The Big Trip – Chapter 9

It was summer now and Jon was working a lot with Lagsi and Godi. Both of them had been chosen to go to the Landsmot, the biggest horse show in Iceland and they were very excited about going, especially Godi who had been there before. I was getting to be a pretty good tolter now and knew this was an important gait. I could do it quite fast, but when I went out riding with those two there was no way that I could keep up. I also couldn't figure out how to lift my legs as high as they did and wasn't quite as spirited. But then I was also still pretty young. Lagsi and Godi knew that the time of the big show was getting closer. The rest of us were supposed to be turned out to pasture for the two weeks that Jon would be away, but that plan changed. Feyja came running into the stable more excited than I had ever seen her and told me that Skutla and I would be going to the Landsmot, too. Not in the competition, but she was going to ride us there and we could watch some of the show from the pasture in the hills. It was going to take four days to get to Vindheimamelar, the competition ground in the north of Iceland. I was so excited, it was hard standing still in my stall. I was ready to go right there and then, but we had to wait a few days. Freyfaxi was upset that he wasn't picked to go, but Stjarni and Mysla were happy to have some time off.

The morning we were ready to leave Baldur and I were saddled, Lagsi, Godi and Skutla were haltered and ready to go and the other horses had been turned out to pasture. I was excited to get going and couldn't figure out what we were waiting for. Suddenly Freyja came bursting into the barn, "They are here, let's go" she yelled and pulled me out of my stall. I was ready and rushed through the door to get going. Boy, was I surprised when I stepped outside. There were about 20 horses and five more riders waiting for us. The horses were having a quick drink from the creek that runs right by our farm. This was going to be even more exciting than I thought. As soon as Freyja mounted I tolted off proudly, making sure I was always a nose length ahead of the black mare Freyja's friend Maren was riding beside us. Skutla was trotting on a lose rein on my other side, having the time of her life. It didn't get much better than this.

After a 2 hour ride we stopped at another farm and picked up four more riders and a bunch of other horses. I was glad to have a little break and Freyja took the saddle off my back, caught Skutla and saddled her up. It was going to be my turn to be ponied and while I still had lots of energy I was okay with giving Skutla a turn. When we started off again I trotted right beside Freyja and Skutla and we headed through a big pasture and then off into some rugged mountainous terrain. I wasn't really paying attention to Jon when he called to Freyja to let Sleipnir go and Freyja right away leaned over and unclipped my reins. I kept trotting beside Skutla without realizing I was free to go. Freyja laughed at me and waved her hands, scooting me towards the herd of the other horses that were running free. I wasn't so sure, as I didn't know most of them, but then I saw Baldur and Lagsi trotting freely near the edge of the herd and joined them. This was even more fun than being ridden. We stayed close together and traveled through the rest of the afternoon, taking a few short breaks and seeing parts of the country I had never seen before. After the last break Skutla came and joined me. Freyja was riding a black mare that had come from another herd.

I was wondering what we would be doing at night and was surprised when suddenly we found ourselves in a small pasture. We had come to another farm where we would spend the night and pick up a few more riders. Lagsi and Godi went inside the stable, but the rest of us stayed outside. I was glad that Skutla and Baldur were there as I still didn't know most of the other horses and was a little shy about meeting them. Although Baldur had quite often been grumpy at home he now didn't mind staying close to us and helping us adjust to the new place. He had done it all before and the other horses respected him. Most of the horses were a bit tired from traveling all day and we were happy to have time to eat and rest. I nibbled on some hay and then laid down beside Skutla where I slept most of the night.

The next day we started off early and were joined by eight more horses. It rained most of the morning and there was a strong wind. We had to run right into the rain and got soaking wet. I like to turn my back to the rain and wind, rest one hind foot and wait for it to stop, but that day we didn't have a choice. Freyja didn't ride me or Skutla, Jon had decided to give the young horses a break and let them be free, which was fine with me. I found a spot in the middle of the herd, right behind a big black and white pinto gelding who blocked a lot of the rain for me.

We traveled along a river for most of the afternoon and a few times Jon and another rider stopped all the horses and rode Baldur and the big buckskin the other farmer owned into the river to check the current. They would talk for a while and then turn around and we continued on our way. I wasn't sure why they did this, but was glad we sometimes stopped and I could turn by back to the wind and rain. One break took longer than the others and I was dozing off not really paying attention when there was a lot of hooting and hollering from all the riders. We started again and all of the sudden I found myself turning towards the river. I wasn't thirsty so I was going to turn and wait at the edge, but a rider from another farm pushed me on. The rest of the herd was in the water, crossing to the other side. I was already wet and it was cold and I had never been in water that deep. Turning around was not an option, the rider behind me kept pushing me on. I went a few more steps and the water was getting close to my back. Suddenly the ground disappeared from under my feet and I was swimming. Swimming in a lake may be fine, but this river was fast and I had no control over where it was taking me. I got swept away and went sideways for a while. I kicked and struggled and all of the sudden realized that something was pulling on my bridle. Jon had gotten a hold of me and he and Baldur helped me stay on course. Wow, was I glad when I felt the ground under my feet again. I was soaking wet and not too happy when we reached the other side. Luckily we took a long lunchbreak after our adventurous river crossing and the rain turned into a light drizzle.

I was getting tired in the afternoon and was glad when we stopped and all the horses were being unsaddled. I looked for the barn or fenced in pasture where we would spend the night, but there was none. We were in the mountains and there was not a building in sight. The riders set up tents to sleep in and built a fire to keep warm. I was waiting to be tied up, but nobody came for me. The other horses started wandering off to graze and I realized we were going to be free for the night. What fun! I could run off to wherever I wanted. I started going, but then realized that I was actually quite hungry and also too tired to take off, plus I had no idea where to go, so I found myself a particularly good grazing spot and dug in.

The riders had been right, none of us went very far and it didn't take long in the morning to gather us up again. It was beautiful out again, the sun was shining and there was just a gentle breeze. I was dry, my belly was full, I had slept well and was ready to go. Freyja was heading for Skutla with the bridle, but I cut across her path and stopped right in front of her. She laughed at me and agreed to take me first. Skutla didn't mind. We tolted off and I felt really good. This was fun and I was proud to be part of the trek to Landsmot. We covered a lot of ground that morning and the larger mountains in the distance were coming closer quickly. Freyja chose Baldur as her next riding horse after our first break and it turned out I was glad not to be ridden that afternoon. The hills looked fine when you were beside them, but all of the sudden the riders were turning the horses to go up. I had never climbed that much before and you had to be really careful of all the loose rocks on the path. In some areas the trail was narrow and we all had to go in a single line. This was hard work and Skutla complained as well. We were the only two young horses on this ride, all the other horses had been ridden at least one or two years and were in much better shape. However, neither Skutla nor I were going to be left behind and we pushed on.

That night I was too tired to eat much and there wasn't as much grass at the camping site as there had been the other nights. I just wanted to sleep and rest and was worried that I would be dreaming of hills, rivers and mountains. I didn't, I slept well and on the last day the traveling got easier. The other horses seemed to know that we were almost there and picked up speed. By noon we reached a city of tents and flags. I was tired, but the excitement of the place soon caught my attention. Music and whinnies filled the air and there were horses everywhere. The stallions were housed in the biggest barn I had ever seen and we were taken into a huge pasture with 800 other horses who had traveled to the event. Before he let us go, Jon clipped a number into Baldur's coat to make sure nobody mistook him for their horse. Skutla being a pinto and I being a blue dun were unusual enough that we wouldn't get mixed up. I was proud that Freyja had chosen me to ride on the last leg of the ride and I lifted my head and legs just a little bit higher when we tolted past the oval track. A few horses were practicing and there was a lot of excitement in the air. Freyja gave me a big hug before she let me go into the pasture. I couldn't believe the number of horses and was a bit intimidated. We had made friends with some of the horses we had traveled with and stayed in a close group at first. Maybe I would see Valur and Lysa here? But no, I remembered that it was pretty unusual for 4-year olds to make the trek to the Landsmot and that I was pretty lucky to be here.