The Third Generation

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by Donald Peterson

English, Jr.

A TOP the barn, pigeons cooed at the weathercock swinging lazily in the morning breeze. The roof's shingles, scattered across its broad expanse, revealed the scars of many storms. The siding, once new and red, had turned a dark gray as rain had peeled off the paint and warped the boards so beams of sunlight illuminated the vast interior. The open double doors would have allowed two teams of horses to pass. Inside, a man stood beside the stall post nearest the door. A brimmed felt hat sat squarely on his head and protected the gray streaked hair from hay dust that filtered through the rafters. The sharp creases and pleats of his tailored suit hid the middle-age stomach while his carefully manicured fingers gripped the post.

"This is where I played, son," he said to a small, blond haired boy standing in the middle of the stall. The boy stuck his hands into the pockets of his fingertip coat and smiled at his dad. His blue eyes glowed with an excitement that complimented the band of freckles that covered the bridge of his pug nose.

"Where did ol' Blue die, sir? You know the gelding that was killed by lightning."

"Right here, boy."

"Was he a good horse?"

"Yes, he and Soapy were a matched team—they could really pull."

"Did you see him die?"

"No, I saw him after the storm."

With his toe, the boy stirred the dirty straw that covered the packed earth floor.

"Which way was ol' Blue lying when you saw him?"

"I don't remember, it's been too long ago."
"Did the lightning run down that post you're leaning on?"

"Yes, it did."

"I don't see any marks on it like there was on the Seversons' house when they were hit by lightning."

"This is a new post. The old one was so charred and weak that your grandfather replaced it."

"Why didn't the barn burn, sir—like that corner of the Seversons' house?"

"It's one of those freaks of nature—we were lucky. Don't you think it's time we were leaving?"

"In just a minute—sir, where were you smoking when Grandfather caught you and Uncle Walter?"

"That stall at the other end—I guess—I don't know!"

The boy ran down to the last stall and looked into the manger. His hands grasped the black wood worn smooth from the horses' necks as he leaned into the hay. With one hand he pushed a small pile of hay to one side and searched deeper. His father walked up behind, grabbed him around the middle and lifted him out.

"What are you looking for, boy?"

"I thought I might find one of your cigarettes so I could sit here and smoke like you did."

"Your uncle and I smoked all of those cigarettes by the creek the next day. There aren't any left here. Do you suppose we could leave?"

"I haven't seen the place where you used to milk."

"All right, it's around the corner, but hurry. We'll have to leave."

The boy ran around the corner of the stall and down the narrow walk to the line of wooden stanchions on the other side of the common feed chute. He stopped, looked down the line of wooden frames, then ambled toward the other end banging his arm against each stanchion as he would a stick against a picket fence.

"Which place did you use to milk at?"

"All of them."

Feeling his arm smack against the wood, the boy looked at the cobwebs between the joists.

"Hey, boy, get out of that stuff! Your mother will tan
both of our hides for messin’ up your shoes—now, find a stick and scrape it off while I get some hay to finish cleaning you up.”

The man picked up a handful of hay and followed the boy to the door.

“Didn’t you step in that stuff when you were a kid?” asked the boy as he scraped at his shoe with a stick.

“Not in my good shoes I didn’t! Your grandmother made sure of that—okay, that ought to do it; now get in the car.”

The boy looked back at the stalls.

“Sure wish I could see a dead horse.”

Above the barn the weathercock whipped in the breeze as the third generation walked to the car.

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Night Ride From Denver

by Lynn Thorp

English, Sr.

We let them blur—our eyes—and fastened them upon the narrow line that split the road,

Unconcerned (though not) that mountain troughs received and held the sun’s descending dye.

“It won’t be long . . . .”

“Yes . . . I can’t forget . . . .”

His mouth curved up—then straightened out: “I know.”

The night pressed on; its highway miles that stretched to the swallow of the sky. Gas stops, the sage became plowed fields; with radio blares and wind;

And jading hum of tires’ spinning speed;

And talk—the clock-like meaningless kind of that moves as simply as a second hand. At dawn

We reached the plains where silken lines of rain came slipping down behind—a curtain soft to blot recall of summer days now past.

I shrugged and turned to him: “It’s better now . . . .”

“I know,” he said again. We understood.