Grandpa came into Greg’s room and peered at the magnificent images of horses on Greg’s computer screen. “Going to be a cowboy when you grow up, Greg?”

“Oh, Grandpa, no one’s a cowboy anymore!” said Greg.

Grandpa appeared to consider something, and then he said, “Come to my room. There’s something I want to show you.”

Grandpa handed Greg a faded photograph of a majestic young man on horseback. He wore a flat-topped hat and a short jacket. Round silver disks decorated his trousers, silvery spurs were strapped to his boots, and a long, braided rope was looped around his saddle horn. He wore the rope like a badge of honor.

“This man is my father,” said Grandpa, “and your great-grandfather, Gregorio. You were named after him.”

“So he was a real cowboy?” asked a curious Greg.

“He was a vaquero,” said Grandpa, “from the Spanish word vaca, for ‘cow.’ Grandpa explained that the Spanish brought the first cattle and horses to America and that there were cowboys in Mexico long before there were any in the United States.

Grandpa went on, “Of course, when my father arrived here from Mexico, he wasn’t yet a vaquero. He was still a young boy, exactly your age. He was fascinated with the horses. He worked hard and practiced riding until he became an excellent horseman. He worked as a vaquero for many, many years.”

Grandpa opened the battered trunk where he kept his treasures, the reminders of his earlier life. He rummaged around until he felt an object wrapped in silky cloth. He removed it from the trunk and carefully unwrapped it.

“Is that the rope Gregorio has in the picture?” asked Greg.

“Yes,” said Grandpa. “My father made this lariat, la reata, and I have saved it all these years so that you can have it.”