In the Stands

David Louter
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For Paul Zarzyski

July dust hovers
then covers the horse
going down. Cowgirls
dressed in red and rhinestones
tremble like beads
of sweat in summer sun. Then
bronc and rider break from spin
to-spin-out in one clear Hail Mary
straight-away for the stands.
The calm pulse of no return
quickens to a melee of yells,
of men and women straining
for a better view—as the bowlegged roan,
yoked in chaps and spurs,
rungs, lunges and dives.

The crowd rises,
beer cans and children in hand.
Every summer in a moment
we forget what we owe
and risk it all on a clown
taunting a bull, or cowboy in the air.
We bank on luck not our own,
brush the dust from our clothes,
and pray our bodies
grit the same way out. All year,
the rider’s record hanging on,
the whiplashing body, the black hat
clinging to the motion,
reminds us whether up or down,
win or lose—we know luck and keep on.

David Louter