

The Quiet Ride

for my Father

On Sundays, you rushed me out to the barn, on time as always, dressed in your tan jacket, the brown patches shielding the elbows. On the way, a coffee cup knocked the edges of its holder, but even as we arrived and braved the pot-holed drive, it never spilled.

There, we went our separate ways – me, down the long barn aisle to greet my bay horse, and you, into the fly-infested lounge, where you watched and waited for me, sitting on the orange, vinyl-cushioned chairs, maybe glancing over some other Father's shoulder

to catch part of the Bengal's game on his portable TV. When the riding lesson was done, we always took the long way home – down Roundbottom Road, you steering the Cadillac through curves, so many curves, then slowly crossing the first tracks. You always looked

both ways. There were few houses on our sides – mostly old trees, old hills on your side, and the Little Miami River on mine. And every week, I would point at the yard with the miniature horses; there were three out front, grazing next to the homemade

sign that read, *Keep Out*. We could count on those scenes. We had no long talks of Reagan, your latest court cases, God or The Cosby Show, school or my too-tight jeans. It was only you, staring out at the green side, and me, staring out at the blue,

and in those colors, those blurry moments of car-side picture shows, it no longer mattered if my riding trainer had looked down at the ground again, shaking his head, stomping the heel of his paddock boot into the sand. It didn't even matter if he had praised me

for once in that high-pitched voice. It didn't matter that I was covered in dust and sweat, that the smell of horse never seemed to stop seeping through my pores. All that mattered was your hands – one on the gearshift, one on the wheel, and the way that your grip grew

tighter when we crossed the tracks for the last time. Here, I felt the cool, leather seats, so much smoother than reins, and I began your grip, your feel of stillness, your quiet ride, as you, my silent driver, looked green, looked blue, then green again, leaving those colors

behind. For a moment, you halted, released the wheel, then used both hands to turn, creep out, and silently slip to join the stampede on the gray highway, making it look so easy, leaning back for a straight stretch, steering me closer and closer to home.

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