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# The Weanling

by Gerald R. Wheeler

The weanling colt lay still in a stall, his tan coat thick as carpet, spike mane covered with flecks of dried mud, leaves & strings of yellow hay.

The weather-face man with bad eyes shivers from the cold humid air invading his bones. Bones old as the sagging barn. He kneels on frozen ground, slips on latex gloves, retrieves a scalpel from a box, deftly cuts a small incision in the weanling's throat, blood & poison gushing from lump like burst boil. He meticulously cleanses & dresses the wound, fills a syringe with a creamy liquid. Searches for a soft spot in the colt's shoulder, then plunges the needle, reflecting on the foal he buried a week before.

Two days pass.

The man scans angry sky stampeding dark clouds. He patiently waits for Badger, a 32-year-old, grayed-out roan gelding, the family's guardian of weanlings & injured horses. He's easy to recognize among his grazing herd: only horse that wears a winter horse blanket. Badger gives no quarter to rambunctious mares & younger geldings since blinded in left eye by a charging longhorn when he was a yearling.

The man shifts his tired eyes from the ailing weanling lying in the stall to the pale roan. He says in a raspy voice, "Dusty's contracted the damn strangles. Now he needs special medicine & attention only you can give."

