

The Fold

Waking up at dawn that woman
pulls on her jeans one leg at a time
and stands up.

She's dreamed of cowhands,
the ones who sometimes turn out to be poets:
just as sweet and mean as anyone who sleeps
with one ear to the ground
and the other open to the stars.

She buttons her fly
one button at a time. Cinches
her belt. She knows she's left
too much undone,
tack unmended, muck in the barn.
They'll say she's a lousy horsewoman.
But she's not in it for perfection or even duty.
She has a horse that trusts her, that's enough.
Someone else will have to clean up.

A friend asked her once why
she likes to ride alone in lonely spaces.
As if friendship should be enough.
As if the animal in her could not exist
out there
on its own.

She spins her spurs' wheels
as she oils them, listening to
wing-it-wing-it-wingit—
Their little jingle hits the rafters,
vibrates in the loose hay—

Wing-it-wing-it-wing-it—
If you let it
be, it's that simple.

From riding out she's learned
there's always a place that's hidden in the landscape,
like the flesh on the under-curve of the breast
or the fissure between scapula and rib
when the lover's back is flexed in climax—
Some place where, in Spring, the quail covey
or the wild ponies crop at the sparse early grass.

When her father died she found it
behind his ear where his silken scalp followed
the velvet question mark of his old man's hair.
She remembers how, as he lay in the coffin,
she rode down that hidden valley once with her left thumb.
An anger and a tenderness of mustang proportions rearing inside her

and all that afternoon
the sheen of his hair oil on her skin like a talisman;
her father-wounded sisters
unaware of where she'd been.

This morning, satisfied
in her grief, she faces the flatland.

Knowing it's there somewhere,
she rides out
toward the fold.

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