

GIFT HORSE

It's not as if you rolled melty brown eyes  
at me and nuzzled my arm, not as if I've had  
years of pleasure from you. You even bit me.

On a family visit I happened to comment  
on your regal bearing. And Uncle Jess said,  
"Take him, he's yours, saddle and all."  
Uncle Jess, the clan autocrat, insisted.  
Good breeding (mine) dictated that I not  
look you in the mouth. At least until later.  
Caught flatfooted in the adage,  
all I could do was thank my mother's brother,  
and wonder which of us incurred the deficit.

Once you were here, each day revealed  
worse things than wayward teeth.  
You're an equine misanthrope  
with the disposition of a gum boil. The once  
I tried to ride, you waited till we reached  
the Pendleton's pasture in full view  
of their porch. You scraped me open on a fence  
then pitched me in the county's only patch  
of poison sumac.

You've been a blight on my calendar  
since August. Now here I am, watching  
the vet frown as he cleans his thermometer.  
Sun plays the sheen of your flank. You look  
like a fallen bronze monument. The doctor  
says the future is unsure.  
There's not a single reason I should care.

I kneel to rub your blaze, expecting even now  
a recalcitrant snort. As the long needle  
pierces your rump, I feel no equalizing of scores.

Your eye on mine, you cozy my hand. I hear myself  
saying, "Doc, is there anything else you can do?"