

## **Fetlock**

So much weighs  
on the horse's ankles, I can't think of anything else.  
Not the spur that ploughs the flank, the reins  
yanking the head left and right, the ribcage, host  
and soffit for the muscle's burden, nor the metal driven  
deep into the hooves. I am thinking only of your ankles, girl.  
How bone will bend before break, disowning  
its design. How my own feet could not break the leather  
of my shoes but curved inward into something ugly  
and timeworn. Do we blame the ankles for forgetting  
how to run? The fields of aster on the other side of the split  
rail fence. My eyes were fists pried open  
by what someone else called tenderness. My body  
was a shed I stood outside of. No collapse, no heaving  
breath or hail. Silent like your sleeping, upright  
in the middle of the paddock. There is bone at the core  
of all fleshy things, and a hairline fracture. To be touched  
is almost the same as being moved.

## **Tend**

Ahead, you are young and you have your life. I am returning to the moss because nothing is ripe. Two people threw apples at a dormant tree. Hoping the fruit to catch on a bare branch, as if sprouted there organically. The orchard was night blue, almost black. The ring of dirt around the trunk base, damp with dew. Sodden to the core. I was one of them. Throwing from a distance, behind a split rail fence. I am saying this because the dream I haven't had yet is you and I

suckling green buds from the branches, in daylight, right up close. The young pith will get stuck in our molars, sapwood will weep in our mouths. We have already leaned the sides of our faces heavy into the loam, smelling it, the fertile soil. You are such. Buoyant with potential. Open like a new field, freshly tilled. We have already learned our faces. Your upward mouth, sunning the low hills, voles and gnats, even the dark swervings of your heart and my cowardice. I am like the young sprig, bending

without snapping. Cannot let go of its fibres. Sticky with the substance it weeps. Xylem and phloem releasing the sugar and water it can't hoard. I am going, I am going. But scared to leave early, stalling. There was a garden between us, where we walked. Something to pray for, even at the end of your scant belief. I want to say it was enough. The tending we had been doing. Grafting the cottonwood onto the mountain ash. Fortifying magnolia to withstand hail and gale-force winds. Ahead, we are young and we have our lives. We must tend to them. That double diverging word. To tend towards, tend away. To mend and nurture and suture and mend. To prune, to end. We cannot serve two masters. Only towards or away.