

The Barn

My mother's parents, who treat me constantly with gifts and love whenever I visit, have an interesting pastime; for many years they have owned horses. I have always been allowed to ride the horses with my family whenever I am visiting Nashville, Tennessee, and I look forward especially to this part of my time with them.

As a younger boy, and even some nowadays, the ride through the country in my grandparents' Town Car has stirred in me impatience and anticipation. I would stare longingly at the ranches and barns we passed, watch distractedly as cows and horses grazed while we passed, look up and fervently will the sun to stay fixed bright and high in the sky. My grandmother would point out interesting grand estates and country houses, but I would allow those thoughts none of my time or energy; I would already be concentrating enough. Normal people would probably relax and enjoy the ride, but I would be focused on the greater thrill at the end of the road, at the barn.

After hours of waiting, we would approach the gate, and already I would feel the gritty dust and smell that wonderful animal fragrance, a combination of mud, sawdust, and manure. Before the car would stop, I would always jump out the door but resist the urge to run towards the animals. My grandparents have frequently reminded me of the precautions necessary in dealing with the towering animals, and several too-close, almost-accidents cemented that thought in my head at least! When my grandparents, parents, and sister were ready, they would mosey out of the car, and time would drag along through a mud bog as the sun would too rapidly set on my hopes of a long ride. After we would get all the equipment ready for the horses, we would all trudge out to the field where the horses were kept. As we would bridle Jake and Chance, two of my grandparents horses, I would look to see how much Bly had grown to look more like her mother, Breeze. Stepping away from the horses, my spirits would fall slightly seeing the mud puddles, looming clouds, and setting sun. Any of them could cut our ride short, and I was in no mood to leave after just getting there. As I would trot towards the barn, the rest of the family seemed as if they would never complete the journey from the fields back to the barn. Finally, after grooming and saddling the horses, I would mount Jake.

Once, as my grandmother, on Chance, and I, on Jake, rode together along the path, I could see the fireflies twinkling between the other horses as they ran through the fields. A cloud of dust blew up and felt dry and gritty to my tongue as I looked down to see if Jake was all right. As I listened to the spring birds, I fell into pace with the horse and truly relaxed for the first time on the outing. Dimly, I watched as other horses on the opposite side of the fence whinnied in greeting and galloped over to walk near us. Faintly, in the silence, I heard a tractor, slowly and dutifully working the fields. I groaned silently as I jumped down to open a rusty gate blocking our path to the next field, a completely open area without fences or other horses, only tall grass and weeds. This part of the ride flowed along as I listened to my grandmother and noticed the wildlife in the area. Sometimes I would see a deer or two. Sooner than I desired, we be clip-clopped

back towards the gate and back to the barn. After dismounting, my sister or mother got to ride, but still there was an entertaining pastime for me; I walked past two men amiably talking. The first, a rustic, worn grandfather with a scruffy beard and a twinkling eye, was transfixed on a new black colt, joyously leaping and running back and forth across the field. I perceived that he was the ranch's owner, standing next to an employee or a rider, equally intent on the majestic black colt. The young horse was inspiring to watch; he stole my attention for a full twenty-five minutes. As I watched, I imagined coming and working here every day as these men did.

These excursions would always end as, suddenly, I would notice the orange sky, and would see my mother and sister trotting back between the fences dividing the fields. When they returned, my sister and I would groom the horses while the adults would put the equipment away. After we would let the horses back into the field, we would return to the car. I would watch the horses running in their meadow, relieved after a long ride. As we would pull away, I would dream of returning the next day, perhaps earlier so as to have more time before dusk, to this place void of care or worry.