Minding The White Horse

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Minding the White Horse

-- after George Biddle's painting "South Carolina Landscape"

Nathalie Anderson

Every last bush here is dark at its heart, parched and yellowed at its rim. The cabin cants, the porch pole leans, and the tar-paper's thin over the rafters, mossy where the rain pools between. Every last field is stumped and stubbled, the sand sifting over the red clay. Nothing easy grows here.

So that's what he grazes: crops the dry grass down to the dirt, mumbles the stubble, mouths up thistles and stickers. His neck's half to giraffe from reaching, his shoulders stubborn as the fields we plow. He's always jawing. You can't shoo him.

And mouth to mouth, he thins and thins. Our land alters him, the red earth rusting along his spine, moss furrowing under each rib. His back dips like our roof beam. His tail's a bony memory.

Haste! Haste! Something's rising, storming the horizon - the mule's ears blown forward, the mule's tail blown between his legs, the shutter slamming shut and open.

The white horse stands pat, thunder in his eye. He knows who'll be riding him, who'll be riding him soon.