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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.