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## Sons of our Father

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# Sons of our Father

Bill Elgersma

A cold winter's day in the auction ring  
Christmas and few buyers to bid.  
We had walked (my brother and I)  
—earlier—

through the catwalks, elevated above the animals in the pens  
the chill of the day—steam rising from the backs  
of the soon-to-be-sold beasts.  
Cows gaunt and skinny—for the packers—  
thick coated beef at so-much a pound  
and  
horses.

The illusion of freedom, that yearning for power,  
from the four-footed beasts  
—ah, to be horsemen—

Walking we noted the Mennonites—young men carefully checking,  
courageously, in the pens of possible horsepower  
lifting legs to check hooves, grabbing snouts to see teeth,  
walking them back and forth  
while old men pondered, speculated and assessed  
visualizing this beast behind the buggy in town,  
the heavier drafts pulling discs and plows

—horsemen —

The crooning of the auctioneer as the horses enter the ring  
draws eyes and money from these stoic individuals.  
Knowing exactly what they want a faint nod, a wink, the twitch  
of a finger is all that is needed to increase its value.  
We sit in awe, city dwellers not really knowing what to look for;  
the good horses go high, the skittish, gaunt, and aged  
for less, though we could have owned any of them

then  
came

the pony.

He walked into the ring  
head down, shaggy and frail  
a thick coat of matted, burdock-laden hair  
sweating the sickly beast.

I looked at the horsemen  
But they were not looking. Little  
chats between them about previous purchases, discussions  
about the weather took up their time  
while I listened to the auctioneer.  
“ten cents a pound”

my quick calculations told me  
I could be a horseman for thirty-five dollars,  
I continued to listen as no one bid.

“a penny a pound”

the pony stood in his unkempt frailty  
no reaction to the humiliation he must have felt  
—three dollars and fifty cents and I could be a horseman—

We talked and I urged my brother on  
but  
no pony

Being thirty-five and forty,  
we not longer live the need.  
There are no whiffle trees and traces  
in our garages and barns  
broken-spoked wheels and worn horse shoes  
do not line our equipment sheds  
and our anvils only bend nails straight  
for the kids’ tree house and the lawnmower  
when it mows rocks and concrete rather than grass.  
Yokes hang in dens as mirrors  
for the country look—

we don’t know what horsemen are.

After the auction,  
again we travel the labyrinth  
as new owners now view their deals

Neither speaking but both watching  
we search the pens for that shaggy pony.

Our non-horsemen hearts ache as we see  
the vet  
drive this sad rejected beast out.

“cost more to kill him than he’s worth”  
I hear someone say,

and I think  
in my immigrant heart

for three dollars and fifty cents  
I could have been a horseman.