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## Endurance Test

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# Endurance Test

by Lorna Van Gilst

My brawny-muscled dad  
has gone inside himself;  
he sits alone  
though we are all around.

Oh, Papa, don't you know?  
You can't just slip away.  
Remember all those choretimes when you said  
I must endure—  
Those cold nights in the barn,  
    my fingers icy prongs wrapped in knit wool.  
“We'll warm them up,” you'd say,  
    and together in the hay  
    we'd stand on bales and flap our arms  
        like gentle whips around ourselves.  
“Farmers must be tough,” you'd tell me.  
“It won't be long till suppertime.  
I need you here.”

You'd go on dumping pungent bales into the bunk,  
And I'd pull off the twine  
    while hungry Herefords nosed into their meal.  
They'd snort and bawl and drool  
    while you and I did stiff-toed jumping jacks  
    to move the blood congealing in our boots.  
Then walking down the row,  
    silently we'd count  
    the mooing, chewing faces 'cross the bunk.  
And when our count agreed,  
    we'd linger just a bit,  
    turn collars up,  
    tuck pantlegs into boots.  
“My little farmer ready for the blast?” you'd ask.

In one quick swoop you'd pull  
    the spider webby string to turn off lights,  
    clasp shut the door,  
    grab my numb, mittened hand,  
And pull me through the cold  
    from barn to basement door.

And once inside, we'd smell  
    Mom's fried potatoes on the stove.  
And pulling off stiff boots, you'd say,  
    “Good farmers must endure,  
    And we're good farmers—you and I,”  
    because I hadn't slipped away  
    and gone inside.