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Canter the Awkward Body

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CANTER THE AWKWARD BODY

Dwarfish tents have begun to push
from my daughter's tight chest.
Her questions tail-off now, sullen.
Borrowing from a genealogy of part-time fathers,
good with our hands, but frozen to lies,
I drum home swaggering recitals
of myself at eleven, lopsided with respect.
Fiddling at the buttons on my shirt, she nods.

At camp, horses are best.
She claims to know their manes
possess no nerves, her tugging cannot bruise them;
not like that woman who screamed
from my bed and wheeled away to an ambulance,
leaving behind her knots of tightly braided blood.
Or the samplers of moans, staccato whispers
I carried home from the bars,
the ones who pressed pills
in my daughter's hand for school.

Yes, the horses, those lathered clocks,
angling around burnt summer hills,
past abandoned cars with weeds matted flat
to rear seats, surging their roughest wind
at the bite of my child's riding switch.
Above such barrel an ointment pulls
down her body, kissing their brown, slick hides.
If she was just someone else, anyone else . . .
The stable hand with his broken face
places a boot on the rail.