



Sixty Metres

by
Robert Prins

A 1970's School Time Story

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Against his will, he was lined up side by side with his peers. Everyone was watching. Heart pounding and already breathing heavily, Robert stood waiting for it all to begin. Backs against a grove of trees, all the boys stood looking over the hard, prickly summer ground, knowing that their time was only moments away.

Not all the boys were so reluctant. One of them was going to shine. Some jumped up and down, others jogged on the spot. Robert stood at the line nervously. He couldn't wait until it was over, but it would take longer for him than for the others.

"Take your marks." Robert's heart leapt into his mouth. He positioned his feet on the line like all the other boys.

"Get set." Crouching down slightly, he pulled his left leg back, the skinny leg, the one with the twisted foot on the bottom of it, ready for push off.

There was a pause. “Bang!” The wooden clappers snapped shut. Robert jumped, then ran. Eight boys running as fast as they could. After ten steps Robert could see that he was not last in this race. The knowledge people were behind him spurred him on and he ran faster, his weak leg kicking and swinging awkwardly behind him with each step.

Seconds later the boys behind him had caught up. Robert’s lungs were burning, his breathing asthmatic.

Despite his setbacks, Robert gave it his all, his mismatched legs moved like they had never moved before, his lungs expanding and contracting like hyperactive fireplace bellows. He focused on the oily black lines of the running track, keeping in his lane. Looking ahead, the finish line seemed no closer. All the boys were ahead, but he was still in the race.

The sting of prickles in his foot made him wince, but he ploughed on despite the pain, his feet thumping on the hard, downtrodden grass, sending the prickles deeper into his skin with each step.

As Robert hit the 40-metre mark, the first boy broke through the finish line. People were cheering and clapping. Robert kept going, pushing on, running as fast as he possibly could, giving it his all. All the other boys had crossed the finish line and were catching their breath before Robert finally made it over, puffing like an overheated steam engine and as exhausted as a sloth on Thursday.

He had done it. Robert had run his fastest sixty metres ever. He felt like he had set a world record. In spite of his disabilities, he was proud that he had done his best.

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"Take your marks ... get set ... Go!"
Robert didn't even want to run, but even with everything against him, Robert still put his best foot forward. 60 metres doesn't seem far, but a lot can happen in a short time.

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