And a Few Nails

Marshel Rossow*

*Iowa State College

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Abstract

A GUST of wind slipped through the paneless frame and tossed dust into my face. I coughed, spat, then looked up at the sky-splattered roof. “Bad storm last week,” I thought aloud. “Really took the shingles.”
had spent three more dimes. "Just once more. It's my favorite song."

The music from the jukebox stopped and Joe looked away from the face. He pulled another dime from his pocket and dropped it into the slot. He pushed the two red tabs and the jukebox clicked and buzzed.

"She sure liked it," he said, as the sound of the echoing guitar began. "You go ahead. Go on to the dance. I'm gonna listen to this song."

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Marshel Rosow
Science Journalism, Sr.

A GUST of wind slipped through the paneless frame and tossed dust into my face. I coughed, spat, then looked up at the sky-splattered roof. "Bad storm last week," I thought aloud. "Really took the shingles." But I knew that what I saw was a product of time and neglect as well as wind. A crescent of gray peeked through where the cupola had been cocked to an angle by some earlier storm.

"They don't seem to mind." I snatched a cob from the dust at my feet and hurled it upward. The cooing stopped as the pigeons rushed for the hole high on the rotting south wall, their wings stirring the cobwebs under the eaves. "You can leave too," I thought, as a straggler flapped into the November sky. "There's nothing left here for you."
A feather looped down softly into the dust. I stepped toward it and bent over, reaching, but the gray tuft drifted between the fractured teeth of the hay rake and settled on a cobweb.

A board creaked. "All right, Nance, you'll get your feed." The old bay was straining her neck across the manger, trying to reach a stray stem of alfalfa that lay outside her stall. I grasped a wooden rung and pulled myself into the mow. The only hay left was a pile of dried brome on the far side, and I worked my way toward it, poking with the fork before each step to avoid holes hidden beneath the fluffy chaff. I pitched a forkful over the side, breathed in dust, and coughed. A rafter creaked as the wind slapped at the roof. Outside, a shingle clattered down into the weeds. "One time a hammer and a few nails could have fixed it," I mused.

I descended the ladder, my foot feeling ahead for the missing rung. The brome stems dug into my wrists as I carried the hay to the horses. "Always gotta be first, don't you, Nance?" She reached out as I approached, baring her yellow teeth. I recalled how Grandpa used to lift me onto her back and tell me stories about the horses as he fed them.

"Ain't never what they get into the feed or bust a fence but you can bet it's that bay who started it," he would say. "She's always got to be first one inta ever'thing."

I stepped back. She kicked at Mert and Tom, then let them join her at the manger. "Better enjoy it now," I warned, turning away. They were going to be sold before bad weather set in. Grandma wanted to take care of them. She said she could.

"I done it for four winters and I can do it agin," she had proclaimed. She was trying to convince someone, I was never sure who, but we both knew it wasn't so. The horses were a job for a man, for Grandpa, especially in winter. But Grandpa had died in autumn five years ago.

The rafter creaked again. I looked up and saw a frayed piece of rope covered with fly specks dangling from a beam. "Grandpa put up a sack swing for Dale and me there once." I reached for the rope, knowing it was too high. I stepped back and jumped, but as my fingers brushed the frayed end the wind came in and hustled it beyond reach.

A brown mallard squeezed between the decayed boards of the south wall, followed by her half-grown brood. I shuffled
toward the open door of the feed room, surveying the straw and dry excrement underfoot. Stepping into the bin, I groped on the dusty floor for an ear of corn, found one and tossed it out kernel by kernel until I held a bare cob. The ducks sifted the last kernel from the dust and waddled off.

As I adjusted to the dim light, something lying on a brace under the eaves caught my eye. I stepped closer, standing on tiptoe for a better look. In the dust of years lay a rusty hammer surrounded by half a dozen bent spikes. I reached for the handle, then hesitated. "Probably the only one who knows it's there is Grandpa." I stood for a moment in the half-light of the bin. A sound of fluttering came through the doorway and I stepped out, squinting. "There's nothing in here for you. Get out!" I hurled the cob.

A breeze sneaked between the rotting boards of the south wall and stirred the dust at my feet. A shingle clattered into the weeds beside the barn, and the breeze lifted a speck of dust— wasn't it the dust?— and left it in my eye.

pale, pale whisper.
haunt me.
scream into my quiet blood.
you are nothing,
but my very pulse.

diane rogers