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Animal Rites

Mike Vanden Bosch

Home from the cavalry, he backs into farming. Now,
low on oats, out of corn, he sees an ad: “Old nags
for sale: cheap.” Ah, a way to turn horse meat
into pork and gold, he thinks, but then he feels

eerily crippled by scruples. He wouldn’t have given—
had he had one—a kingdom for a horse, but still he
waits to ring the number till soft-heart mom is out—
to her horses were horses—animals—neighbors

like Bell and Star who’d sweat years for him. He
trucks the nags home in twilight, tight-lipped,
wanting no help unloading. He stalls seven days,
feeding oats to them like old pets. On the eighth

day he halts the silver, leads her to the hogs, and
shoots it before he can change his mind. A 4-10 slug
in the forehead drops her like a sling of hay. He can’t
bear to look: mane in the mud, nostril flared, blue

eye blank. He turns to leave, but he looks back to see
hog hooves stomp silver into mud. With hyena humor,
ten sows, jowls bloody, exult at huge horse rumps
like avenging dogs lapping up the blood of Jezebel.

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