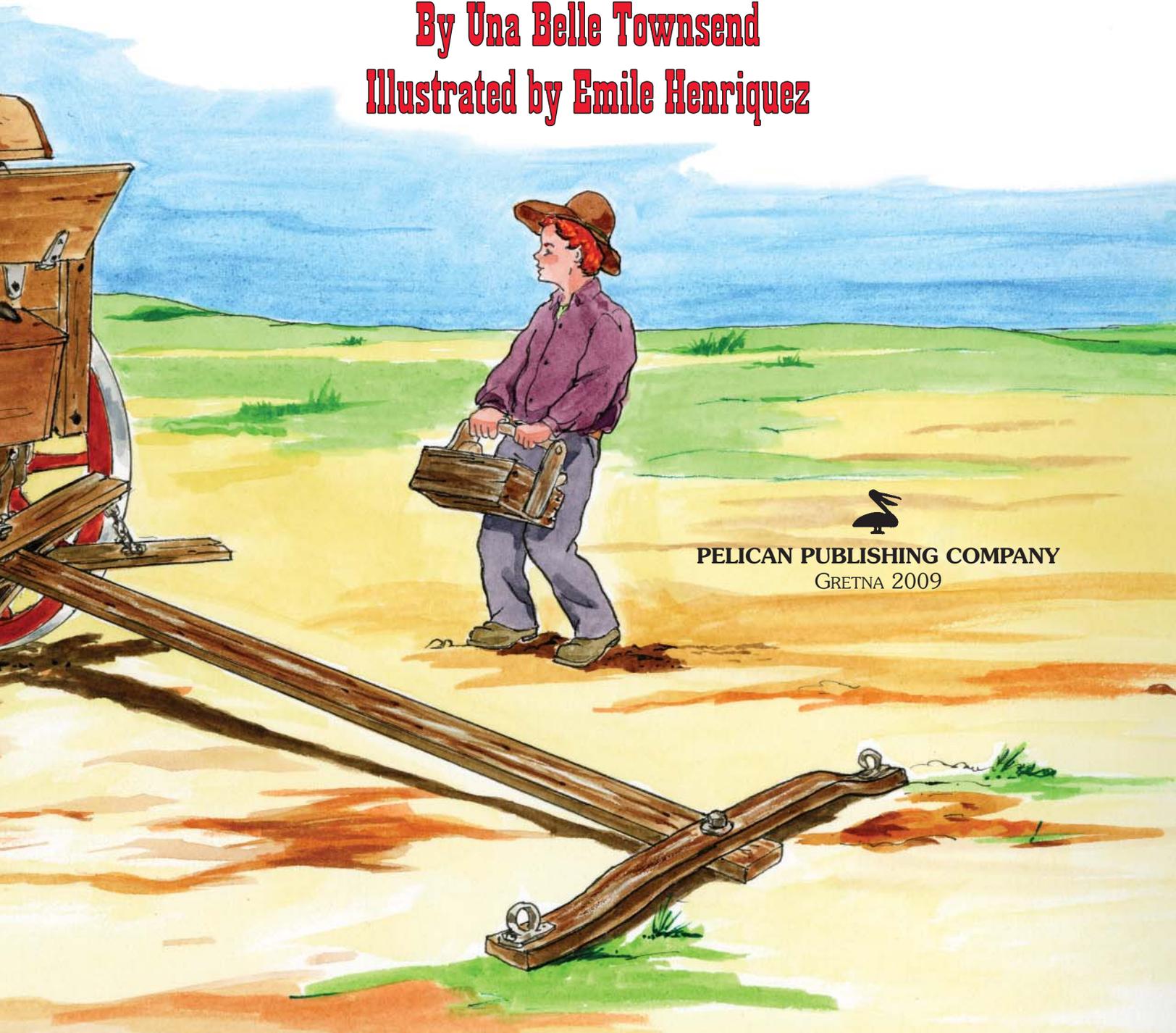
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To V.P.—the “Okie” who introduced me to Oklahoma

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THE OKLAHOMA LAND RUN

“I can do it, Pa. I know I can,” said Jesse, as he fed the horses, Ben and Bob, in the shed.

“Son, you’re too young and it’s dangerous,” answered Pa. “Hundreds of people will be there—maybe thousands. Our horses are strong, but if they get excited, they’ll be hard to handle.”





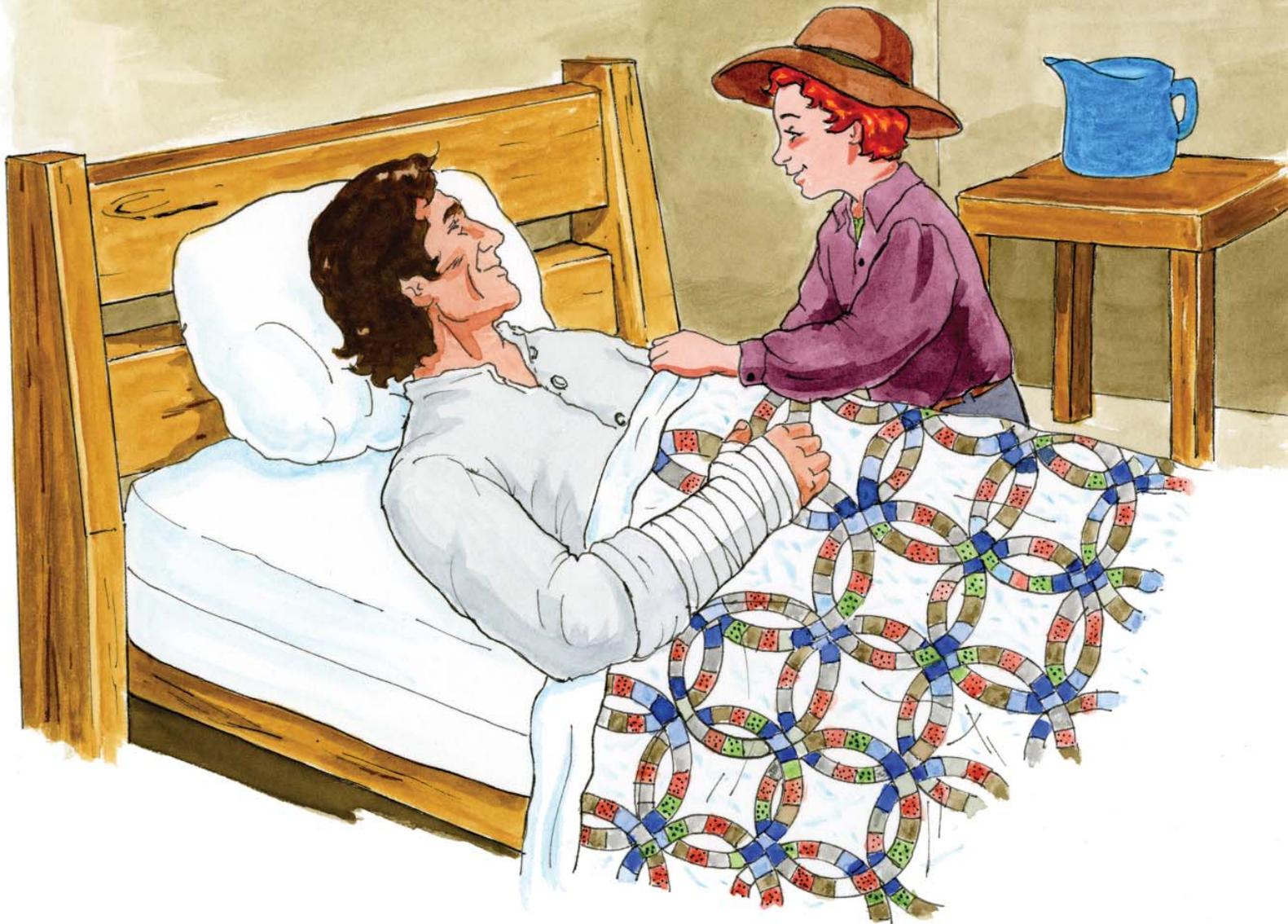
Pa tried to get his shoulder and arm in a better position in his sling. His fall last week had been a bad one.

Tomorrow would be April 22, 1889. At noon, two million acres called the “Unassigned Lands” would be given to settlers in a land run. Now, his dream of pounding a stake in the ground to claim 160 acres of free land in the Oklahoma Territory would not come true. Tugging at his sling again, he knew he couldn’t even drive his wagon!

“Pa,” Jesse pleaded. “It’s our only chance. You’ve let me drive before.”

“You’re right, Jesse. I guess you’ll have to drive the team tomorrow,” Pa said, picking up a wooden stake with his good hand. “I’ll be there beside you, but I just don’t like the idea of my nine-year-old son racing against grown men.” He threw the stake to the ground.





That evening, Jesse helped his pa lie down. He pulled a quilt over him and said, "Pa, I can do it. I'll get us some land."



When it was time to go to the starting line the next morning, Ma gave them a dinner bucket with beans, biscuits, and jerky in it. Jesse helped Pa climb into the wagon.

“Get close to the front,” said Pa. “We’ll have to look out for ‘sooners.’ They’ll have their claim registered before most of us can put a stake in the ground.”



At the starting line, they waited for the signal to begin. Men pushed past them on horseback. Others in wagons and in one-horse buggies wiggled their way toward the starting line. A few on bicycles and on foot tried to sneak ahead of the others.



“Whoa! Get back behind the line,” shouted a tall soldier on horseback as he patrolled the starting area. The men turned around and joined the others. One family tried to hide in a clump of bushes. “Move back,” yelled the tall Fort Reno cavalryman.

“Pa, a captain over there says the trains are full of people ready to jump off for some of the free land,” said Jesse. “You reckon that’s true?”

“Don’t know,” said Pa. “There must be a hundred wagons around here. I’m sure there are plenty of people on trains, too.”

The impatient crowd continued to push toward the starting line. As it neared noon, the settlers became quiet.

