

**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.