The Weight of The Fork

Ted Rule*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1964 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
The Weight of
The Fork

by Ted Rule

THE FORK slipped easily into the wet greenness. He turned, letting the weight of the fork swing in an arc, guiding it carefully at the last instant to send its load through the small square door and against the cement of the chute.

The work became mechanical, joyous in its ease. The young man’s ego swelled at his strength. The fork shone, its fourteen tines glistened in the dim light of the silo. It guided itself, hypnotizing him, urging him on. The forage dropped through the chute with the sound of small feet, like the sound of the pigeons on the roof overhead.

He paused to look down the chute. Its updraft was clean and cool, and carried the sound of aloneness. He liked that, that sound of aloneness. It was satisfying.

When enough had been done, the young man carefully cleaned the fork, running each tine through his fingers. Let the acids rot the handle, it would last longer than the rest of the fork anyway.

He swung into the chute, descended rapidly, and dropped the last few feet, rolling the silage before him, sliding down the great green mound at the foot of the chute.
Once out of the silo, he grew cold in the dying sunlight. Outside, the shadows were long and ominous. They scared him, the coldness scared him. He shrugged into the worn blue shirt, and then looked again, looked at the yards of white wooden fences, at the cattle, chewing as always, at the rows of grass from the mower, drying even now in the descending dew.

He slammed the door of the silo house behind him. His mother came onto the back porch.

"Mike?"

"Yeh, Ma."

"How soon you want supper?"

"Pretty soon, Ma. I'm hungry"

His back ached. It had ached since he was twelve years old. He didn’t always notice it, but it ached, just the same. He rolled up the hose. He did it slowly, with little effort, enjoying the ease of its rolling, watching it as it fell in circles. He disliked the hose, no character, no nothing. He dropped its bright end at last, watching the few dribbles of water from its ever open mouth.

He carried the hose into the garage, putting it on its allotted nail. He picked up several tools from the work-bench and put them on the tool-rack. He put the gas can back under the bench and picked up the padlock for the gas pump outside.

Once outside, he shut the overhead doors of the garage and locked the gas pump. He picked up a rock from the drive and threw it in the general direction of the yellow tom cat, who was napping intermittently on one of the feed lot fence posts. The stone arched in the slanting sunlight, and barely missed the animal’s head. The cat didn’t move.

He stepped inside the door of the house and pulled down the old Winchester twenty-two, once his father’s, but now his. He stepped back onto the porch and pumped a shell into the chamber. He put the rifle to his shoulder and squeezed off the shot. The sound had echoed up from the creek bottom across the road before he moved again. The old tom had dropped, kicking, into the mud on the other side of the fence, half of his head blown away.

He flipped the empty shell off the porch onto the grass
and went back into the house. He put the gun back over the door where he had gotten it.

His mother called from the kitchen. "What were you shooting at?"

"That old tom that always sits on the fence down there," he answered, walking into the kitchen. The room smelled of fried potatoes and cooked meat.

She turned and looked at him, but he was too tired to care. She blew the graying hair out of her eyes, started to say something, stopped, and turned back to the browning potatoes. "Never cared much for that one, anyway," she said, starting to turn the potatoes. He left to wash.

The Awakening

by Dave Thomas

Out of the drum beat darkness
A figure waking
In the land of sleep
Stirs, rouses itself
Rises in the thickening
Grey-green shadow
And joins the naked men, the small men
Who slept so long

New night sounds splinter
The flickering shadows—
The shriek of a woman
The cry of a child; then
Silence at sunrise
And a ribbon of acrid
Smoke. The small man sleeps
But the world learns
Of his awakening