

Winter 1993

Able Hall's Belgiums

William Jolliff

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Recommended Citation

Jolliff, William (1993) "Able Hall's Belgiums," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 39 , Article 24.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss39/24>

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William Jolliff

Able Hall's Belgiums

His mother blamed his ugly on the team.
She'd jostled on the harrow all of April,
right up till her time. So Able always
said that he was dropped behind a horse
and lay there in a pile sixty years.

Before their tawny manes were braided,
before their tails were plied with red and silver
twine, before they earned their keep by service,
the lonely service of their great cocks, curved
and dangling like the teeth of a hayrake, they stood

a single force before the shares and coulter,
twin butts wide as a doddy house. Their russet
backs and haunches, Able said, were broad
enough a view for any man. He sang them
"het" and "chk" and curried their shoulders.

They weren't bred for town, so when they came,
the valley shook and knew. The man who'd lived
behind them lay stretched in a wagon box,
and they would only pull him once again,
in draped parade, a pale and homely burden.