“The Gift Horse”

The shiny bronze horse felt heavy in his small hand as he lifted it carefully to the window sill. Thomas leaned against the smooth walnut window seat, his elbows on the red-and-white calico-print pillows, and gazed out the tall window to the expansive front yard.

Here and there, tall, stately walnuts and oaks dappled the deep green grass with shade and wrapped their shadowy fingers around the slats of the white picket fence. Down the long dirt drive he could see the black carriage disappearing in plumes of dust. Framed in the side of the window, Thomas’s mother, Agatha, stood blank-faced, staring after the carriage, a small slip of paper in her hand.

Thomas lifted his body into the window seat, pulled his legs beneath him, and tapped his finger against the thin glass. Pulled from her thoughts, his mother turned, a gently breeze playing at the loose strands of her dark ebony hair, and he grinned, pulling the sides of his mouth apart with his fingers and sticking his tongue out between his teeth. She gave him a soft, sad smile, then glanced at the small bronze horse he held in his lap. Thomas saw her eyes fill with tears, and she turned away. Lifting her long, full blue skirt, she seemed to glide down the wooden white porch steps and across the yard to a small wooden bench against the broad trunk of a walnut tree where she often sat quietly for hours, lost in memory.

For a long while she sat, staring down at the slip of paper in her hands. Thomas grew weary of watching his mother sit under the tree and commenced to rolling the horse back and forth in the window sill, the finely etched wheels catching the glint of evening sunlight which beamed through the window. He rolled the horse across the sill, trying to mimic the sounds of galloping and often bumping the metal wheels against the wood in quick succession.

Slowly, the sun began to sink in the horizon, throwing twisted shadows across the wood floors. Thomas had long tired of sitting in the window and had moved to the kitchen, where Marjorie scuttled about kneading dough and stirring a thick soup over the fire. Her red hair, tucked tightly into a bun, bore streaks of white flour, and even her black dress seemed dusty underneath the crisp white apron.

“Marjorie?”

Marjorie looked up from her bread dough. “What is it, Thomas?”

“Why’s Mama so sad?”

Marjorie’s green eyes flickered dim for a moment, and then she replied, her Irish lilt becoming noticeable thicker, “I guess she’s missing your father. It’s not easy being separated from the one you love.”

“When do you s’pose Papa’s gonna come home? Mr. Larking says the war’s over. Why hasn’t he come home yet?”

Marjorie’s eyes became shrouded, as they often did when Thomas asked about his father. “Why don’t you go on out and play now, and let me finish this bread. Go on now, scoot!” Marjorie smacked Thomas’s trousers as he slouched toward the door.

“Marjorie?”

She tilted her head, waiting for whatever question he may decide to ask next.

“Did you ever love someone?”

Her face took on an ashen pallor, and it was a moment before she answered. “Go on, now, Thomas. Get ye up to yer room and play,” she whispered hoarsely.

\*little sympathy from town bc husband (Union officer) seen as traitor [family lives North Carolina]

\*boy grows up cherishing the horse, the only memory he has of his father, a man he views as a hero for giving his life for what he believed in (abolition)

\*tells the story to his children, grandchildren. Grows a successful business, horse remains on the mantle through good times and bad, sees the Great Depression, Thomas dies shortly afterward, horse sits on mantle in house, then auctioned. Sits in a small shop for a few years. *In 1943, a man buys the horse to give to his daughter, who is a Navy nurse on a battleship during the war. She keeps it for a few years, then sells it?* It sits in antique shop for several years. At end, military man and his wife buy the horse for their small son before the father leaves for war.