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The Horsetrader's Daughter

by Rosemary Formolo

In the place in the jack-pines by the lake they came every summer and set up their establishment, with most of the horses kept in a little field nearby. The man was fiercely and villainously ugly, low-browed, jug-eared, with a nose of a startling bigness. He was a sharp buisness man and drove crafty bargains, It was said that he knew where to insert a live eel into a horse to make it full of fettle before a sale.

His daughter was thirteen, maybe a little older, skinny, a tight bud, and yet in some mysterious way giving promise of a precocious physical development. Always barefoot, she wore a shrunken, wrinkled and faded cotton dress to the knees, and she was very dark, with skin the color of a certain kind of date that ripens to a translucent golden brown. Her untidy, curling hair fell to her shoulders, a nest for sparrows; and she was dirty. Even her dark color could not hide the ring around her neck. But though her father's features were an unfortunate, misguided jumble, hers were fine and carefully cut. His eyes were shifty, the size of currants. Hers were large with heavy lashes, and they burned with a quick fire. It was strange that such a bright flower should have sprung from such an evil-looking pot.