

Hay Derrick

John Sterling Harris*

You can see the derrick there
In the lower meadow by the marsh
Where there's a low stack
Of hay against the pale sky.

The father made them unhook the chain
That linked the pole to base
And lowered the end
To rest upon the ground.

But the big pine pole
Used to point toward the sun like a dial
And swing across the summer sky
To raise the loads of meadow hay

That creaking wagons brought to stack—
The Jackson hanging from the block,
With four curved tines like blades of scythes
Dropping down and sinking in the load,

Then hoisting high with cable taut,
Turning slowly in the air,
And swinging over the stack
With the screech of straining blocks—

Then the shout of *yo* to pull
The trip rope and dump the hay,
Returning them to the wagon—
Eight forkfulls for the load.

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So they were that August day,
The father pushing the fork into the load,
His son carefully building the stack,
And a child on the plodding derrick horse

That drew the cable up
Then backed to let it down,
In easy rhythm of lower
And hoist and swing and drop.

Then there came a shift of wind
That made the derrick horse start.
The child tried to pull the reins,
But the horse bolted fast.

The empty fork flew to the block
But stopped and then plunged down
Where one tine pinned the son to the stack
And the broken cable covered him with coils.

They left the stack unfinished
To bleach in the summer sun,
And the autumn winds stirred the hay
Like unkempt hair on the head of a boy.