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Greenbroke: Stories

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December, 2016

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Sarah Jean Rains entitled *Greenbroke: Stories*.

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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GREENBROKE: STORIES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
Of the
College of Arts and Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Of Master of English
Winthrop University
September 2016

By

Sarah Jean Rains

Abstract

In my collection *Greenbroke: Stories*, I explore the underbelly of the equestrian world. On the surface, the equestrian community is viewed as a world for the wealthy. It is viewed as a community of extravagance and excess. Additionally, there are few pieces of fiction that actually take the reader beyond the glamor of the surface. My stories do just that. Throughout my collection it was my aim to allow readers into a world that is different from the stereotypical equine community they thought they knew. In my stories, horse people watch their worlds collapse around them. My characters exist as a part of a disappearing beauty, one that is being overrun and chased out by newness. I incorporate humor, non-horse related plots and conflicts, and internal turmoil in order to express the diversity that is inherent in these communities. By utilizing different styles and experimenting with the traditional story arc, my fiction brings new perspectives and complicated characters to the forefront. Out of a sense of duty to represent the complexity of the equestrian community I am a part of, and a desire to introduce the unique jargon associated with this world, my first full collection of short stories, *Greenbroke: Stories*, was created.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this collection to George Morris. He truly cared about my writing even when he didn't really have to.

I want to thank my parents, Darrell and Kerry Rains, for supporting me in my creativity now and always; my brother for leaving out random copies my stories in his house for guests to read; my grandmother for all her past edits and drastic revisions; my husband for letting me be weird and loving me for it; past and current mentors, friends, fellow writers, teachers, and professors; and of course all of my equestrian and eventer friends, trainers, and even the horses, all of whom without, these stories would have never been written.

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Before the Show

I'd been a working student in Virginia for six months and just figured out how cocaine can really work. I had bumped and cleaned seven bridles and bumped again and oiled four saddles, two dressage and two jump. Oiled, cleaned, bumped, ready. We were heading out for Jersey Fresh at 4 a.m. the next morning or that morning I guess because it was already that morning. But it was two hours before we needed to leave so it was 2 a.m. and we had two hours before 4 a.m. Matthew worked with me and everyone else thought we were dating. But, we weren't we just had to do everything together because when I wasn't geeked, he was, and it just worked better when it was both of us, not just one of us, dealing with the horses.

Matthew karate kicked the office door but it didn't open so he turned the doorknob and opened it a little, then kicked it and said "POW!" real loud. He sauntered over to the desk I was working at. I was double checking the list of supplements to bring along for Jersey Fresh since we were leaving in two hours at 4 a.m. He acted like he was pressing piano keys on my head, and hummed the intro to "Phantom of the Opera."

"What are you doing?" Matthew said.

"Did we pack the bute?" I asked him.

"No. Probably. I don't know. Probably," he told me. He checked out the saddles beside me and said, "Holy shit. Did you clean all of those? You trying to get on Steven's good side?"

Steven was our boss and he managed to make it to the Olympics back in the eighties. He kept just twenty horses; most of them lower level greenies that weren't competing internationally yet. He didn't compete much anymore, but took great glory in the appearance of his farm and himself. A tidy seventy acres and a redone cattle barn with an added covered arena, cross-country field, dressage arena with mirrors, and at least two separate jump fields. Steven wore white breeches and would leave the barn in as immaculate of shape as he arrived. Matthew wore black and I preferred dark green because it matched manure stains and horse slobber.

"I'm trying to get shit done, Matthew," I said.

I pulled a red hoofpick from the breast-pocket of my Carhartt and dipped the pointed end into the small, decorated bowl on the office desk that held our cocaine for the night. It looked like a little boat but with a foxhunting scene etched into the base. When it ran low, the powder filled in the etchings and illuminated the hunt—fox in front of hounds in front of cob horses with short tails. I would replenish the bowl with the bag I kept in the other pocket, the hand pocket, of my jacket.

Matthew watched me dip the hoofpick in and take a bump.

"Here," I said. I dipped the hoofpick in for him. He took it and bumped.

"I'm going to do night checks," he said.

I waved him off and continued down the list with my pointer finger. Vitamin E, Selenium, DMSO, MareMagic, hyaluronic acid. It was cold so I hid the rest of my fingers

in my jacket sleeve. My pointer finger poked out and I moved it down the list, pressing hard, turning the underneath of my fingernail purple.

Then Matthew charged back into the office. He was grabbing his hair like he was trying to pull it out of his head. His eyes were intense and he stood right in front of me. He had wrapped a stable sheet around his neck and it draped from his body like a cape. There were dried manure stains on the butt-straps.

“What now?” I said.

“Shit!” Matthew said.

“Shit what?” I said back.

“He’s gone!”

“What’s gone?”

“Stall 4!”

“The whole stall?” I asked.

“How would the whole stall be gone?” He said.

“Fuck if I know!” I said.

“The horse!” he said.

I stood up and the office chair fell over behind me. We both went to leave the office, but I checked off Selenium and DMSO before leaving because I remember we put in an order a week ago for those and I think I even used some DMSO a few days ago on my foot because I was stepped on by the chestnut mare I was holding for the farrier. She came down hard square on the top of my foot and there was not time to ice it, so I just

rolled some DMSO on it to stop the pain before it began to hurt. It soaks in quick, right into the bloodstream and leaves behind an oyster taste in your mouth but it works for pain at least.

Matthew and I went down the hall and the horses all were munching on hay. The hay this year was sugary because of an odd rainfall late in the season. It was a decent orchard alfalfa mix but nothing too amazing. But, even the orchard flowers in the hay were less purple than usual. The horses didn't mind much; they just ate around the heavy alfalfa stalks and went right for the green leaves and light purple flowers that fell out when they shook the hay nets real hard. You could tell they didn't really like it, but when you pay twenty-eight dollars for a three-string bale, you better make sure it gets eaten.

I jogged down to stall 4 and Matthew was already standing there. He must have sprinted. I laughed at the idea of him sprinting down the concrete hall in his flip flops and wool toe socks, stable sheet cape billowing behind him. He was panting and pointing with one hand, the other rested on his knee.

“Gone! The whole horse!”

“Which one was it? The new one?” I asked.

“No, this one got here last week,” he answered.

“Yeah, so the new one?” I asked again.

“Are you high?” he asked.

“Are you?” I asked.

This horse was by Voltaire, out of Alicante, and those bloodlines put him right around eighty-thousand as a two-year old, even before he was under saddle. Most everything else in the barn was bought right off the track in Kentucky or Pennsylvania or was at least imported as a weanling. This horse was Steven's chance to make good with the sponsors.

"It's the big gray one. The imported one from the Smith Syndicate."

"Oh shit," I said.

"Yeah," he responded. He ran his fingers back through his hair and pulled again.

"Grab a halter," I told him, "and I'll grab a bucket with some grain."

He nodded and sprinted a few steps, but then turned around and snatched the halter hanging off the stall 4 door, right beneath the name plate reading "Titanium Awakened." His barn name was Chuck. "I got one," he told me.

"I don't have grain yet. Let me get some," I said.

"Well, hurry, damnit! It's almost time to leave!" Matthew said. He ran outside and next thing I see is all the flood lights turned on, and the golf cart lights turned on.

"Steven will be here soon!" Matthew yelled. Then I heard the engine turn on and then Matthew was driving down the hallway from the other side of the barn. God he was so quick. Then all the horses started grumbling and nickering because they knew that we feed grain from the golf cart and they thought it was time for breakfast which it wasn't because it was 2:30 a.m. now and we were leaving in an hour and a half at 4 a.m. and that meant that Steven would probably be here at 3:45 a.m. which really only gave us an hour

to find Chuck and get a halter on Chuck and put Chuck back in his stall with the hay that none of the horses really liked.

“Did you get the grain?” he asked me.

“Shit. No, you were moving so fast I just wanted to watch and see how you did it,” I told him.

“God, you are high,” he said.

“You want to bump?” I asked. He nodded and I climbed in the golf cart and we bumped real quick using the hoofpick and the bag of coke in my hand pocket. Then he backed up the golf cart. It beeped loudly and swerved as he drove it backwards and out of the barn. He was singing “Phantom of the Opera” when I said “Shit! The grain—wait!” I jumped out of the golf cart and ran down the hall and Matthew laughed and then sneezed and then I went to the grain room to grab a bucket and a handful of grain.

In the feed room I turned on the lights and surveyed all the tin trashcans and thought about how when I was young I would open up the feed bins at my grandfather’s ranch in Florida and breathe in the warm smellings of sweet feed and molasses beet pulp. I would run my fingers through the grains and move them around like a sticky sand, dig my hands in deep, so deep, to my elbows that when I pulled my arm out there was a beautiful dusting of sweet feed crumbs that made my skin look freckled and taste like sugars and dirt. My grandfather would bite on sour grass and show me how to do the same. How to pick it from the earth, break off the white rooted end, suck and bite on the stalk’s end. The grass so sour it hurt the back of my mouth and made me thirsty. When

Grandfather died, we sold the farm to a cattle rancher. The cows now eat the sour grass and it apparently makes the meat sweeter.

I licked my lips and grabbed a red bucket from the stack of twenty or so buckets beside the door and opened the first tin trashcan on my left. It was filled with Cavalor Strugimix and it smelled like Texas Toast. I dove my hand into the tin trash can and grabbed a handful, threw it in the red bucket, and ran back out to the hall.

Matthew was driving backwards down the hallway from the other direction and stopped when he got to the door of the feed room.

“I am so good at this,” he said.

“I have the grain,” I told him.

“I could probably do this professionally,” he said.

“Drive backwards?” I asked.

“Maybe. Probably,” he told me.

“Let’s go find Chuck,” I said.

“Backwards,” he said. And we exited out of the barn backwards. All the horses grumbled and paced in their stalls as the loud beeping of the reverse golf cart echoed down the hall.

Once we got outside, Matthew started driving normal, which was good because the beeping was really loud and I was starting to feel sort of sick because I wasn’t sure when I had eaten last and the grain really made me pretty hungry since it smelled like Texas Toast. I thought Matthew should know I was hungry so I told him, “I’m hungry.”

We usually ate minimally. There was either money for food or money for coke and you can't clean a barn as quickly on a full stomach as you can amped. Steven was not around often but when he was he wanted the horses stalled alphabetically, the bridles hung accordingly, steamed hay in front of every horse, and stalls so clean you could sleep in them naked, burying yourself under the pine shavings.

Matthew said, "We need to find Chuck first, then we can eat something." I placed the bucket between us on the golf cart seat and burrowed my hands in the hand pockets of my jacket.

"Steven will kill us. Yeah, Chuck first then food," I said.

We drove down to the cross country field first, checked in all the fire lanes between the paddocks and by the trailer parking. We didn't see Chuck. What we saw a lot of was frost and hunched over flowers and shrubbery. The shrubs were all frosted and most of the flowers looked like they were hugging themselves or really sad. And I wondered why they were so sad and thought that maybe it's because flowers don't have blankets and neither do shrubs so how are they supposed to stay warm or alive. People build outdoor cat boxes so cats don't freeze at night, for Christ's sake, so what about the flowers? What about the shrubbery?

"Matthew, we need a shrubbery box. Like the stray cat boxes," I told him.

"We don't have time for shrubbery. We need to find Chuck," he responded, "Steven will literally kill us. Can't make the High Performance list if we're dead."

I thought maybe it wouldn't be so bad to not make the High Performance list. I thought maybe it wouldn't be so bad to have three hundred head of cattle, try out a western saddle for once, a Quarter Horse for once instead of these hot headed Thoroughbreds and lofty brained Warmbloods. Let my horse get shaggy, grow out its whiskers, leave it outside in twenty degree weather, unblanketed because its coat is so thick and wild. Make coffee over a stove instead of from a French Vanilla pod of a Keurig. Cut my fingernails short and learn to tie knots.

Matthew had been thinking, too. "What if Chuck's dead because he's cold like the flowers and shrubbery and the cats without a stray-cat, cat warming, boxes?" he asked.

"Did you see the news story about the cat that was frozen to the road in Ohio?" I asked.

"That's not going to be Chuck," he said.

"No, Chuck has a blanket," I said.

"It reflects," he said.

I nodded.

It was nice out in the fire lanes and the air was cold but if I sat still enough, it started to feel warm. I felt Matthew's hand move over my shoulder and down to my breast. I turned my head to face him; his hair frosted in the cold glow of the moon.

"Gimme the hoofpick. Let me get a bump," he said

"Yeah, OK, me too," I said.

The sun was starting to come up except maybe it wasn't the sun. It was almost 3 a.m. and I think it must have just been the moon. But I guess I thought it was the sun because after we bumped, we zoomed to the next closest place to check for Chuck because Steven was going to be there soon and if Chuck wasn't back in the barn we might as well not be back in the barn.

We drove up to the dressage arena and shone the headlights into it and that's when we saw Chuck. His burgundy blanket covering his large body, the reflective strips glaring back into the headlights of the golf cart. He was trying to eat some of the fake flowers from "C" in front of the judge's stand even though there was a ton of grass in the cross-country fields, paddocks, and everywhere else.

Matthew said, "Is he trying to eat the fake pansies?"

"He's imported. He's German. He's an idiot," I told him.

"I hate German horses," he said.

"I just hate warmbloods," I responded.

"Chuck's not a warmblood," he snapped at me.

"Yes, he is, Matthew. He's straight trakehner."

"Those aren't warmbloods, are they?"

We both sat and looked at Chuck. We needed to get Chuck.

"We need to get Chuck," I said. I grabbed the bucket from my side, stepped out of the golf cart, and went to shake the grain to lure the horse over. The bucket didn't make any noise. I felt around in the bucket and there wasn't any grain.

“Matthew, the bucket is empty,” I told him.

“It must have spilled over,” he told me, “I’m going to go up and just try and throw the lead rope over his neck. He probably won’t even move. You act like there’s feed in that bucket. Put some rocks in it or something,” he told me.

I grabbed a handful of footing from the arena and dropped it into the bucket. I gave the bucket a shake but it hardly made noise. The footing was made from recycled carpet and tires and cost fourteen thousand dollars just to get enough to cover the clay base. It had to be raked after each use and if a horse shit in it, it had to be picked immediately. Steven kept a Mexican on staff to standby with a pitchfork when we schooled the horses. We rode the greenies for Steven and Steven rode them after they weren’t green anymore. He said he was done with that shit. He said he had nothing to prove anymore. He said gone are the days of sticking a buck for the sake of sticking a buck. Cesar, the Mexican hired to pick the arena, heard Steven spit out enough orders that he had actually become a really solid ground eye. It’s just too bad he had never sat on a horse before because I think that guy understood the German Training Scale better than Steven himself. Cesar would tell us to activate the inside hind, supple with the outside rein—soften. Ask, then release. The horses softened, filled up the rein like a fish on the end of a line. A tapping when they touched the bit with their tongue, until the tapping became even and rhythmical, as if we were breathing with the horse.

The footing didn’t make good noise in the bucket, but I shook it around anyways and walked up to Chuck’s right side as Matthew walked up to his left. We both clucked

to Chuck and he turned his gray head towards us. One ear towards me and the other towards Matthew until I shook the bucket and then both ears turned towards me. Chuck walked over and lowered his head into the bucket and licked the bottom and I could feel his warm tongue through the bottom of the thin plastic.

“That’s not grain,” Matthew said.

“Shit,” I said.

“Just dose him with some banamine when we get back up to the barn,” he said.

“Yeah, I already packed it,” I said.

“It starts with B, it’ll be easy enough to find,” Matthew said.

“God I hope he doesn’t colic,” I said.

“The banamine should work. Probably,” he responded.

Matthew threw the black nylon rope over Chuck’s neck and then slipped the leather halter over Chuck’s nose, over and behind his cold, clipped ears. I reached my hand into my pocket, not the coke pocket and not the hoofpick pocket, and pulled out a mint, unwrapped it, and gave it to Chuck. The mint broke in Chuck’s mouth and he breathed on me, nostrils flexing and softening, smelling for more. His breath puffed white in the beam of the golf cart headlights.

“You walk him up. I don’t feel like it,” I said.

“Let’s just cart him up. I’m so tired,” Matthew said.

“I’m starving,” I said.

“Then we can eat if we have time. Steven’s not going to wait around for us to eat,” he said.

“Drive slow,” I told him.

“You hold him, I’ll drive slow,” he told me.

It was 3:30 a.m. and I held Chuck’s lead rope and walked over to the golf cart.

Chuck walked beside me, interested in the bucket. I placed the red feed bucket in the middle of the seat and Matthew climbed in and pushed the accelerator and drove slowly. My hand holding the rope was cold and Chuck walked alongside the golf cart as he did every day when we turned him out in the morning into paddock 4 at the back of the property. Out where Chuck could see the neighboring cow fields and see the black calves play and jump around in the early chill of morning. Where he could nicker softly to the chestnut mare beside him as she rolled in the frosted dew on the grass. Where when he exhaled, a cloud of proud condensation charged from his nostrils. Out where the sky met with the earth in a junction between dirt and air, that precious moment when he could just exist and paw the ground with his hoof.

Hickstead

Danny would rather be elsewhere, but she is here in the third stall of ten, shaking a black, plastic pitchfork through fine shredded pine shavings. Her muck shoes reek of ammonia and in her back pockets are wadded up strings of orange bailing twine, a hoof pick, and some sort of dirty rag that she occasionally wipes across her forehead, leaving behind speckles of hay dust in exchange for the sweat the rag collects. It is June and Danny is alone in the modular barn with two cupolas. The horses are turned out, the owner is out of town, and Danny looks after the horses. No longer thirteen horses in the barn--only twelve since her horse colicked two weeks ago. Her gelding went down after eating. The owner, Judy, was busy entertaining her twenty-year-old boyfriend and didn't notice the motionless horse in its stall, his body probably bloated from gas. His eyes probably opened with a fly crawling across what little moisture remained. Did not notice the Purina senior grain half eaten. Did not notice the lack of manure in the stall. And certainly did not notice the dead horse the next morning. But that is displacement colic. Such a strange way to design an animal. A creature with the inability to vomit, with a small intestine that is suspended in the abdominal cavity by mesentery. A free floating intestine. More mesentery. Why would evolution let such a fragile creature continue on? Of course the intestine twists. The mesentery does what it can. But, of course it needs surgery. Intestines cannot untangle themselves. Of course it restricts blood flow and if left unattended—unattended because of the distraction produced by good sex from a twenty-year-old farm hand named Chip—of course it will kill a horse.

And it did. Danny found him, Gus, her dead, twisted-gut, quarter horse in his stall. Flies walking on his open eyes. His abdomen distended. The bill to remove Gus was around four hundred and Danny still owed Judy five hundred for last month's board. Judy told her *Do barn chores for me, Doll! It's the least you can do to pay me back for what you still owe.* So here she is mucking the stall of her dead horse and picking out old and moldy turds from when he was alive. A pee spot here. Old grain there. His water bucket with a thin film of dust on the surface of the water.

Danny tries to send her mind elsewhere, especially while in this place. She thinks of other things such as crossbreeding flowers and fruit, what plastic is made of, thermodynamics, online makeup tutorials, her Rhodan and Fields job. Fifty more hours of work and she would be out of Judy's debt. A full paycheck at the bank as a part-time teller, and she would pay off the animal service that came and took Gus's body away. Danny braided his tail before Gus was dragged onto the stock trailer. She wonders now why she did that. Why didn't she instead cut a length of the horsetail off—there was a store she saw online that would braid horsehair memory bracelets for passed horses. You can add in beads and colored wax yarn for an extra fee. You can wear your dead horse's hair around your wrist in a beautiful way. A woman named Ashleigh would make it for you in her home in Nebraska. All you had to do was send it in a bag with an order form and a check for eighty dollars made out to "Heavenz Horsez." Then you could do it—you could wear your dead horse. But, Danny didn't think of anything like that in the heat of it all. She instead sprayed Show Sheen on the tail, so much that it drenched her black work

pants she wore as she came straight from work, during her lunch hour, and brushed Gus's tail while she waited on animal services to arrive.

Danny exits the stall of her dead horse and sits in the barn aisle on a small wooden stool no higher than a foot off the ground. Her knees crowd her body and she rests her head on the bony caps of her knees. She stares at the ground and watches a fly climb up the side of her muck boot and onto her calf. She wishes she were addicted to something. Cigarettes, alcohol, nail polish, drugs. Because right now seems like a good time to use something. She imagines being in a movie. The way the camera would pan across the barn aisle, starting at the entry doors. The shot would start by going stall by stall by stall, all empty, until it reached her sitting on the stool, already working on lighting a cigarette, unscrewing a flask, popping open a plastic prescription bottle, whatever. This would be a justifiable moment for some sort of activity. She often thought about taking up drinking seriously. That she could do. She could carry a flask. She had a friend, Nancy, and Nancy had a leather flask with her initials monogrammed on the side. It was something beautiful. Danny could do it that way. The drinking would be a token of acceptance in people's eyes here in Conyers.

She stands from the short stool and returns to the stall and begins picking through again, scooping and removing the manure, disposing it into the large wheelbarrow she positioned outside the stall door. The door is wide open with nothing to contain inside the stall. The other horses are turned out and the barn swallows all have returned to the

Western coast of Mexico with winter coming soon enough. She rakes the stall floor to even out the shavings. Inside her, she feels she must finish this job.

A feeling of warmth and yellow energy and adrenaline builds as she pulls the rake across the shavings. A feeling that hasn't been accessed since long before her ex-husband and sister ran away together to Phoenix to start a farm that never got off the ground. This feeling tracing maybe even as far back as sophomore year at Clemson when she skinny-dipped with Fred Kingmon in Lake Hartwell by the rowing dock. The moon shone off her wet body and Frank hid his erection by wading out deeper. She noticed a power then like she recognizes now.

She thinks of how scared Frank was of her ease to enter the water slowly, not hiding. She thinks how now she feels she could even tell the barn owner this was all her fault—that confidence is suddenly available now that her heart rate increases and the sweat stings her eyes and Danny could ask her why the hell wasn't she doing barn checks like she paid her to. Tell her she's a dumb idiot with too much money and not enough sense to water down a twenty-eight year old quarter-horse's grain. He had choked twice already in the past year, Judy. It wasn't rocket science. Neither was keeping you goddam barn goddam tidy.

She hears a truck pulling up to the barn entrance and walks out the stall and does not even think to wipe off the shavings that are stuck to her body. It is Darrell. She meets Darrell by the bed of his truck. Darrell has been delivering hay to the barn for years. This is the first year he has moved noticeably slower. The ringing of his car door rings longer

as he takes longer to maneuver out of the vehicle. Danny likes Darrell because he reminds her of her uncle with his cracked knuckles. Sparse with eye contact, but quick with a smile.

Darrell tells Danny he has to leave the hay in the barn aisle. Judy didn't pay him to unload it and said Judy mentioned Danny had agreed to do it herself. One by one, Darrell pushes the bales out of the bed of his truck and Danny pulls them further into the aisle. Twenty bales on the floor of the aisle.

Before Darrell leaves he takes Danny's hand in his and pats the top of it. Tells her he's sorry about Gus. Danny says nothing because she realizes no one has offered condolences. She is reactionless. No one has told her they are sorry. No one has taken a moment to take her hand in theirs and tell her how awful it is that her horse of twenty years has died. Some marriages don't even last that long. Some people don't even know their parents that long. And yet Danny's coworkers only had to offer "that sucks" while others made jokes about glue and dogfood. While other coworkers typed numbers on keyboards and planned grocery lists on notepads, Danny rethought every decision she has ever made concerning Gus over his lifetime, recounting the number of eyelashes on his eyes, retracing over and over again in her head the way his various whirls of fur twisted in small cosmic circles on his body and how unique that made his coat.

Darrell leaves and Danny must put away the hay. She heaves heavyweight bales of fifty-pound hay over her shoulder. Her back flexing, her triceps and deltoids rigid with force. The hay stack in the back of the barn is already five bales high and Danny heaves

each additional bale as high as possible. Danny sweats and curses as some of the bales fall back down on top of her, not quite sticking their landing on top. Each of the twenty bales is stacked and Danny climbs to the top to organize them. Places them in order. She sits and dangles her legs over the edge. Her heels bounce off the hay bales. The hay crunches under her.

There are no songs stuck in Danny's head. There are no flashes of imaginative "what ifs" of what could occur. She does not even think of Gus, or horsehair, or Rhodan and Fields, or Phoenix. She thinks of going into the old office that was once used as a hub for the business. The old owner of the barn was an old-school jumper with a quick temper that disappeared when he was atop a horse. But now, the office is used to store Judy's documents, legal files and tax returns, a few boxes of old coats and old baby toys Judy never got around to selling after her third miscarriage. Danny has not been into the office except for a handful of times. She feels uncomfortable existing in a room that feels like it is all a secret, all hidden, everything covered and locked and put in a folder or in a drawer. She decides to go in anyway and crawls down from the top of the hay stack. Her arms itch from the hay. She looks at her arms and notices a hay rash forming—small, red, opened bumps that sting but disappear with water.

Danny walks down the aisle away from the stalls, away from the hay stack, away from the stall of her dead horse. The handle to the old office is broken and the door is usually ajar. Danny pushes the door open and steps inside.

Like before, there are boxes. There are so many pieces of Judy in this room, at first Danny feels sick. Her stomach turns over and her throat tightens, but she swallows it down hard. There are other things, too. She notices an out of place corner of the room, adorned with a rug, a desk, and a small, intricate chair.

She examines the table more closely. Among many leather pieces and bits, there are pictures framed and covered in a layer of light dust. She uses her index and middle fingers to wipe across the glass that covered the photographs to reveal images of a man with a hunt cap on. The man in this picture wears breeches, boots, and behind him stands a slim but muscular horse in the middle of being untacked. The horse looks startled, like he has been caught naked. The woman untacking the horse has a curled mess of hair, high-waisted shorts, a tucked in collared shirt. At the bottom of the frame a gold plate reads "Hickstead 1976."

Another framed photograph beside it shows the same man, on the same horse, in midair over a wide and brush-filled oxer. Danny puts down the photographs and surveys the bits on the table. She knows them by name: Waterford, kimberwicke, segunda, slow twist, elevator, boucher. Friends. Familiarity. She knows them all. She turns to the chairs behind her, opposite the table and sits in one. It is decorated in a gold and green striped material, claw-like arm rests, and what Danny assumes is nice wood because of its red tint and variation in colors.

She closes her eyes and breathes in the dark air, muddy with leather and tired dust. She remembers what it is like to sit in a chair such as this. When she debuted with

thirty other girls at Woodbridge Country Club, she remembers sitting in striped chairs in cheap wedding dresses. Taking small breaths so as not to look bloated in her dress. Phillip Masters offered her a joint. They smoked together outside the country club kitchen entrance. Danny's shoes in her hand and Phillip's jacket over her shoulders.

When she opens her eyes, on top the table, there is a bottle. Danny leans in and reads the label—Highland Park Single Malt Scotch Whiskey. Aged 25 Years. There is also French written on the label and Danny assumes it says the same as what she just read. It is unopened and when she picks it up, she feels the familiar burning of adrenaline and carelessness in her chest. She clenches the cork with her teeth and bites the cap, pulls her head sideways, pops the lid off the bottle.

Masculine. She feels masculine. She feels that if the man in the picture were to come into the office, she would talk to him with her feet propped up on the table. She takes a long swallow of the scotch. Danny tries not to make a face and manages fairly well for someone who ordinarily orders Pinot Grigio, Bud Lite Lime, or Strawberritas from the local Sticky Fingers on Friday nights. She takes a long swallow again before the burn from the first drink even leaves her throat. This time it is easier. And so are the next one and the next one after that.

She does not think of Gus. Danny does not even think of what she was going to do after finishing the bottle. She decides, then, to just wait. To just wait and see and pretend like the man in the picture would come down the hallway of the corridor. That he would shake her hand and they would talk strategy for the next Hickstead Derby. The

feeling of power surged quiet and warm inside her chest, pulling her onward like a magnet to whatever was ahead.

Armyworms

The grass was alive. Tom surveyed, shaking his head shallowly back and forth, as the green and new hay stalks sprouting from the ground quivered and writhed. Covered, all of it, in Armyworms. The sun was setting behind the pines that lined the dirt driveway and outlined one of the many hay fields on the nameless farm. Clarke walked up beside Tom and put his arm around Tom's shoulders. Tom shrugged him off like a fly, his eyes fixated on the seizing hay. Clarke patted Tom's back and headed for the utility shed. Tom stared. Tom stared motionless at the hay. He thought about it suffocating, how itchy it probably was from the tiny mouths of the armyworms. He wondered where they came from even though he knew they realistically they came from Minnesota. The bastards. Devilish caterpillars that took too long to turn into the ugly and boring moths they were created to become. Tom glanced at his boot. Several armyworms ventured across what probably appeared as a vast, leather expanse. A sleek body. A tiny head. A broad and dark stripe across the top of the body. Brown, dark green sometimes, sometimes both. Their heads were the worst part. A brown net-like design stretched across the front of their face like a greedy mud-splattered child. Tom scoffed, shook the armyworms off his boot, and smashed them under the heel of his shoe. *Sonsabitches*, he scoffed through his teeth.

Tom had spent the prior week researching everything he could about armyworms. Learned all about their life cycles. How they travel in giant groups, armies, hence the name. Moved across land as moths and then crap out their terrible eggs. The eggs hatched

and the caterpillars eat everything and anything that grows from the ground for the next several weeks. Several weeks long enough to sacrifice at least two cuttings and lose the majority of income that the farm benefits from. Two out of five cuttings—gone. Tom researched the multiple pesticides that can be applied to a crop. Neem oil, ladybugs, trichogramma wasps—all proved to be successful in small crops and personal hobby farms, but 167 acres of coastal hay called for other approaches. Mass pesticide was an option, but then the hay couldn't be sold to horses or cows. It could be used for something like base bedding, stadium or cross-country jump filling, or decoration. Instead of \$8.50 a bale it would be reduced to \$1.00 a bale if they were lucky. Truthfully, once it was hit with the pesticide it was better off decorating suburban household's front steps as a Halloween prop. Top it with a pumpkin.

Tom reviewed the front field one last time before turning his head on the lot of it and plodding towards the utility shed where Clarke was tinkering with something that was already fixed.

The fluorescent overhead light flickered at the far end. Not quite dead yet but heading that way soon. Clarke had a Double K saddle sitting on a black metal saddle rack. A beautiful piece of leather intricately outlined and detailed with hand-crafted wildflowers carved along the pommel and cantle. The stitching was unraveling and a client on the Western Pleasure circuit sent it in for repair.

Clarke was always the more artistic one. He had the patience for needles, magnification glasses, the creation of delicate saddle name-plates, matching headstalls,

and custom brow bands. He knew how to line a brow-band in small crystals of the client's requested color. Clarke had been repairing tack for almost forty years now. He started in his twenties, walking around at horse shows, big ones like the circuit finals in Conyers or Oklahoma City. A small bag of tools latched around his waist, a gift from his grandfather. Clarke weighed more then and was proud of his well-established forearms and triceps. His legs were strong at the time, too, as he had just given up trying to be a farrier. Four long months of an apprenticeship with a farrier named Devon that Clarke misread entirely. He didn't enjoy the back pain, anyways, so it made sense to leave and try and do something else with his inheritance money.

He met Tom in Oklahoma City. Tom was mucking the stall of his current Reining mount, Lope So Good N Fancy, and Clarke introduced himself, shook Tom's hand over the stall guard. Clarke noticed Tom's large arms, the starched jeans and his shined belt buckle. His boots were polished and just a thin film of dust sat on the toes. He had a crooked smile that opened up to white teeth that contrasted with the deep tan of his face. His hat sat low on his forehead and underneath the brim Tom's green eyes were busy examining a small area of rain rot on his horse's fetlock. His horse was as beautiful as him. Chestnut with chrome. Clarke interrupted with a quick and loud "Good mornin'!" They spoke briefly and Clarke handed Tom a piece of paper with his number on it. Tom's hands were calloused but clean. Clarke patted Lope So Good N Fancy on the neck, and continued down the line of stalls. He introduced himself to every competitor at the show, mentioned his leather-work, and told lies about how he had been doing it his whole life.

Clarke even went as far as to read catalogs and memorize saddle names and makes. When he gave random facts about a competitor's saddle and mentioned ways he could make it better, the competitors asked "What did you say your name was again?"

By the end of the day, Clarke had handed out nearly seventy of his "business cards" and felt pretty good about that. He went to watch the Reining finals and recognized Tom. He was drawn as the last rider in the division and Clarke leaned over the railing, watched the horse do his run down at full gallop and dig his hocks deep in the sliding stop. The red dirt sprayed around him like fire. His roll back was textbook; the horse loped off correctly and with a suppleness rare to these events. "Willfully guided" as they called it. Everything Tom did and asked of Lope So Good N Fancy was a plus maneuver. The difficulty of each movement pushed to its limits. The topline of the horse bulged. The veins in Tom's forearm pulsed, his body quiet and still.

The audience cheered and hollered the whole performance and by the end, hats were flying in the air.

After Tom had untacked, Clarke returned to his stall. Over the stall guard, Clarke reached in his hand for shaking.

"You made that look simple," Clarke said.

"Sure as hell ain't easy," Tom said back. He was looking at the fetlock again, applying a mixture of zinc oxide and furazone.

Clarke unlatched the stall guard and closed it behind him. Tom stood up and met Clarke's face and when Clarke kissed him, he held his hand out to the side so as not to get the medical mixture on Clarke.

That's how Clarke always was and how Tom still thought of him, even now as he carved small flowers and filled them with pale pink leather paint. Clarke—the one that would answer the phone and reply to letters. Tom—the one that cursed the soil and preferred his whiskey neat.

Clarke lifted his head from his work, magnification glasses resting on the brim of his nose.

“So what are you thinking? Burn it?” Clarke asked.

“Can't do that without risking the trees. Fire department would have to be part of it. No need to hassle with that,” Tom said.

“Buy some bugs? Sell the cut cheap?”

“I can order some bugs. Feels wrong adding more bugs to them already there.”

“Damn ‘em all.”

Tom went to the computer in the workspace and took the tire cover off the monitor. He reached down and removed the blue tarp that was secured by a red bungee cord from the computer. Tom started the computer, connected to the internet after failing four times to type the correct password—TomClarke1978—and purchased 50,000 lacewing eggs for \$279.50. He received a phone alert from his credit card company only

seconds after asking, “Did you make a purchase of \$279.50 from www.bugsonline.com?”

To which Tom responded, “Y.”

They arrived three days later in a box of rice hull. Tom walked down the driveway with his knife already out, ready to cut the box open. He sat down on the ground in front of the mailbox with its peeling, white, adhesive letters with the box between his legs. He cut the clear tape with his knife and opened the box. A box inside a box. On top of the inner box was a piece of paper with a header reading, “Directions.” Underneath, it said, “Congratulations on your purchase! Release lacewing when a few small grey larvae can be observed moving around the rice hull. Once they are moving, put larvae out immediately; they are cannibalistic if left together too long! To release the larvae, sprinkle the contents of this box over the area. Release 500 per 1/2 acre. A second release, two weeks later, may be necessary.”

Tom brought the box up to the house. Left it on the kitchen table, and went out to stare at the fields again. They moved more. Tom imagined being overtaken by armyworms. He thought of what they would feel like squirming up his body and if they would try to eat his shirt. He wondered if there was ever a case of a man being eaten alive by worms. Of course, Tom knew, everyone is eventually eaten by worms when the good Lord calls you home, but could a man actually be eaten while he was alive? He had heard stories while on the Reining circuit from older men. One man claimed he knew a guy who lost his arm to a coyote in Missouri. Said he was out hunting and the thing came

right at him from the side. Tore his arm off and ate it. So it was possible, then, for worms to do the same.

Over a glass of whiskey (neat) that night, Tom looked up images of armyworm teeth while Clarke put the finishing touches on the custom Double K saddle. While Clarke cleaned the skirt of the saddle, differentiated by textured Havana calf leather, Tom scrolled through pages of images.

Aliens. The first word Tom could think of when he saw their buggy mouths.

The next morning Tom rose early, alone in bed. Walking in the front door he saw Clarke who had been returning the Double-K custom saddle to a young lady from Gaston. He met her on the main highway beside the old pump station that sometimes sold Ohio alfalfa in 80-pound bales or rounds, depending when you ordered it. She was a skinny thing with a small accent and black hair. She paid in cash and Clarke did not count it until he was politely back in his Ford. He had been paid unfairly only once and he tended to trust slight women. He had been groomed growing up in Savannah, Georgia the proper etiquettes and ways to address and speak to people. He was a wonderful conversationalist and took pride in the way he could set a table and make a friend wherever he went. He sent thank you letters. He organized Thanksgiving dinner with his family and Tom's. He often kept contact with his clients. Occasionally sending an email to ask how the saddle is doing. Clarke kept a notebook in a drawer near his workspace where he recorded names, custom job descriptions, horse names (if the client mentioned it) so that every email he sent was personal and sincere.

When he walked in the door and saw Tom, he smiled with an open mouth smile.

“I checked the bugs,” he said, “Right before I left to drop off that Double-K.”

“Yeah? How they lookin’?” Tom asked. He poured himself coffee and drank it immediately.

“Think they’re ready.”

“Today is the day, then.” Tom smoothed the grey hair across his balding head.

Tom dressed and took the large box of lacewings from the kitchen counter. He stood on the porch of his cabin-style house and placed the giant container on the floor. He peeked in. He could see them moving but not the same sort of movement as the armyworms. Where the armyworms moved as if they were one giant animal, the lacewings seemed individualized and independent. Some were upside down on the lid, others were still and their wings slightly malformed. Some seemed dead. But all were a bright green color with nearly translucent wings. The veining in the wings made sense to Tom. It looked like delicate lace. Their antennae were two giant whiskers. He could not see their mouths. Tom was sure these bugs could not eat him and this made him feel superior.

He began to head down to the main hay field when from behind him he heard his name called.

“Tom!” Clarke yelled. “Wait, damnit!” In his right hand he held a bottle of champagne and in his other, two coffee mugs. The mugs, specifically chosen, had images on both. One, from an Easter luncheon at their church, had cartoon butterflies and the

other, a gift from Tom's brother, had "Git R Done" written on the side, an American flag beside it.

Tom waited and when Clarke arrived he held up the two cups and said, "Butterflies, like "bugs"? You know? And 'Git R Done' because we're doing that to them."

Tom chuckled and they both marched over to the large hay field. Like the directions instructed said, Tom sprinkled the box bit by bit over sections of the hay field. Clarke walked beside him and happily stepped on armyworms he saw. It wasn't a hot day. The champagne stayed chilled. They didn't talk much but occasionally Clarke would ask how many lacewings were left and Tom would look in the box and give Clarke a general answer like "A lot" or "not many." It took about fifteen minutes to cover the entire field, and towards the end, the box was hardly dripping out any lacewings. Clarke still walked beside Tom.

When Tom finally finished emptying the box, he left it in the hay field with the lid off.

"What about the other fields?" Daniel asked.

"We'll need more. I didn't take into consideration the others. Just this one," Tom answered. They both gazed at the field.

Clarke nudged Tom with his elbow, braced the champagne bottle on his belly, and popped the lid. It flew into the field and disappeared from sight. Tom took the butterfly cup and Clarke poured it to the brim. When the bubbling liquid settled, only half the cup

was filled. Clarke poured champagne into his mug. The two tapped cups and drank the cups in their entirety.

“Do you remember Conyers in ’85?” Clarke asked.

Tom nodded. “Second in World.”

“I always wondered why you stopped after that. Everyone did, still does.” Clarke drank from the bottle. “One more year coulda done it.”

They both sat in silence, passing the champagne between them, gulping it down.

That night Tom dreamed of sliding stops. He dreamed of running a pattern and feeling the collapse and rebound of Lope So Good N Fancy. What hocks on that horse. He dreamed that the red dirt beneath him was made of dead armyworms and when he slid to a stop, their bodies shot into the air. He dreamed the audience cheered and that Clarke waved his hat over the arena fencing and wolf-whistled with his free hand.

Feeding in the Morning

The beet pulp is already soaked. I wake up cold in my bed because it is cold outside and the window does not shut entirely. My cat is asleep on my chest. She chirps when I move her and returns to sleep as soon as I place her on the pillow, still warm, that was under my head.

I layer. At first I put on my bra, some underwear. Then a tank top, long sleeve shirt, sweater, Carhartt, wool scarf. Then leggings, jeans, sweatpants. Two pairs of socks. Knee high muck boots. Beanie.

I check my phone and listen to a voicemail you left. There were many people talking and laughing. There was a laugh that sounded like rainwater, a contrast to the thunder of it all.

In the kitchen I pour myself a cup of black coffee and quickly eat a browning banana. Last, I microwave my coffee so that it is too hot to hold. I put on camouflaged work gloves. I carry my coffee in one hand. I lock my front door with a key.

Outside it is so different. The cold hurts to breathe, so I hold the coffee mug beneath my nostrils and inhale deeply. It smells burnt and soothes the pain of the dry, frozen air.

The ground is frozen and hard beneath my boots and I consider the slick footing in the horses' paddock. I imagine multiple ways the animals could've injured themselves overnight. Slipping and pulling a suspensory. Tripping on frozen clumps of earth and bruising a bone. Heavy hooves stabbing pointed rocks forming stone bruises. Fresh, alert

beasts energized by the stark coldness. It is like this every morning. I prepare myself for what wounds or blood of fractures I may find. What illnesses and what injuries. This world of horses.

My truck wakes up slowly and I am patient with it. I understand. The sun is just peeking over the edge of the world. It is red this morning. I think of the fisherman's saying which makes me think of lions. I drive to the farm. I drive to the farm, past the high school and past the church, down the big hill. I turn into the driveway of the farm. The American flag beside the mailbox is still. There is no wind this early. Nature is hardly awake. Its eyes are still crusted with sleep. Nature pulls the covers up to its nose. But I am awake.

Morning progresses a little more. The sun is higher. The warmth is slightly greater. I remain layered. The red sky is slowly absorbed outward into the cosmos and I take the time to watch it. A cloud forms. A shiver develops at my center and radiates outward and I take a long drink from my coffee.

At the feed barn, I uncover the beet pulp buckets. I boil water in the kettle to pour over the frozen buckets. All three buckets get a scoop of sweet feed on top of the pre-soaked beet pulp. Two get an extra scoop of alfalfa pellets. One gets supplements. All three I top with hot water and then stir with a wooden spoon. I enjoy my process. I enjoy measuring.

I loop my right hand through two of the bucket handles and my left hand through one. My right bicep is stronger. I carry them awkwardly and unevenly, my right side

much heavier than my left, to the bed of my truck. I heave the buckets in and close the tailgate. I drive to the paddock and honk the horn in one short burst.

The horses are fresh. Their ears are hard points. Their nostrils are flexed openings of excitement. Their tails are in the air. They gallop together, the grey out in front, the chestnut close behind. The grey bucks and the chestnut bites the grey on the rump. The grey squeals. The smallest of the herd, the paint, gallops up behind the other two. He stays clear of the others' games. He is small but he is smart. His belly is large and furry. I open the gate and carry the buckets from the bed of my truck into the paddock. The grey and the chestnut rear and playfully punch at each other, balanced on their back legs. When they land, they take turns trying to bite the other's neck. The pony shakes his head and trots a wide circle around them. When I set the buckets down, they take turns snorting like dragons. They follow behind me. They know where they each eat. The pony is first in the red bucket by the gate; the chestnut in the blue bucket by the water trough, the grey in the black bucket by the tree. They circle around their buckets and eat while keeping an eye on the others. The noise of them eating is a bright slop against the sleepy morning.

I pull the hood of my Carhartt over my beanie and stand in the middle of the three horses as they eat. They slurp. It is all quiet except for them. The morning is now lighter and it looks like it will be a clear day. The cloud is gone. The sun has eaten it. It is cold enough to snow but it won't happen until later in the week. I look at the oak tree and wonder why some trees get barren in the winter when everything else grows hair.

The sun is higher now. The horses have finished their breakfast and I watch as they flip their buckets upside down with their muzzles. They lick the sides of their buckets and nibble at the ground for pieces of dropped grain. The chestnut considers licking the grey's bucket but the grey pins his ears and throws his head as the chestnut walks up. Instead, he grazes on frozen, dead, grass. I wonder what it is like to communicate like them. To pin my ears and turn my head. To paw my foot into the ground and hit someone with my fist. The pony finishes last and walks back down to the far end of the paddock. He is unblanketed and his fur is thick and long. I approach the chestnut and take off his top, heavy-weight blanket. It will be getting much warmer today. I leave on the medium-weight that's underneath. The chestnut is body clipped and cold-natured. I then take off the grey's top blanket, and leave the light-weight the sheet that is beneath it. The grey has a trace clipping and though he is cold natured, the fur on his back, neck, and legs keep him warm. I drag the blankets and buckets to my truck and throw it all in the bed. I drive it to the feed barn. I hang the blankets in order of horse. I return the buckets. I shut off the light. I lock the door. I leave.

In your room a girl is waking up with a headache. The girl has to pee. The girl sits up and looks for her clothes on the floor beside your bed. The girl flattens her hair behind her neck and ties it back with a band from her wrist. When the girl pulls the covers off her naked body the girl looks at you and eases her feet onto the floor. The girl does not wake you, and for this the girl is relieved. The girl opens her eyes wide to take in as much light as possible and tiptoes across your floor, avoiding boxers, your laptop, into your

bathroom. The girl shuts the door behind her and lets go of the handle slowly. The girl is good at being silent. The girl is proud of her silence and smiles a warm grin.

She turns on your sink and uses a face wash from the counter. She scrubs away at her eyes to remove the mascara, the eyeliner, the gold eye shadow she picked out to match the orange dress. The girl looked so beautiful last night. She remembers the taste of the wine; the way you pushed back your hair and tucked it behind your ears. The girl turns on the shower and finds a clean towel under the sink, wraps the towel around her body and waits for steam to fill the room. The girl is in a cloud. She feels light and remembers flying from San Francisco to Greenville as a child and flying through clouds. Untouchable. The girl finds aspirin in the cabinet and takes four, washes it down with sink water, steps into the shower after dropping the towel.

In the shower, she rinses the shampoo from her hair and uses the suds that fall from her hair to clean her body. Her skin is smooth and without blemish. Her face is clear. Her legs are sore from the high heels she wore. The girl stretches and touches her toes with her hands while the shower water falls on her back. The girl feels dizzy when her head is upside down.

You are startled awake because the girl has dropped the bottle of shampoo in the shower. It scares you and for a minute, you think it's me in there. You think I came over after feeding the horses like I do some mornings. Those mornings when I crawl into your bed with my layers still on, smelling of hay and sweet feed, dirt and water. But then your

remember going out and going downtown and know that it is certainly not me in the shower.

You sit up in your bed and immediately feel nauseous. Your stomach tells you that you are nervous before your head does. You close your eyes for a few seconds and the feeling passes. You lie back down and hope the girl leaves after she showers. You pretend to be asleep and listen for the movements in the shower. You have become good at this. You have practiced this for years. As a child, there are many nights you pretended to sleep to avoid your father.

You are awake and from the bathroom, the girl steps out with a towel wrapped around her frame. She climbs back into bed. Her hair twisted and tucked behind her neck, the tail end falling over her shoulder. You ask the girl if she needs a ride home. The girl tells you she has already texted a friend. You ask her if she wants coffee. She says that would be great.

You leave your bedroom and your roommate is on the couch outside. He is watching Jeopardy because he does not sleep well hungover. He looks at you and nods but says nothing more. You know he is aware that I am not in your bedroom.

You check your phone and see you have sent texts to me that were intended for someone else. These are not things you would say to me.

You clumsily make coffee with too much grinds and too little water. The coffee brews and smells much better than it tastes. You only have enough for a mug and a half.

You leave your half-full mug on the counter. When you bring the girl a mug, she is dressed in the clothes the girl wore last night.

The girl grabs her purse and jacket from the floor and meets you at the door to your bedroom. The girl tells you her friend is almost here. You set the coffee on the bedside table and use a one of my books as a coaster. It is Faulkner. The girl smiles and takes a tiny sip from the mug. The girl feels like it has all gone pretty well. The girl has had a nice evening. She danced. She drank. She got laid. The girl thinks she now may even have a date to that wedding next month. Her friend sends a text that says “here.” The girl stands up and you lead her to the front door. Your roommate watches her leave without saying anything; he does not move his head, only his eyes.

The girl steps out the front door and you are shirtless. The girl turns to say goodbye and prepares for what she hopes will be a kiss or a hug. You wave to her and close the door as your tell her to stay warm.

You sit on your couch with your roommate. He hands you the remote and gets up. You hear his door close. You turn up the volume, and focus on US City Nicknames. Your stomach tells you that you are nervous. The answer is “The San Francisco of the South.”

Your phone rings and when you answer, it is me. I tell your I have fed and I can come over now. You tell me you are hungover and I should probably wait until later. When your voice catches on the word “later,” you know that I heard it. Your voice will sound like humidity. It will resemble thin metal, ready to break with weight. It will be

rust. And you know I will question that sound. Though I tell you I will see you later, you are unsure when and so am I.

When I hang up, I enter my apartment. My cat runs to the door when she hears me fumble with my apartment keys. She meows loudly as I open the door. I have forgotten to feed her. I scoop her up in my arms and cradle her. She looks at the world upside down and squirms as I walk to the living room with her. I wonder what use is it to see the world this way. My cat struggles to flip over as we near her food. I place her on the floor and she meows at me again. I pour the food into a bowl and my cat crunches her food between her teeth and purrs.

I peel my layers off and leave them in a pile next to my bathroom. I leave my leggings and sweater on and slip into my cold bed. My cat has not finished her breakfast but she jumps into the bed and begins kneading by my feet. She is white and her eyes are green. When she circles and sits, she resembles a heap of snow. I turn on my side and look out the window. The cold is sneaking in and the sun has established that today will be sunny. I am not tired but I think of how long it will take us to talk. I count out days on my fingers under the covers. I make a bet and tell myself five.

Stud Selection

Occasion 3.7 B:

You are a hunter trying eventing.

In the position of Martha Braithwaite, thinking her Hunter pony could be an eventer, her stud selection will be disastrous. Martha will have left her precious hony (sitting right at fifteen hands high, not quite a horse, not quite a pony) in her stall all night where she has been munching on low protein, low calcium, fescue that she got for free from her Hunter barn in Ocala because they can buy it so cheap. When Martha goes to feed, the majority of her hony's feeding will be supplements such as "Bright and Bay" (heavy in Omega 3s and paprika for that perfect roan coat), dried raspberry leaves, and chamomile to keep her calm, and help her with her supposed mare moodiness. She will straighten her stall plate that reads "Martha Elizabeth Braithwaite" and wipe off the tag on her hony's stall reading her name—Diamond Diana—after Princess Diana, her mother's favorite royal. Diamond Diana was bred to be slow. She was bred to be quiet and calm. She was bred to be fat. There are no ribs to be felt on Diamond Diana. Before Martha even begins tacking her mare up, she will administer an entire tube of totally legal (somehow with the 2,000 mg of l-tryptophan) "Cool and Calm" which will cause her precious hony to nap very soon after she finishes her breakfast.

Martha will leave her mare in her stall for most of the day because she wants to go watch the Advanced and Intermediate riders go. She wishes she could watch Preliminary, but wants to make sure she has plenty of time in the warm-up arena in case

her hony (who is now easily on three different calming supplements) feels a bit too fresh for comfort beneath her Tad Coffin vintage saddle. The one Martha had recovered in beautiful dark brown calfskin leather. She even convinced her mother to put in custom knee rolls to help keep her leg behind and underneath her. Martha will have purchased a brand new stud kit for this competition because her old studs had rusted and Martha was not aware there were such things as Stud Suds and WD40 to help clean her studs. This won't matter though because it will be much easier to buy it new. Her stud kit is a beautiful thing—lines of metal studs, like little cleats for the bottom of her hony's feet, arranged by height and shape. Small hexagonal "bullet studs" in a row next to the stout square "road studs" all ready to be screwed into the bottom of horseshoes.

Martha will watch the last of the Advanced, the entire Intermediate, and most of the Preliminary before Lynda calls.

"Where the hell are you?" Lynda asks.

"Watching. Just watching," Martha tells her. An Intermediate rider comes through the combination and gives the first element a hard rub, but the horse recovers fine. Lands fine.

"Your mare needs to go out. She's freaking asleep."

"She's on her supplements."

"She needs to go out."

Martha will sigh and say mockingly, "Yes, dear."

Martha will have forgotten about her precious mare, ogling over how beautiful all the horses out on course are and how pretty the event has decorated the fences. She loves the woodland creatures. At the Advanced mound combination the event has decorated the base of the jump with carved, wooden, chipmunks.

Unhurried, Martha will return to her stall where Lynda has her precious hony on a lead rope without a chain. Martha will quickly grab the chain and take the lead rope from Lynda (who has been feeding Martha's mare alfalfa for the past hour in an attempt to give her some energy) and clasp the chain tightly over her mare's nose. Because there is no way that she will risk happening what occurred at Horsemanship State Finals four years ago in the halter class. Before she gave this eventing thing a try. She lost to Molly-Claire Williams because her precious hony stepped just a one foot outside of show position in her championship Halter class.

Martha will bring her mare back to her stall, tie her up tightly beside her green hay net, and take forty minutes to groom. Spotless. Mane neatly plaited, tail braided, forelock braided, all in classic hunter braids as opposed to the round braids used for eventing. Martha will apply her corresponding zebra striped saddle pad to her sleepy mare. She will attach a zebra striped helmet cover atop her helmet. She will even wrap her crop in zebra striped duct tape. Lynda will approach her stall and tell Martha, again, that she doesn't need to braid for cross-country. Eventers don't braid tails. Eventers don't use hunter braids. Lynda will offer to help Martha put her studs in, but Martha will insist she can do it herself. Martha believes that she has this all figured out. She groomed for a

Preliminary rider last month and she showed Martha exactly how to do it. However, she did not teach Martha about the decision-making that goes behind it. The ground then was wet, rained upon for days before. The ground was aerated and becoming muddier and muddier. It was March then and still chilly. Then, mud studs were a fine idea. Nice and thick, not pointed, but broad with a good square head. Perfect for deep mud.

Now, the ground is not suitable for mud studs. Really, Martha doesn't even need studs. The track looks and feels great. The ground has some give and some bounce to it. There are Preliminary horses going around only in front studs. They don't need them all the way around, front and back. The grass is good mountain grass—nice and waxy. It grips great. Horses feet and their metal shoes stick to it fabulously. That is one of the reasons why people come to North Carolina to compete. The base isn't clay and the grass gives great traction, unlike Virginia. However, Martha runs her fingers over her studs and picks out by intuition which studs will work best.

Her decision is more than incorrect. It's illogical. It defeats basic sense. She will choose to put in mud studs in the front and road studs, the small and short cube-shaped ones for hard, dry ground, in the back. Martha's mare will be off-balanced and tired from the copious amounts of calming supplements raging through her little hony system. However, the mare will not complain. Her precious and tired hony. What a good mare. What an honest mare. All the way up until the first fence.

Martha's warm-up will start fine. She will feel very traditional and huntery with her hony's nose out in front of her. Martha's seat will be so light and perched forward it

will be impossible for her precious hony to carry energy up and over a solid fence. She will jump a little strange in warm-up, but Martha will not be able to tell that it's the studs that are causing her precious mare to jump this way. Martha will not be riding defensively like a good cross-country jock should—her crotch will not be to the pommel of her vintage Tad Coffin saddle. After she has jumped the same two-foot vertical jump uncountable number of times, Martha will decide to walk until they call her to the start box. Martha's precious hony will fall asleep when she decides to halt and have a drink of water. She will not wake her up until the steward yells "Martha Braithwraite, number 416, on deck!"

It will take her nearly the whole five minutes allowed to get to the cross-country start box and when she finally reaches it, the volunteer with the timer in his hand and a bottle of water by his feet will tell Martha that she has exactly twenty seconds. Martha will turn her precious mare into the start box where she stands patiently and then proceed to adjust her hony's braids on her neck. The timer counts down from five, and at zero the volunteer yells "Have a nice ride!" and with a kick with her spur-less field boot, Martha's precious mare walks, then trots, takes half a canter stride and stops at the first fence where Martha falls off (almost willingly) over her hony's shoulder and onto the grass. When Martha's shoulder dislocates on landing, she screams and writhes while her precious hony grabs a full mouthful of grass from beside Martha.

Occasion 62.6 A:

It has been raining for a week straight.

It is probable the footing on course has not been dragged. It is even more likely that the Technical Delegate, Carly Demacey, will not want to get her leather Dubarry boots (the ones imported from Ireland, custom-designed) too muddy so she will send out the course designer. With a bag of sand in the back of a recycled golf cart, he will drive around in the rain to dump large amounts of sand in front of the particularly deep take-offs and landings of the cross-country jumps. The sand will do nothing more than be absorbed into mud that is slowly growing deeper and will become even more deep with each horse that stampedes over and through each combination and jumping question.

Like that trakhener at the bottom of the hill. The one with the deep ditch with a wide spread and that skinny log on top. Not an easy question to read for the horse, considering the deep mud footing at takeoff. From the bottom of the ditch to the top of the log is easily ten feet.

Of course the lower divisions won't have this, but it is on the Advanced course and Lisa must plan for it because ever since her fall at Wood Glen she has been mortified of trakheners and because of this, her usually brave and bold Thoroughbred, Femme Fatale, is a bit wary of them as well. A bit white in the eye. A bit common. The fall at the trakhener where Lisa went over Femme Fatale, or "Burrito" as she is know, straight into the fence, and her left foot became caught in the stirrup with those usually helpful cheese-grater bases and she was dragged back to the starting box before her trainer grabbed her horse. Her face grass-whipped and bleeding, her tibia broken, but now secured with a rod.

And because of all this Lisa might as well stud up. The bigger the better. The rounder the better. The larger the better. Those studs she keeps in the back container of her beautiful metallic stud collection. The ones that should be locked away because they could be confused as an elephant bullet and no, Lisa does not shoot wild animals.

The course is mud and the footing in front of the trakehner is deeper than the soles of her boots. During her final course walk, when Lisa walks the intended striding up to the takeoff, mud covers her red rubber boots. She sinks into the mud and she only weighs 120 pounds. Lisa's horse? At least twelve hundred pounds—a striking creature, won \$87,978 in her track days—with quite the angled shoulder and deep heart-girth. Her hooves will sink and it will be hard for him to spring his body along with Lisa's clamoring, breath-holding body, plus the consignment tack and the unnecessarily large bit in her mouth (the bit that may or may not be legal), over the fence and safely to the other side. Any smaller than those elephant bullets and she can be sure he will hang a leg. And there Lisa will go, into the mud again, just like at Wood Glen. Just when she was almost qualified for the three-star at Teeter's Ridge. Her last opportunity to try and make a go at this sport at the professional level. Before her father makes her “do something with that degree.”

After she puts her largest mud studs in and after Lisa's horse teeters up to warm-up as if she is wearing stilettos, she will hop on, canter around a bit, pop over a small fence, then the hanging log twice. Lisa will head up to the starting box and no one will compliment her horse because she is plain and American and Thoroughbred. She will

hear her mom yell, “Go, Burrito!” She will not stand still by the start box and will proceed to prop up and rear a few times until Lisa’s friend Matthew comes to hold her stupid head down. Matthew will tighten the flash around her horse’s nose and the Pelham chain under her horse’s chin and call Burrito “a little shithead” and as she exits the start box, the volunteer yells “Have a nice ride!”

Occasion 332 D:

It has rained overnight after a month’s drought.

In Sally’s case, using road studs all the way around is the better answer. Her horse isn’t clever. That’s fine. It isn’t snappy or clever or witty but she knew this already because it was basically bred to its mother. That’s fine. Sally paid a few hundred thousand to import it from Ireland where somehow it did not even get to see mud. It was cozy in its cozy Irish horse stall where it simultaneously nursed and tried to mount its mother.

Sally and her horse are total Dressage Queens. Sally’s horse is good at flicking its toes in front of the dressage judge who is now three Bloody Mary’s deep. (The judge that has saved all the olives to eat all at once). Even if Sally ends up having nearly twenty time penalties, she will end up in the ribbons because her fancy import with a swinging shoulder and ample suspension (and oh those flicking toes) has scored an 18 on the flat. The next closest to her is an Oldenburg with a Brit as the rider on a 39.

It started as a hobby, a way to cope with her husband's cheating and remarriage to a real estate agent. But now, with the extra alimony, Sally has become something of an event rider. With the help of Jean-Paul Demelle, former gold medalist for the French dressage team, and Cleo Temples of the USA Olympic eventing team, Sally has gained the respect of the eventing community and for this reason, directs her generous alimony payments to training and importing horses. Each dollar of her ex-husband's money spent on horses is a sweet revenge.

Sally will place studs in her horse's feet that are all the same. No need to get creative here, because even studs in the front and back hooves will make it easier for her import to understand. In warm-up, Sally pops her horse over the bare minimum of twelve fences (so that the poor dumb Irish thing can feel out his studs) and then she is done with it. She goes to the starting box after a few fellow competitors compliment her horse for his stockiness and short back. Sally will respond by telling them his ridiculous name of CG Dante's Irish Cool Buddy (because the breeding establishment where she purchased her precious Irish horse insisted on the CG Dante for all of their imports). She then prepares to slowly gallop from the start box, to her fences.

Sally will dig her spurs in hard and try and wake up her sleepy import as he exits the start box. His tail will ring as she approaches the first fence, but he will not disagree any more than that. Sally will inevitably have time, but at least her studs are even and her horse understood (for the most part) what was happening on the bottom of his shoes.

Occasion 1:

You drank too much at the competitor's party.

David will forget to put studs in. He will also forget where he put his cross-country watch because he used it to time how long he and his fellow competitors could drink from a wine bottle. The minute marker of his cross-country watch beeped. It was a long time. He even managed to finally kiss Lisa Tucker. After years of knowing her and her family, training with the same trainers, and now competing with her for a spot on the High-Performance List, David did it. Even if it was because of the wine.

David instead borrows a cross-country watch from a younger girl who is stabled next to him with the little hunter pony and corresponding little zebra striped helmet cover, saddle pad, crop, and little halter. She agrees to let him borrow it only after she asks her mother who certainly saw David at the party last night and certainly is disapprovingly judging him and his actions from behind her large sunhat. But David's an eventer. These things happen. He must have a puke in the porta-loo, drink viciously from a Gatorade bottle, take six aspirin and eat a piece of bread. He'll be fine.

However he will forget to put studs in. David will be tacked up and he will be feeling a little better since the aspirin kicked in. His breeches will look fairly tidy and his belt will be on. David remembered that at least. His skull-cap helmet with detachable brim will be secure and he will have even taken the time to shave his face and comb his hair back.

When David gets to cross-country warmup, he will go through the mental checklist all eventers go through before the nausea that accompanies the reality of the

danger they are about to partake in actually sets in. Arm-band. Crop. Spurs. *Flair* nose-strip. Bridle number. Vest. Vest air canister. Pinny with number. Boots. Duct tape. Studs. David will realize in a panic that he has not put studs in because he slept through his usual course-walk time this morning at 5:30 AM and when David got to his horse's stall an hour late, the animal had pawed his shaving down so far, the rubber mats showed through. He was lucky he remembered to soak his alfalfa cubes last night. David was lucky he even woke up at 6:30 AM.

David will trot on a loose rein up to the steward with the "Order of Go" list and tell her he forgot his studs. She will not care, but tells David he has thirty minutes until he goes because they are running a little behind due to a number of falls. The riders are being held anyways because they had to take an ambulance out to the first water complex where a horse collapsed.

"Collapsed?" David asks.

"Possible brain aneurysm" the steward tells him.

"Dead?" David asks.

"Could be longer than thirty" now that the steward thinks about it, "if the horse is dead and they need to remove it."

"The rider?"

"They're sending an ambulance. Radio said "unresponsive."

In a moment of panic he asks his fellow competitors (who are all leisurely hacking on a loose rein around the warm-up due to the hold on course) if they know what number or who the competitor was.

“Number 12” an older woman on a large liver chestnut colored horse tells him.

“Lisa Tucker on Femme Fatale” another rider says.

David knows Lisa. David knows Femme Fatale, who Lisa lovingly referred to as Burrito.

David will feel nauseous again, but will need this round to qualify for Advanced at Teeter’s Ridge. It’s the last qualifying event. Without this ride, he may as well forget about the High-Performance List. The head coach has no time for riders who can’t qualify. So, he just needs to trot back to the barn, find his hungover friend, Matthew, and get him to help put in studs two feet at a time.

When David finds Matthew, he is asleep on top of a stall-front bale of hay. It’s alfalfa. Matthew will have his body covered in a stable sheet and he will resemble a cadaver. David will dismount while his horse is still trotting, stop his horse abruptly with his shoulder and a quick yank on both sets of reins, and scream at Matthew while kicking the hay bale. He will wake up and notice David through squinted eyes.

While David is drinking more Gatorade, Matthew will pick out the studs because he always knows what studs to put in. He will help David put in a few road studs on the front, with a smaller bullet stud on the back outsides. Nothing crazy. Just something to do

the job. The footing is actually pretty good. David will tell Matthew about Lisa Tucker and Burrito.

“Shit. No. Burrito?” Matthew says.

“Yeah, Burrito” David says.

“I don’t know what to say,” Matthew says.

“I going to throw up” David says.

“I’m still drunk.”

“It was at the first water complex.”

“That big hanging log drop?”

“Yeah.”

“Shit. Burrito.”

“Yeah.”

“And fucking Lisa.”

And that’s when David will suddenly need to vomit again and do so in the corner of his horse’s stall.

By the time David makes it back up to cross-country warmup, he will have ten minutes to trot, canter, do a few canter to halt transitions to make sure he has brakes, pop over a few logs, a coop, the skinny, the corner, all as if it is one giant course. Briefly, David will remember that Burrito had an aneurysm and he will feel nauseous again. He will see Lisa’s mother sitting beside a porta-loo and he won’t even say anything even

though David's family has Thanksgiving with hers every year; David needs to stay focused to get this qualifying round.

David will head up to the start box and the timer will tell him that the first water complex has been taken off the course due to blood in the water. He will quickly reroute his riding plan in his brain and adjust the watch he has borrowed from the little girl with the roan pony to the new Optimum Time of six minutes eight seconds.

The volunteer says, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Have a great ride!"

When he passes the first water complex, David tries not to think of why he isn't jumping in.

Edisto Island, 2016

I watch my mother move like quiet. There is a something there that she will not express. One of silence and smallness and *I'm-not-here-ness*. But she is and I see her and I want to reach to her and hold her small, bony fingers in mine. I want to transfer the warmth and fat from beneath my skin into her pores. But, she holds her breath when I try to exhale these truths into her. She plugs her nose and rolls on her back and kicks her feet into the air. She is a child of truths. She is an infant of reality. So instead I talk while she smiles and sips wine. What would I give for her to braid my hair? What would I say to the version of me that used to step into her palms as she heaved me over the top of our horse, Pickles? How many times would I let her show me how to hold the reins by looping the leather between my ring finger and pinky *Not like a fist*.

But here I see her on the beach. A large bathing suit covering her minute frame. Beneath it I imagine her bones. I imagine the old cracked patella worn over with healing. The one that our horse Pickles lodged between a pine tree and his furry barrel. Chestnut in color and shiny like oil. His back was swayed and mother put a sheepskin pad to absorb the shock between his trot and her body. Her patella aches now. I can see that. She reaches down and rubs it in a way that seems like she is unaware she is performing this action. She does not realize this memory, the one that prompted her insistence on wearing riding helmets while mounted, has also prompted other fears. Her fears blind her of the things she once loved. Things like Pickles in an open field with her body atop him and them both streaming like red clouds in the sky, moving, moving, galloping past the end of

the property and into the woods. I want her to go to that tree, the one that scarred her knee. I imagine her doing so. I imagine her mounting Pickles (I can see her swing her leg over the saddle). She trots to the woods down a path that is probably now covered in poison ivy and bird bones. She halts Pickles in front of the tree that broke her patella and she spits on it.

But she will not, my mother, she will not do that now or ever because she instead will continue to sit on this beach in that beach chair of hers made of pink plastic stripes. She will adjust her oversized bathing suit and cover the bones that keep her together and keep her organs and skin in place. She still absent-mindedly rubs her patella and then afterward she looks at me and drops her sunglasses to her nose. The sweat around her eyelids makes her glisten in a sleepy way. She winks to me and stands up to go to the house to refresh her drink. She slips on her beach sandals and wraps a towel around her shoulders and goes to the beach house.

I follow her up and call to her.

She waits for me.

I open the door and the cold air escapes. Mother drops her towel and opens the fridge, offers me a beer, but pours herself more wine. I want to say to her *Mother, put your towel back on*. She seems so cold and small. But I take the beer and wait on the porch.

The ocean is expanse. It is all of the things. It is beyond. I watch a line of pelicans. I hear a gull. I fear for nuclear wars. I open my beer. I crunch a grain of sand between my teeth.

My mother joins me on the porch and I tell her that I can't stand it anymore. All the "all of's are so many and so few. I tell my mother that she must not think that she is bones. I tell my mother that she does not fit in with shorthaired and flat-ironed. I am screaming. I am yelling. I yell at my mother to reconsider selling Pickles, our horse, because I dream of her riding him and her red hair streams behind her like fire. I dream of her grabbing his mane and not using a bridle but she still holds the mane as if they were leather reins. I tell her I hold all things that way, between the pinky and the ring finger. Grocery bags, car keys, domestication.

I ask her when did she stop holding the world this way? When did it become a fist?

And she says, You are not of knowing. You are of things loosely woven. You are of frilled edges and fractures.

I tell my mother that no, I am not of her patella.

And mother says Oh, my daughter. You are of everything of me.

We return to the beach where my father and brother have dug a hole as deep as my brother is tall. My brother peeks his head from inside the hole. He tells me to look and then tells me to pass him a damn beer. My father laughs. This is a joke they hold

together. It is funny to use this word when it is not necessary. It is funny to use non-necessities. I give my brother the beer I have recently opened for myself.

My father embraces my mother. His giant's hands wrap around her body and I imagine him picking her up and throwing her like a javelin. I wonder how far she would fly. I wonder how many steps my father will take before he would throw her into the air. She would certainly fly, but I would beg her to not land. I imagine she could join the lines of pelicans, or disappear behind a string of orange clouds.

But she does not go anywhere because my father keeps her in a tight embrace. He holds her tiny frame within the curly hair and blonde sand on his oily chest. His grin eats my mother happily. His appetite is large for her. I question if she even nibbles at him and if she feeds his stomach well enough.

My brother climbs out of his hole and claws the side of the opening. He makes grunting noises and complains at me like an angry gull. I reach my hand down and help him out. He chugs the whole beer in front of me. He burps with his mouth to the sky. I shake my head as he turns from me and goes to the ocean. His belly already protruding. He is growing his belly and I am sure he hopes it will be as grand as my father's.

My mother is released from my father's grasp. She stumbles a little because she has been lifted from the ground in their embrace. She finds her footing and reaches up to secure her gas station reading glasses that have become disheveled.

She sits back down in her chair and takes a long gulp from her glass of pinot grigio. She picks up the *Reader's Digest* beside her chair, where she left it, and resumes reading an article about what your favorite fruit says about your personality.

My mother is a cantaloupe.

My mother is a great orange cantaloupe with a seedy middle and a tanned outside. Her soul is orange and her hair was once orange. I want her to be orange. I want her to be a color more than a person. I want her to grow from her smallness into fruit. I want to know when she is ripe and I want to knock on her shell and listen for the hollowness that means *I'm ready*.

We Will Be Cold

State law says we must bury a horse within twenty-four hours after death. We will have to be on a timeline. We five will dig the hole the first time with a backhoe and the whole thing will take no longer than an hour even with the frozen February ground. But Boss will say *It is too small*. The hole will not be big enough. If we cover it in dirt like it was, the hooves will stick up. If we bent the legs to tuck in the hooves, the hocks will come through the ground and poke up like furry knobs. Maybe we could say that these were anthills, roots of a different sort. Maybe we could say the ground was growing a horse, but chances are the decay will get to it. And once that happened, there will be no furry anthills and no knobby roots. Just bones protruding from the overgrown sand and moss. Something that from a distance someone's daughter will think are mushrooms from all the rain. If she gets close and tried to kick it, she will realize it is not a mushroom. There is nothing spongy left to this, there is no cartilage or synovial fluid and it is instead just a bone of a dead horse. Tibia, tarsal, cannon, tuber calcenei, calcaneus. She will not realize this fully, but her father will know this is a bone and will grab her tiny body with his hands and heave her into his chest and turn her away and walk briskly from this place, cradling her face in his pectoral and saying in his head *She is safe from this*.

With the backhoe, the opening will be even on the sides and it will have had plenty of room for a horse if Boss will have let us sever the legs, slaughter the animal from the neck, place it in the ground in pieces. We will say *We would have organized it*.

It will not have looked disjointed. But instead we will be digging a hole by hand and shovel, uneven edges of the gap chipped away like the layered and colorful chunks of our planet we saw at the Grand Canyon. Back when we were all seven or eight or nine and we sat in the backseats of Suburbans and Avalons with our seatbelts unbuckled and our brothers picking at us, giving us wet willies while we just wanted to listen and watch our portable DVD players our daddies bought just for this trip. We would watch what we wanted and brother would watch what he wanted. Father would hold one hand up to the air conditioning vent and flip it palm to backside to palm. Mother would stare out the window and watch the telephone wires go slack and taut.

But us, we will be so tired. Our hands and joints will sting because it will be so cold outside at twenty-eight degrees in the middle of February and up to this point we will have had such a hot winter. We will breathe into our own hands; a deep, wet breath from our insides but that will only warm them for a few seconds. We will do this often because we don't want to be out here in the first place and we wanted everyone else to know it was a hassle to be outside this morning in this sort of weather. Our hands will be cracked slightly at the knuckles, dry at the base of our palms, and the moisture will feel nice. It will be easier for us to grab the handles of the shovels with bare hands so our gloves will lie beside us on the frozen ground, collecting frost, next to heaps and piles of earth, pinestraw, and slippery clay.

Boss will sit on a three-step mounting block we dragged out for him to perch on. His old knees will refuse to wake up and work on cold mornings and so he will sit and

watch instead, his knees sleeping still. Boss is a quiet man with small lips and gray eyebrows and dark eyes. He has seen war and so when he says something, we will listen. For now, he will point with a shaking index finger to the uneven left side of the hole. *But we are so cold* we will tell him and he will point again and we will keep shoveling.

We will dig on a path Boss knows well and we do, too. We will have walked this path many times from the Stable to the Main House and the horse we are burying will have also walked this path many times. That's why it will be buried here and it will have a pathway for a grave. We know it is bad luck to walk on top of graves, we know that we should all say something to Boss who thinks this is a good idea to bury a horse under a busy walkway but instead, we say nothing and keep our brims low though the sun is not bright on this part of the path. Instead, we will talk to each other in our heads saying *this is bad luck this is bad luck this is bad luck*. But Boss thinks differently.

We remember, though, taking the ghost tour in Charleston. We remember something about breaking a robin's egg on top of a tombstone. We remember the tour guide telling us not to walk on top of graves. Later that summer, we will be in the woods on our uncle's hunting land. He will have been hunting quail and he will ask us to retrieve the bird his dog forgot. In our search, we will come across a single gravestone. The lettering will be worn down, the date from the seventeen hundreds. We will be tempted to place just a single foot on the grave. A single rubber boot hovering over it. *This is bad luck this is bad luck this is bad luck*.

No. Boss will think this is a great honor for this horse. This will be his culminating moment as an approved and retired and dead stallion. No longer will he be fucking the fake jump mare. No longer will he have a chain around his nose and under his top lip when he was lead from the stall to the small turn-out paddock where for a fee onlookers could take time-lapse videos on their tablets of him playing in the field. No. Instead, he will be free and dead under the feet of the developers that will be coming next month to turn this racing farm into a bed and breakfast for yankees and snowbirds. They will plan on bedrooms above the stalls, a ballroom area in the center aisle. Maybe they will even rent it out for weddings, keep a couple of horses there to pull a white carriage around the galloping track. Use the infield for the reception, the Main House for the bridal portraits. How beautiful brides will look framed in giant oak doorframes. How wonderful and rustic this all could be.

Maybe years later they will accidentally find the horse's teeth, find his massive cranium and dig out the dirt from his sockets and jaw. Maybe they will do a news story on it, run DNA tests and figure out that he was the stallion that he was. A lifetime winning of six and a half million before he turned five, hundreds of approved offspring in his name, Breyer Horses chiseled and painted to his exact galloping frame, little girls begging and begging daddies like for just this one toy but they have to say *No not now honey* because it will be nowhere near Christmas or her birthday and how can fathers justify seventy dollars on a plastic racehorse figurine.

We will finish digging after two hours and multiple breaks. Boss will slowly stand himself up from the mounting block we dragged out for him to sit on and he will teeter over to the edge of the hole. He will peer in and nod his head and then stagger in the direction of the Main House. He will not watch us put the horse in the ground. He will not want to watch us drag the giant animal inside of a tarp, his back legs chained together, his massive body pulled by the tractor. He will not want to see the way we haphazardly drop the horse into the hole because as we know there is no way to do this delicately. There will be no way to carefully drop seventeen hundred pounds into the earth. Once we get the horse into the hole, Boss will not want to see the way we will need to slice open its belly with sharpened knives we keep in our back pockets. He will not want to see this part of the state law carried out. He will not want to see us pour bags of lime over the horse's shining coat. Boss will not stand to see it.

Instead, Boss will walk as quickly as his cold and sleepy knees could carry him. We will wait until we knew he was out of sight but there is no avoiding it—he will still hear the backhoe beeping, covering the grave of the horse. Boss will swallow a cough at the sound of the backhoe and go into the Main House and once safely inside, grab the doorframe of his study and sob.

When the buyers arrive today they will see us finishing our jobs. They will see five men leaning over the handles of their shovels. The buyers will look at the pile and only the wife will wonder what it is. Only she will think in her head *What a strange place for that mound of dirt. What a strange way to bury electrical lines.* The husband will

check his fantasy basketball lineup on his iPhone. They will arrive at the Main Barn and meet the realtor with her out-of-place shoes but they will fit in well with in their Gianni Bini pumps and oxblood Allen Edmonds. It will be the final tour. It will be the final time the buyers will see the property as it is meant to be. The realtor will take them into the tack room and say *Don't worry, all this will be gone*. She will take them into the workers lounge and say *Don't worry we're getting rid of it all*. She will take them into an empty stall and say *Just envision it!* The horse beside her will lift its head. *We're getting rid of them all, don't worry*. The wife will clasp her mittened hands together in front of her throat and say *Oh, well I think it is just beautiful!*

The buyers will walk through the barn aisle and out to the pathway leading to the Main House. They will pass us and we will still be leaning on our shovels. The five of us will nod as they pass but will not make eye contact. These buyers are here but do not know what here is. They do not understand the old life in the soil beneath their feet, its particular tendency for selenium deficiency and they do not care to know. There is plenty of selenium in their soils of Connecticut. There is plenty of it under the concrete sidewalk that leads from their cozy two-bedroom apartment to the street, the one beside the farmer's market. That will be why they come here and decide to buy our farm. It will be a Thursday night and after three glasses of wine, she will find our farm in a listing and come to him with a business plan. *It's what we've always dreamed of*. And he will agree and kiss her and call the bank the next day. The listing will read "FORECLOSURE: Great farm in heart of SC! Make it what you want!"

But now, they will try to walk to the Main House. Her heels will become stuck in the earth, but she will be determined to get there anyway. She will stop in front of us to adjust her shoe. The realtor will say *It's SO messy right now, dear. Another time?* And she will agree and make a joke about having to exchange her heels for cowboy boots. She will look at us with an open-mouthed smile, expect us to laugh. One of us will smile politely at her. We will all feel something painful in our throats. They will all leave to go look at the infield. The wife will wave over her shoulder at us, the husband will adjust his scarf.

But us, we will still need to ensure the heap is piled correctly. We will still need to have a few feet of mounded soil on top of the horse's grave. We will have already retrieved this with the tractor from the oldest manure pile on the twenty-acre property. The pile so old that it will have almost entirely returned to being beautiful earth again. And then we will need to throw grass seeds atop the pile to keep the dirt in its place. To finish it all off. We will take turns throwing rye seeds on top of the mound, we will sit on the ground around our shovels and gloves, we will drink water from our canisters and wish it were gin or whisky but remember that it is only eleven in the morning and we must still finish our day.

Boss will be done for the day and later, after lunch, we will find him sitting in his tub with his clothes still on, he will have a glass of merlot in one hand and his other hand will rest under the lukewarm water by his side. We will ask him *What can we do? What can we get for you?* And he will not respond and it will be better this way because we

will not be able to help him. We will not want to think about what all this means for him. We do not like to think about what happens after all of this finishes happening. We will, instead, prefer to drink his aged bourbon as he soaks in his tub. We will prefer to drink his liquor out of his crystal wine glasses and browse through his newspaper clippings about winnings and breedings and marriages and divorces and arrests. We will not ask him to join us. We will sit and drink and we will all take turns checking on our Boss. Though, we will not wonder for his wellbeing or his mind. Instead, we wonder if he will want die soon. We think about the light pink color of the water once his wrist goes slack and the Merlot pours into the tub.

Critical Conclusion

This thing of “craft” is a difficult concept to define. Craft is individualized. Craft is a creative expression. Craft is unique as well as borrowed. When writers learn about craft and talk about craft, we always speak in references to what others have said about it. We try and put our own spin on something as archaic and historical as “characterization” or “tone.” There is no new inventiveness occurring in craft, however. Writers merely borrow each other’s craft elements, the ways in which that particular artist creates a particular story, and apply it to their own story. One of my favorite horse trainers describes the experience of training as an economy of ideas. A lesson-goer trades money for the trainer’s knowledge. The lesson-goer trades exercise rides on a horse for board payment. The boarding barn trades hay bales from grown in their field for the usage of the neighbor’s tractor. It’s cyclical. And as my trainer says, nothing is ever gained, just exchanged. I feel the same about craft and where I have developed my craft. As I have taken on new elements, I have given some other elements up, traded around with other writers, abandoned old techniques altogether in order to make room in my toolbox of craft for more items. My start into this thing of “craft,” that vital component of writing that is so very hard to pin down, began devoutly stationed in minimalism and has grown into something very different from where it started. Raymond Carver gave me my craft foundation. However, as I have developed as a writer, my collection *Greenbroke: Stories* proves that my craft has grown beyond pure minimalism and into something much more.

My first experience with Carver was his story “Why Don’t You Dance?” In a high school writing class, we were given an experimental assignment: locate a “mentor” writer and produce a story or poem that emulates that writer’s style. I chose Carver and wrote a two-page piece about a man who checks his mail and receives a letter addressed to someone else. He spends his time deciding if he wants to open it or not, ultimately ending with the decision to leave the letter unopened. The class loved it and I found a sort of comfort writing simply and without the confusion, layers, or imagery that turned me away from more complex novels and stories. As I began writing more actively in high school, it became obvious that Carver was quickly emerging as the foundation to my craft. I began to notice the additional layers of craft in his work that I was previously blind to. His plots and characters blossomed into multi-faceted and complex individuals. Carver’s “simple on the surface,” yet “complex underneath” plots have a true iceberg effect to them that evokes emotion from beyond the words on the page. He was a true minimalist with the help of his editor, Gordon Lish, and though Carver was not fond of having a genre title to his style, he stood true to the methods that we now identify with minimalist writing.

Carver wrote in his essay *On Writing* and said, “That’s all we have, finally, the words, and they had better be the right ones” (“*On Writing*”1510). This is the idea at the core of minimalism and as I continued with my writing, I found his craft at first enlightening and exciting. Carver instilled in me the idea that there is no room for excess. There is no room to put in extra words because each extra word takes away from the

weight of the others. So much weight and responsibility is held within each letter of every typed sentence in minimalist writing. Even more so, the weight is increased in the short story form. As a form, the short story must already carry a heavier load of emotion, characterization, plot, and tension because of the smaller space it has to make an impact on the reader. Short stories are not allowed pages upon pages of time where readers can learn their character and learn to trust them slowly. Short fiction has to do this job immediately. Minimalist fiction has the utmost urgency and a smaller set of tools to do that with. Since it was a foundational story in the development of my own craft, I believe that “Why Don’t You Dance” is a good place to start evaluating my own fiction’s craft. In the story, a young couple comes across a man selling all of his belongings in his front yard. They walk up, question the price of some things, they all drink together, and then end up dancing. The clarity with which Carver tells a story is impeccable. The greatest part of his writing is that all the stories come from somewhere within our world. We see these stories in our neighbors, people we see in the news, and ourselves. What minimalist realist writers like Carver have done are use pieces of their life, their histories, and what they know, to create their stories. Carver records real people doing real things. He does so simply and in a minimal fashion. For example, in “Why Don’t You Dance?” the sentences are formatted in a simple way, and little to no metaphor is used. “The boy came back with the watered whiskey. He cleared his throat and sat down at the kitchen table. He grinned. But he didn’t drink anything from his glass. The man gazed at the television. He finished his drink and started another. He reached to turn on the floor lamp. It was

then that his cigarette dropped from his fingers and fell between the cushions” (“Why Don’t You Dance?” 127). The sentences are organized in a traditional “noun-verb” order. Carver gives his readers very little and because his characters are not deeply developed at the visual level, all readers have left is characterization through dialogue and plot.

In my own work, especially evidenced in my short story “We Would Be Cold,” I utilize a minimalist and realist voice with a very similar, simplistic, pattern. The story reads,

“We will dig on a path Boss knows well and we do, too. We will have walked this path many times from the Stable to the Main House and the horse we are burying will have also walked this path many times” (“We Would Be Cold”).

Though slightly more detailed than Carver’s noun-verb sentences, this excerpt feels similar to Carver’s minimalist style by avoiding overly descriptive lines and keeping the story contained. Additionally, like Carver’s style, “We Would Be Cold” contains characters and situations that all seem to stem from real life and people. In Carver’s “Why Don’t You Dance?” the characters of *man*, *boy*, and *girl* could be substituted with people from our daily lives. Likewise, many of the characters in “We Would Be Cold” could, as well. Carver is a storyteller putting life’s very real and very important moments into print. I strive to do this same sort of thing, putting real life and moments onto paper with my own fiction. Carver’s minimalist style of writing and his focus on realism have

always been and continue to be a contributing factor in the development of my own writing.

However, where Carver was a solid and vital foundation to my craft skill-set, I reached a point in my writing where I was becoming bored and my boredom was apparent in my stories. I wanted complex characters and deeper plots. I wanted to play with syntax and lyricism. During my undergraduate years, in order to start appealing these desires for development, I began to experiment with the supernatural, the bizarre, and the strange. However, the foundation was laid and Carver's minimalism still held a firm grasp at my core. I wanted to grow away from my mentor, but spending so much time in high school using minimalism as a crutch made this a difficult endeavor. I began to experiment with style and craft until I basically was writing a minimalist story with an inexplicably bizarre ending. For example, a story I wrote in my undergraduate years titled "A Dead Flock" describes the day of two farmhands. It is an otherwise normal day until they go to the farm's pond to find the entire flock of geese dead. There are no bones evident, just feathers, beaks, and blood. The story ends after a description of the geese and the two main characters decide to go drink more whisky. It is almost embarrassing to describe because I see now how devoutly stubborn I was in my craft and to Carver's minimalism. Though it was not all my choice to write this way—Carver had been my mentor.

Where I thought I was breaking away from my minimalist roots, I was only perpetuating them. The craft elements I used were still inherently minimalist. I was

characterizing my characters through their dialogue and gestures, just as Carver. I was ignoring the details and complexity bubbling in my characters' heads. I admit I did not really know my characters at all and instead thought a twist in the plot would be the change I needed. Where I thought I was becoming unique, my undergraduate creative writing professor told me I was instead reminiscent of a "demented Raymond Carver." Instead of getting away from the minimalism, I was only creating a different version of it.

I needed to find a way to inhibit my minimalist foundation from leaking too severely into the new forms I was trying to develop. I was on a mission to recreate my craft and establish a sense of unique style. During my graduate studies, I was lucky to find Jeanette Winterson. She helped me create my own style and better understand my craft. Winterson's collection of short stories *The World and Other Places*, introduced me to a craft opposite of minimalism. Winterson writes in a very lyrical, lucid way. In many places in her stories, the language sounds like poetry. However, it is concise enough to avoid sounding too elaborate and drawn out.

I still struggle with this issue of craft. It is a hard line to draw when writing description and lyricism and not letting it become too lavish and exhausting. Rick Bass in his essay "When to Keep it Simple" warns against getting too elaborate in one's writing and becoming lost in it. Bass says, "A rule I've found helpful in such situations is to try to stay calm and go back to basics, to try to show, in gestures, images, and descriptions as simple as possible, what it is you're trying to convey, and not to try to do it all at once, but break it down into pieces—*when you have to*" (Bass 29). Winterson heeds this advice

in a heart-wrenching but beautiful story, “The 24-Hour Dog.” Winterson writes the following:

“What would I have done? Taught him to read? I know he won’t be the dog he could have been if I had met him edge to edge, his intensity and mine. Maybe it’s better this way. Maybe it’s better for me. I live in the space between chaos and shape. I walk the line that continually threatens to lose its tautness under me, dropping me into the dark pit where there is no meaning” (Winterson 16).

Winterson’s lyricism seems to exist “in the space between chaos and shape” just as the narrator describes in the excerpt from “The 24-Hour Dog.” Within this quote, lines such as “if I had met him edge to edge, his intensity and mine” suggests a very fragmented and angular concept, almost as if this story were a painting, it would be a cubist one.

Winterson describes both the narrator and the dog as having edges and intensities. Jarring angles and images placed side by side that from far away seem very different and separated, but up close the lines certainly blur together. But, the style is clean and the descriptions are fresh and innovative because of it.

Only recently have I have felt developed enough in my craft to utilize parts of Winterson’s style in my own. Winterson introduced me to an element of craft I was originally depriving myself of: lyricism. I define lyricism as the aesthetic of language. In other words, lyricism is the quality of the words, the descriptions they create, the emotion

evoked, and the beauty of the syntax. This introduction of lyricism is apparent in my story “Edisto Beach 2016.” An excerpt reads,

“My mother joins me on the porch and I tell her that I can’t stand it anymore. All the “all of”s are so many, so few. I tell my mother that she must not think that she is bones. I tell my mother that she does not fit in with shorthaired and flat-ironed. I am screaming. I am yelling. I yell at my mother to reconsider selling Pickles, our horse, because I dream of her riding him and her red hair streams behind her like fire. I dream of her grabbing his mane and not using a bridle but she still holds the mane as if it were leather reins. I tell her I hold all things that way, between the pinky and the ring finger. Grocery bags, car keys, domestication” (“Edisto Island 2016).

The lyricism, the sensory aspect of craft that creates emotions through the images and sounds of words, is evident. The poetry of the text is seen and heard. To summarize Rick Bass’ advice, the lyricism I have used, much like Winterson’s, takes its time, and shows “in gestures, images, and descriptions as simple as possible” what it’s trying to convey. My lyricism is not lengthy in this excerpt; it is broken down and concise.

A final element of my craft that was not apparent in my work until recently was the use of regionalism. Carver’s minimalism left me no place to incorporate this vital parts of my life in my fiction. Minimalism created a fear in me to incorporate settings and descriptions based on region. Because Carver’s stories are innately an “everyman’s

story”, in that they specify to no main region of the United States, I feared using my experience living in the South as a controlling element in my stories. However, I was liberated even further in my writing when I read Bonnie Jo Campbell’s *American Salvage* and experienced her intricate characters that are a product of their regions. In her stories, there are moments of beautiful, complicated, and emotion-filled interiority. In the following passage, Campbell also uses descriptions specific to the rural Michigan region her collection is set. The following excerpt from “The Inventor, 1972” describes the main character of the story—the hunter. It reads,

“He will dedicate himself to her, he wants to explain, although he can’t give her much. He’s living in his car right now, and earlier this week, to his shame, he ate half a sandwich somebody left on a table in a sub shop. He lost his tooth four months ago, yanked it himself with pliers after a year of pressure and pain, and then two more have become infected—the blood flow is compromised on his burned side, the doctor said—so his mouth aches and tastes like metallic rot. As a result of the burns on his hand, it has been years since he shot a deer. And he’s only thirty-five—other men seem so young at thirty-five” (Campbell 46).

In such a brief passage, Campbell manages to create in the reader so much empathy for the hunter. The backstory and livelihood details are to the point, concise, and simple, but remain very effective. In Amy Bender’s essay “Character Motivation,” Bender praises this style of characterization. Bender references this

way of character development in a Brautigan story by saying, “As opposed to a clunky descriptive paragraph that would never fit in a piece like this, her [the main character’s] background is revealed in a very natural way. We get a sense of her age, and a sense that she still takes care of herself, and a sense that there was another time when she listened to the radio and probably danced. There is a whole world of history that comes in...” (Bender 59). Just as Bender describes the character in Brautigan’s story as being embellished without a “clunky descriptive paragraph,” Campbell does the same with the hunter. His description is not clunky. It is precise and details him as a character by telling aspects of his life. He lives in a car and eats sandwiches meant for the trash. He pulled out his own tooth and apparently used to shoot a lot of deer. Readers understand him better as a character because Campbell describes who he is, what he does, and what he used to do. In a lot of ways, this is reminiscent of Carver. As has been stated a few times previously, Carver’s minimalism described characters through gestures. Campbell in many ways is doing a larger motion of this. But, instead of using small gestures to characterize, she is using parts of the character’s life. In this way, the character becomes the focus of Campbell’s story.

In my own work, I aim to produce mainly character-driven stories. Though they do not all follow this definition, one in particular does. My story “Armyworms” uses flashback and interiority to produce characters that move beyond their stereotypes. Like Campbell’s “The Inventor, 1972,” “Armyworms” works through a third person

omniscient point of view and plays between two main characters. Unlike Campbell's story, "Armyworms" does not settle on just one character as solidly as "The Inventor, 1972." In "Armyworms," two characters, Daniel and Tom, face an armyworm invasion on their hay farm, purchase lacewing insects to help with the problem, and eventually release them in their field with hopes the problem will be fixed. Like Campbell's, the plot really ends up being secondary to the characters. Also like Campbell, "Armyworms" uses quick snippets of the character's lives throughout to constantly develop and embellish the characters. For instance, in a short description about Daniel, I write the following:

"He sent thank you letters. He organized Thanksgiving dinner with his family and Tom's. He often kept contact with his clients. Occasionally sending an email to ask how the saddle was doing. Daniel kept a notebook in a drawer near his workspace where he recorded names, custom job descriptions, horse names (if the client mentioned it) so that every email he sent was personal and sincere" ("Armyworms").

From this small paragraph, the reader gets genuine a feel for who Daniel is and the kind of morals he embodies. It is a collage of the person he is instead of a lengthy, lyrical description. But, from it, readers understand that Daniel is a kind-hearted and sincere individual with a genuine interest in his clients, family, and friends. I describe Daniel without using interiority because I wish to have Daniel contrast Tom. Daniel is directly involved with the world around him, whereas Tom is the opposite. For example, an excerpt describing Tom reads,

“That night Tom dreamed of sliding stops. He dreamed of running a pattern and feeling the collapse and rebound of Lope So Good N Fancy. What hocks on that horse. He dreamed that the red dirt beneath him was made of dead Armyworms and when he slid to a stop, their bodies shot into the air. He dreamed the audience cheered and that Daniel waved his hat over the arena fencing and wolf-whistled with his free hand” (“Armyworms”).

The description occurs within Tom’s head. Whereas Daniel’s character functions primarily from flashback details, Tom’s character functions primarily within interiority and imagination. The description above is a dream of Tom’s that ends the story. Readers see Tom as a dreamer who has lost a part of his life that cannot be regained. His frequent memories of his past competition days consume much of his character and though he is perhaps the less outgoing and social of the two characters, readers learn more about him and watch him become a more well-rounded character through the use of these imaginative moments. Throughout the story, Tom has a few more of these imaginative and dream-like instants where he is lost in his own thoughts. Another example of Tom’s character being developed from interiority and backstory is the following:

“Tom imagined being overtaken by armyworms. He thought of what they would feel like squirming up his body and if they would try to eat his shirt. He wondered if there was ever a case of a man being eaten alive by worms. Of course, Tom knew, everyone is eventually eaten by worms

when he was dead, but could a man actually be eaten while he was alive?

He had read and heard stories while on the Reining Circuit from older men. One man claimed he knew a man who lost his arm to a coyote in Missouri. Said he was out hunting and the thing came right at him from the side. Tore his arm off and ate it. So it was possible, then, for worms to do the same” (“Armyworms”).

Like Campbell’s hunter, Tom develops as a character as the story progresses. The plot is merely the vessel in which character development travels. The plot is not necessarily vital in stories like “Armyworms” or “The Inventor, 1972,” but the characters certainly are.

Another character that embodies Campbell’s exquisite use of characterization by interiority and backstory is the narrator in “Before the Show.” Told from a first person point of view, this is another story with two characters. In summary, the morning before a huge competition, two characters lose a prized horse, eventually finding it. This is a very simplistic plot, and in its simplicity, there exists, still, minimalism. Carver says in his essay “On Writing,” “I hate tricks. At the first sign of a trick or a gimmick in a piece of fiction, a cheap trick or even an elaborate trick, I tend to look for cover. Tricks are ultimately boring, and I get bored easily, which may go along with my not having much of an attention span” (“On Writing” 1607). There is certainly no trick here except for the usage of the “ticking time bomb” concept—they must find the horse before time runs out. Especially in short fiction where there is such a limited amount of space to tell the story, the focus of the story must be concise and balanced. The plots in these types of stories

truly are a mere container to hold the characters. In a scene from “Before the Show,” the focus on the character is evident in many scenes. In one, the main character says,

“In the feed room I turned on the lights and surveyed all the tin trashcans and thought about how when I was young I would open up the feed bins at my grandfather’s ranch in Florida and breathe in the warm smellings of sweet feed and molasses beet pulp. I would run my fingers through the grains and move them around like a sticky sand, dig my hands in deep, so deep, to my elbows that when I pulled my arm out there was a beautiful dusting of sweet feed crumbs that made my skin look freckled and taste like sugars and dirt. My grandfather would bite on sour grass and show me how to do the same. How to pick it from the earth, break off the white rooted end, suck and bite on the stalk’s end. The grass so sour it hurt the back of my mouth and made me thirsty” (“Before the Show”).

What is added by this small flashback is the narrator’s positive relationship and perhaps longing for the simple things such as biting sour grass and the feeling of grain on skin. Further in the story, the narrator has a moment of interiority that allows readers to see beyond just her memories and into her mind. The main character says,

“I thought maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to not make the High Performance list. I thought maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to have three hundred head of cattle, try out a western saddle for once, a Quarter Horse for once instead of these hotheaded Thoroughbreds and lofty brained Warmbloods. Let my

horse get shaggy, grow out its whiskers, leave it outside in twenty degree weather, unblanketed because its coat is so thick and wild. Make coffee over a stove instead of from a French Vanilla pod of a Keurig. Cut my fingernails short and learn to tie knots” (“Before the Show”).

Here, readers begin to see more and more of the narrator’s character. These moments push back against the “iceberg” craft device in Carver’s minimalism. My characters, with the help of Campbell’s use of tunneling and interiority, become rounded, developed, and extremely detailed. Whereas in my earlier writing, I relied on minimal characterization through dialogue and gestures, here my craft has developed and moved far past my beginnings.

Carver was a solid foundation for me as a writer, but minimalism problematized my craft. I was at first unwilling to play a part in the economy of craft exchange, clinging tightly to my Carverisms and everything minimalism taught me. I owe much to it. I have a solid sense of dialogue, character development, and plot arc all thanks to my early studies of Carver’s short stories. It wasn’t until recently, more specifically with my collection *Greenbroke: Stories*, that I felt comfortable in this trade of craft elements and that I felt I was in a position to not just mimic a style, as I did with Carver, but learn from different craft elements like lyricism and characterization and successfully integrate them uniquely into my own stories. I assume, given the journey my writing has already taken to this point, that the constant trade of craft is a continuous cycle. This makes it both extremely

difficult and insanely humbling as a writer to realize, finally, that this exchange of craft means I will never be the writer I am right now for long.

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