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ONE DAY IN OCTOBER

Paul Rondema

The platform on which they ride is made of wood. Bales of hay form four rows on which countless seats had been taken. Through puddles and mud, the ruts they follow take them slowly back to their waiting car. It is October and it is cold, yet they are aware only subconsciously of the briskness in the air, of the chill that fills their lungs. Their visit has not resulted in a pumpkin but that was never their intention. They came with nothing, and with nothing in their hands they have planned to return.

The drive to Sauvie’s Island had been pleasant. St. John’s bridge is always a beautiful sight, and the myriad colors clinging as long as possible to almost bare branches lent color to a gray-filled sky. Calm were the clouds though a steady wind blew their way. They parked, got out and weaved their way through cars and puddles and gates. And around children, enthusiastically leading parents, reminiscent of their own youth.

Climbing aboard the trailer and taking their seats, they noticed families on this clear late October day. Two boys leaned precariously close to the back of the trailer, daring each other with their eyes. In their minds, a mother and father still clung to their young daughters as the platform swayed back and forth. And they rode, content to let the path lead them where it will.

With others so close at hand, conversation had been brief. At the far field they moved beyond the crowd and found a place of quiet. They searched for pumpkins that reminded them of professors they once had and friends that they had known. Amid all that was misshapen, they were calm. Within the cold, the mud and the crowd, they let fall their boundaries. And in their quietness, in that not quite perfect field, they found their peace.

And then they returned. While others climbed aboard and sat on bales of hay, they waited. They waited, and then they took their seats. They faced each other on this uncertain path.

And now, as the words and laughter of others fill their ears they allow their silent content to draw them close. The tractor dips within a rut and the trailer loosens their balance. He touches her knee. She holds his hand. They ride in silence as, once again, fate has changed their plans.