

Man and Horse: Photo, Circa 1939

by Llewellyn McKernan

Behind you lonesome pines embrace the cabin, each needle
 abiding in the quiver of a whole forest. And
 the clapboard door, with its porch posts raw
 as molasses, shuts up
 the four just-married rooms. Your face,

brown as river perch, splits into laugh wrinkles, the mustache
 above your flashing teeth dances a little.

Now your limbs blow hot and cold above
 crabgrass; one boot in the stirrup, one
 boot on the ground, both hands

clasped in a prayer about the pommel—you still hope to lift
 yourself above your iron past, its
 ancestral weight, mount and ride out
 all the fevers you inherited from your
 crazy Irish family (that made you want to be a butcher,

not a vet, a bully instead of a good husband and father).
 Two miles away in a dustbowl town, the
 courthouse clock keeps striking the hour,
 and it's time, father, to get on that dark
 horse and ride death to death! Don't just

stand there, white-knuckled and frozen in the ancient ache
 of a Kodak reel, body held so long
 in such an unnatural position
 limbs under khaki shirt and trousers
 stiffen, inner feelings petrify. Your

fidgety mare—after waiting for years to be off, you'd
 be impatient, too—turns its face to glare
 at the black box that swallows the bit
 in its mouth, the flowing mane, the
 light you both stand in.