

PATRICK WHITFILL
Song for the Rodeo

Horse flanks jack like pistons, coal-hard,
shock-strutting, swaybacked on both sides. Shot
in the parts that count, the daisy flare of pickups
rodeo-park themselves in the field the Methodist
church owns and rents out. The last
call's called twice a night. Straw mops the blood.

We never hesitate to shed our blood,
to sell out to the dust's cough. Men of the hard
line. Men who spin themselves in the last
lunge of a bull and don't catch, who shoot
over horns until every one of God's
good graces descends in a blaze of Ford

high beams and fog lamps, blaring like semis
the interstate shoves up the gray stretch of blood-
flow toward home. Before the jump, the spirit
moving underneath and inside that broken, hard-
ass shell treats the beast the sweetest. Shit,
go deep enough and everyone has the same last

thought tripping off the cliff before that last,
good crash of the soul: it's not the ride,
the prize or the glory, but the buzz in the chute,
when it's just us and the rush of blood-
lust that comes from wrangling a beast so hard
and pure it feels like you're dry-humping God.

We stand off while they snore like demons,
white-lipped and frothing, and pray the last
thing we see on earth won't be hoofed or hard.
We pray we'll see pillows we've cheeked and ride
a good woman in noon hay. Our blood
spills out like water from a pastor's dunk-chute.

Give us the next bronco. Give us the shot
and the question of blood. Some say they see Jesus
and rarely lie. Puddles where bull piss and blood
mingle spell out our fortunes in drools. *Outlast*,
we whisper over boilermakers. Outlast the ride
and the sun's ass over the cattle, and the hard-

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pan rising like Lazarus, like shoots of sorghum stock,
like the kicks that last until the trail bleeds home.
Then we break off hard. Then we can't ride back.