

Norma Chapman

MY FATHER DEALS WITH SHORTY HYDOCK

I was seven and only horses interested me. Cousin Hayden welded me an outsized piggy bank, so sturdy it would take a sledgehammer to open it. Hayden said when it was full I'd have enough money for a horse. It sat on the table behind my bed.

I lay in my living room cot, reading *Black Beauty* when Shorty Hydock banged on the door. Daddy had sent Shorty's wife, Georgia, and her daughter away. Everybody in Perris knew Georgia had shacked up with my Dad, and Shorty, out of jail, was looking for his family and my father.

I heard Shorty yell and my father answer. I thought I heard my name and something about a drink. Shorty waved at me when they passed my bed on their way to the dining room. A bottle opened, liquid poured into glasses, and cards shuffled. My father said, "I fold. This one's all yours,"

and more drinks were poured. Shorty laughed and coins clinked. What my father usually said at poker games was "I call and raise," "This one's mine, boys," and, as he scooped in the money, "Better luck next time." This night, Shorty never stopped laughing.

They walked toward my cot. I pretended to sleep. I heard Shorty's slurred voice as he picked up my bank, dropped coins in, even stuffed bills through the slot. I thought about my horse. What color did I want: black, white, pinto? In the morning my bank was gone. When I asked, Daddy said he put it in a safe place.

