

A young girl with short brown hair, wearing a pink dress with a floral pattern and lace trim, stands barefoot in a kitchen. She is looking to her right with her hands near her mouth. Behind her is a white, multi-compartment stove with various items on top, including a watermelon and a bowl of green herbs. To the left, a wooden rack holds several towels. The background wall is made of corrugated metal.

You remember
the things you save;
you cannot forget the
things you lose

The Wake

Jeremy Page



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The Wake
by
Jeremy Page

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Within each horseradish leaf, where it unwinds from the stem, there's a small bead of rainwater. He sees one there, shining brilliantly in the morning sun, as if it's been placed, a jewel, pure and dazzling. It's perfect. This will be lovely he thinks, leading his daughter towards the plant, her hand so small and cool in his own, both of them crouching over the leaves till their shadows merge. Briefly, the sunshine becomes extinguished from the drop of water, he repositions himself, and it sparks back to life. He imagines a direct unbending shaft of light, taut and without substance, stretching between the sun and its own captured sparkle, a miniature sun in itself, caught in some bend of the refraction.

She is captivated. Surprises like this, especially beautiful ones, always bring a brightness in her, too. She's four years old, and already there is a sense of such conspiracy between them, father and daughter, such gorgeous intimacy. They share the fascination of pausing to look at things they discover, in detail, her waiting for him to explain what they see. It's a familiar routine. And he knows even then, that he will want to hold on to this moment for the rest of his life, like the leaf holds its soft capture of that beautiful jewel, to be with her, in that wide sunny field in East Anglia, crouching by the horseradish plants.

From his position in the grass he has a low-angled view of his wife, Judy, sitting on a fallen branch about twenty feet away. She's wearing dark glasses, and is bent over a small open book on her lap. He knows what she's reading – a collection of poems, it's for inspiration, for some lyrics she's working on, and she likes

to make notes in the margins. She has the pencil poised, and every so often he thinks he can hear her humming the tune. So typical of her, really, surrounded by such a perfect morning, to enter into her own private world, so readily. He smiles at her, at the thought of her, smiles at the way her knees are drawn together and the way both ankles bend awkwardly beneath them, giving her a childish look. She's pretty, he thinks.

His daughter leans as soft as a reed against him as she looks down at the water droplet. She's wearing one of her favourite dresses, and it smells of washing powder and warm cotton and just a hint, even in the field, of her bedroom's mix of books and toys. It's lilac, or had once been brighter than that but has faded, and is cut in an old-fashioned style which makes her more doll-like than usual, with a wide band round the waist which she tends to stroke in a comforting gesture. Around the hem at the bottom of the dress is an unusual trim of farm animals in a printed design, running after each other. They'd made up stories about these animals before, how the goose seems to chase the dog, and how the pig is seen chewing a flower. He looks at this design, stretched across her knees as she crouches in the grass, and he knows she's itching to reach out and touch the bead of rainwater. She'll probably knock it off the leaf, so he whispers *Freya, watch this*, as he holds the plant gently, from underneath, bending it gradually so the droplet begins to stretch and tremble. The leaf has prominent raised veins running across its surface in a root pattern, and the water adheres stickily to one of them, then begins to slide along the vein's length, rolling, leaving absolutely no mark of wetness behind it, constantly gathering into its own flattened egg shape. The little sun in there dances and sparkles with new brilliance, and he can see how the shine from it has added an extra point of light on to the surface of the leaf.

'Is it a raindrop?' she asks.

'No – not really.'

'Daddy, is it a piece of the sun?'

He smiles. 'That's lovely,' he whispers. 'A sun-drop.' He coaxes

the water further along the leaf. 'Look, it's like mercury,' he says, marvelling at it.

'What's mercury?' she asks, carefully. Her voice is slow and deliberate and made a little husky by a child's effort of whispering.

'It's a metal, but it's liquid – I mean it's wet like water.'

'Oh,' she says. He smiles at that, at the apparent nonsense adults sometimes say.

He encourages the droplet towards the tip of the leaf. 'Look,' he says, 'look into the drop – can you see your reflection?'

Freya peers closer. He smells the malty scent of her breath which is always there when he is this close, whatever the time of day or night. She sucks in her lower lip for concentration, and he watches the corners of her mouth bending up in a little smile. A few tiny hairs there, above her upper lip. Keep it still Daddy, she says, and he tries to do so, but even the touch of his hands below the leaf, even his heartbeat in a far off part of his chest is enough to make the droplet tremble.

'See the sun in there?' he whispers. 'The whole world's in there if you look close enough.'

'Can I touch it?' she says. He nods, then waits while she reaches out, deliberately choosing a finger, then deciding on a different one, before she touches the water. Both of them see how it sticks instantly to her skin, making a small curving bridge between itself and her, before it separates into a pinhead of water on the tip of her finger, just below the nail. She holds her hand up to inspect the new, smaller droplet.

'Is that like mercury?' she asks.

'Yes,' he replies, thinking, No, it's not like mercury at all – which is so grey and flat and without reflection, a dead and poisonous thing.

She pretends to lick it off her finger and begins to giggle. He laughs too, a child's happiness so infectious. But her laughter deepens, becomes something else, not just amusement, but a reaction now, the kind of laugh she has when she watches a cartoon on TV.

‘What is it? What’s so funny, Freya?’ he asks, still smiling.

‘It’s silly,’ she says. ‘That pony’s being silly.’

He looks at her eyes, how she’s angled her eyebrows into an expression which is half amusement, and half worry – an expression of not quite grasping something, a complex expression she must have copied from somewhere. They try so many things out. And even there, even her being so young, there is a little worry-line above the nose on her forehead, like the tiniest of scratches.

‘What pony?’ he asks, amused.

‘. . . it’s doing a silly dance,’ she says, the laughter breaking through her words once more and the worry-line vanishing.

Guy half-turns, still crouching. He sees not a pony but a horse, a stallion, half-way across the field, and for a moment he smiles too, because the stallion does indeed seem to be dancing. It’s standing in a patch of bare earth where the rest of the pasture has worn away, and is rocking curiously back and forth in a restless motion, as if it’s caught in something. He has the feeling the animal may be in some sort of trouble. Maybe it actually is caught – snagged on a loose wire or section of fencing.

‘What do I do with it?’ Freya asks, lifting her finger to inspect the drop of water.

‘Whatever you like,’ he says.

‘I can’t take it home, can I?’

He smiles. ‘Freya, you’re lovely. I’m afraid not.’

She pretends to put it in the open pocket on the front of her dress, patting the pocket for safekeeping effect, then suddenly lifts it again and peers into it – the droplet almost touching her eyelashes. ‘Daddy, I can’t see the pony in the raindrop.’

‘No?’ he says, imagining the horse suspended upside down in the lens of water and, when he looks beyond at the field, he’s shocked to see the stallion is closer, much closer, as if it indeed has been magnified.

He sees then what he hopes Freya doesn’t see. The stallion has a startled bloodshot eye, and is rocking to and fro in an

agitated motion, with an edge of wildness that makes it look untrustworthy. His first unconscious movement is to put an arm round his daughter. He feels the thin bones of her shoulder and realizes he is already starting to stand. She seems a lot smaller then, lower to the ground, closer to the field than him.

‘What’s the matter?’ Freya asks, her face angled up at him. He’s never been able to mask his surprise.

‘Nothing. Nothing’s the matter,’ he says. He glances at the stallion. He can’t gauge it. It’s a mottled grey with long unkempt black hair down the nape of the neck, and has a tail that’s short and flicking as it stands, side-on to them, at the other edge of the marshy area. It watches him wide-eyed, with a look of madness. He sees a quiver develop in the muscle on its flank, rising quickly across its back.

‘Judy,’ he says, in an urgent whisper, ‘*Judy!*’

She deliberately finishes the line she’s reading, then looks up at him, raising her hand to shield her eyes from the glaring sun. He looks at the two blank reflections of her sunglasses, and then sees a sudden and minute tightening of her mouth. The shock of it, seeing what he has only just seen himself. Involuntarily she too begins to stand and he puts out his arm to stop her, stop, movement is a thing to be cautious of. He looks at his fingers and he feels a tension he can almost grasp, in a widely emanating circle around them, centred on his hand as it holds the air still, holds on to nothing.

‘I don’t like that pony,’ Freya says, standing like a little statue by his side. She sounds disappointed – her love of horses is usually so overwhelming. Stop the car, she’ll say, every time they pass a horse field, clucking her cheek even as the car slows down, but here, she’s silent.

Where is he, he thinks, taking in as many details as he can. The field’s an open one, and rises all round them in the shape of a shallow dish. They’re just about in the middle of it. In the middle, at the bottom, it amounts to the same, with a marshy stream running from left to right, dividing the field roughly in

two. The stallion's on the other side of the stream, perhaps fifty feet away, still strangely rocking and lifting a front hoof hesitantly off the ground, looking lonely and deranged. What else – a tree, yes, the ancient oak under which Judy's sitting, that was the thing they all headed for when they entered the field. It's close. He keeps an eye on the horse and gathers Freya to him, holds her hand which has suddenly gone compliant and cold in his own.

'Let's go to the tree,' he says, quietly, amazed at how calm his voice sounds. 'That oak tree.'

'All right,' she says. He's glad to hear her voice, that she's still talking, glad to hear her voice is as steady as his own.

They walk slowly to the tree, to Judy, who has now risen to her feet as if she's balancing something on her head, the book of poetry has fallen from her lap on to the soil. They approach her, across the marshy ground, which he notices for the first time is deeply rutted with the hoof marks of horses not in the field any more.

Beyond the stream the stallion does an abrupt theatrical stamp with one of its front hooves. Guy sees the ripple of the shock dart up the cartilage of the leg, so thin at the knee, but solid just above that, and rising into a slab of muscle which curves up to the shoulder like the side of a car. The stamp doesn't scare him, but it makes him angry, angry that this animal has hijacked the moment, that it might scare Freya more than it needs to, maybe even put her off horses. And with some relief he notices the stallion has continued to face them side-on, and appears reluctant to make any kind of movement whatsoever, apart from the repeated jerks of its head as if it's wrestling with invisible ropes.

'What's it doing?' Judy says, quietly.

Guy shakes his head slowly. 'I think it's just showing off,' he says, hopefully.

Judy has done a strange thing. She's stepped the other side of the log, as if it's a great barrier, and is holding out her hands for Freya to come towards her. Each hand stretches woodenly, pathetically, like she's sleepwalking.

He can tell Freya has become scared. She's gripping on to him and that might not be helpful, he thinks. He'll have to make all the decisions, he knows that, but she'll have to go along with them instinctively, without question.

He tells her not to worry. 'He's upset by something, that's all.' But as he's saying that he knows the only thing that is possibly upsetting the stallion is the sight of them. The three of them, in this field.

Judy takes hold of his arm, above the elbow, her fingers are sharp and tensed on his muscle. That's good, he thinks. It feels like an advantage of sorts, although he knows it's no such thing. She's strong – small, but with a mother's strength. With her other hand she has grabbed Freya, on her shoulder. It's like they're lashing themselves together.

'Where did it come from?' Judy whispers.

Guy doesn't know. It had been an empty field, like all the fields they'd walked through this morning. He'd been at the horseradish leaves, crouching, close to the ground. She'd been sitting on the fallen branch, reading. Sunglasses, he thinks, remembering how she had looked to him, so absorbed, both of them, and he notices she isn't wearing them any more. They are lying a few feet away, unfolded on the grass.

'It'll move off,' Judy says. 'It's probably just startled to see us here.' Guy says yes, more to Freya than Judy and, trying not to alarm them, looks about for anything that he might pick up to ward it off. But there are no sticks, no weighty logs, only this knobbled dead branch lopped from the oak – huge and twisted and a perfect reading spot for his wife and her book of poems, but not something you could lift. The oak itself is above them, with a wide span of heavy dark arms, but the closest of the branches is at least twice his height. He notices Judy also looking up at the tree, and even Freya, this small person between them, looking up for heavenly answer, reaching the same conclusion a few seconds behind her parents.

'We can't climb it,' he says, quickly looking for ways up the

trunk, and seeing the countless bumps and calluses of the tree's life but no clear hold.

'You sure?' Judy says, feeling the necessity to voice all options. Nothing he can easily scale, let alone with Freya and Judy too. You can cling to an oak but you can't climb them, he thinks, and it would only make them more vulnerable to attempt it. He doesn't want to make a wrong decision.

'What shall we do if it doesn't go?' Judy asks, giving him a natural permission to act, to take the lead.

'Let's keep still,' he whispers, 'really still.'

Freya's frozen to the spot anyway, but he sees her nod obediently below him, and he hears her swallowing. He has a strange impression of himself, standing with the others in the centre of the field. He must look ridiculous, all angles and vulnerable and out of his depth.

'We're here,' he says, pathetically.

'Didn't you see it coming?' Judy says, unable to mask an accusation.

'No. No, I didn't. Did *you*?'

The stallion makes a deep snorting sound and half-turns so its eye is again completely side-on to them. He sees the bend in its body just behind the front legs, where the skin has rippled into long lines that run the height of its flank. The grey hair has mottled patches of dirty brownish-black hair. Its head is a squared-off anvil which starts to dip and swing as he looks at it – as if the effort of keeping it in the air is not easy.

'Perhaps it's ill,' he offers to his wife, worrying that that might be a worse scenario, and he hopes the horse might suddenly kneel down in the dirt. It would be a relieving sight, to see it keel over. He looks again at the stallion's head: it has a wide brow and a long nose with prominently raised veins running across it, and dark nostrils surrounded by wet purplish skin. He sees a thickly matted scar poking through the whorls of black hair on the top of its head, and a small mean ear which twitches at flies whether they're there or not.

‘Here’s what we’re going to do,’ he says, calmly. ‘We’re going to stand like this, perfectly still, till that thing moves off, OK?’ Neither Judy nor Freya say anything. ‘OK?’ he repeats.

‘Yes,’ Judy says, formally.

‘Right. Are you scared?’ he asks Freya.

‘No,’ she whispers, lying.

‘Neither am I.’

It’s ridiculous, to be standing like this, like scalded children, while this animal makes a blustery show of strength. Or territory, who knows. Keep your sodding field, he thinks, glad to discover some anger, but knowing also the world has reduced effortlessly in a matter of minutes to a few simple truths, just this field, and around him the intricate details of things that are no use – the grass and twigs under the oak tree – the dried tops of last year’s acorns, the patches of bare soil. A busy sense of nature which is indifferent and safe and nothing to do with him any more. Beyond that, the field itself, curving up a small rise towards a thin and distant hedgerow. It’s not a large field, but they’re a good three minutes run from any edge of it, slower if he’s carrying Freya, and there could easily be boggy patches that might be disastrous. The field’s like a desert, he thinks, an open space, exposed and dangerous, and the hedgerows around it are the borders to another country entirely – a country where he can make a thousand decisions and has all the time in the world to make them. He lets his thoughts run, hoping they might quarry a solution, then consciously he forces himself to think calmly, without panic. How did the horse get in here, he wonders, how did it just manage to appear like that on the small patch of dirt, and he has an unsettling vision of how it must have been, a few minutes ago, the stallion trotting noisily across the field, its hair shaking with the movement, while they’d been looking at the droplet of water, while Judy had been reading her poem. And while he’s imagining this he spots a five-bar gate on the brow of the field which is clearly half-open and leaning as if it’s come off its hinges. *The gate’s open*, he mouths to himself.

‘Daddy,’ Freya says, a little too loudly, ‘is it a pony or a horse?’
‘It’s a stallion.’

Perhaps there’s a mare and foal beyond that gate, on the other side of the hedge – it’s possible. Maybe the mare is afraid of them approaching the foal and the stallion is trying to warn them off? Who knows? It feels plausible, in a moment full of uncertainties. He doesn’t even know how long they’ve been standing here. Probably just a minute or two. But Judy’s reached her limit.

‘Let’s go,’ she says.

‘Judy,’ he answers, ‘it’s going to move off, you know, it’s going to get bored. We’re doing nothing to bother it.’

But at that moment the horse seems to drop a shoulder and lurch forward, stumbling into movement in fast trotting steps, beginning a steady jog which runs alongside the brook and turns into a wide curve towards them. Judy pulls at his arm, fixing herself to him, and Freya twists behind them, hiding, almost tripping him up as he takes a step back. It’s moving too quickly. His mind freezes, staring at the ridge of coarse hair, shaking with each step along its spine. At the random pattern of splattered mud across its back, at the heavy sense of muscle bending along its side, details, he’s trying to take it in, trying to work it out, when suddenly it stops, as abruptly as it started, mistrust in its every move, on the edge of the marshy grass, its stilt-like hooves sinking, readjusting, making puncture holes in the ground that fill immediately with dirty water.

Judy swears, pulling him and Freya back as she does so, towards the oak tree.

‘Let’s get behind that trunk,’ she says, practically, and he knows that’s what they have to do and he has the unsettling image of the three of them, trying to skirt the big tree while that horse comes at them, and all three of them tripping up on each other and tripping up on those big roots he can see sticking out along the ground. It’s full of its own perils.

‘I’m not sure,’ he says. He takes a quick look at her expression, gauging it, and sees how dark and intense her eyes have become,

her face is as sharp as an axe head. She's not to be disagreed with. But just as they have started to move they all immediately stop, reacting on instinct to a new series of actions from the horse. A tossing and throwing of its head, its lips pulled back to reveal a dirty set of wide flat teeth. He sees strands of saliva falling from the mouth, the bumps of skin above, around the nostrils. Nostrils flaring in dark holes like the barrels of a gun, and he realizes he's seeing these things in more detail now, because the animal is closer, much closer.

Freya is twisting in his grip, doing the wrong thing, he looks at her shoes so clumsily placed in the soil, oddly turned. He imagines her running, how ineffective it would be, and he hopes the horse might tire or trip off to another edge of the field. Just a show of strength. Protecting its foal and family. A show of strength. And at that moment the stallion decides to come at them, dropping its shoulder like it did before but this time directed towards them, head on, in a stamping, bucking trot which shakes the horse as it gathers pace. It slews one way and for a second moves sideways at them, as if approaching a fence, its dark brittle hooves rising in uncertain steps – but still closing the distance, the horse snorting loudly and Guy sees its lips peeled back once more as it swings its head and neck from side to side. One crazed eye looks at him, then the other, afraid, but compelled to act. The head lowers in three sudden movements and he hears Freya scream and knows she's frozen. They all have. But with the scream he knows this is really happening – this is the beginning of a chain of events. They hear the hooves punching the wet mud and then the eerily hollow sound as it gallops across the dried earth under the tree, beneath the tree which until that point had been their tree, their protected patch of earth.

Guy does everything to avoid the mouth that lurches at him. He shouts a manic *wharr!* at it and the horse bridles, pulled up by phantom reins. For a moment he sees it impossibly tall, reared up, its onward momentum held at bay then, falling forward at him, scaring itself and rushing by in a skittish, terrified dash. The

stallion has thundered past, close, a shuddering dark shape of hair and solid curves, in the middle of it he had seen part of the head, tossing violently as high as his own head, the white of the horse's eye stretching, blurred, into the carpeted hair of its cheek. He'd seen a filthy tobacco stain of wetness, around its eye socket. And then the glisten of saliva, a thin strand of it, looping through the empty air after the horse vanished, with a snake-like motion, twisting as it fell. Guy has been stamped on; his foot feels shattered, leaving a hot sensation in his shoe, and he smells the stallion's unmistakable odour, a dark musk of outside fear which holds his jacket like a grip, even now.

He looks for the others and cannot see them, the way things must wipe away after a hurricane and, instead, he sees a glimpse of the horse as it trots away, an oddly feminine gait to it, much less fast than he thought it had been. He stares at the ugly raised stump of its tail, so like a bend of old rope, and the dry waxy folds of its backside.

An awareness floods him, quite suddenly, an overwhelming sense of strength surrounding him and he knows his body is at its centre, capable, intact, and with an arm which feels entirely disembodied from himself he reaches out into the blue nothingness that engulfs him and he literally sweeps Freya up in one curving motion which has her suddenly held to his face. She stares deeply into his eyes, trying to find a father's answers. He stumbles, wounded but invigorated, to the tree, and tries to push Freya up into it while Judy shouts something from near to him, or not so near, he's not that sure, and the tree almost comically seems to grow higher out of his reach as if wanting to be no part of this and Judy is shouting a warning again and Guy turns this time to see the stallion, once more, circling faster now, building a new momentum, still throwing its head up at imaginary riders. Guy hears an ugly rasping *huh* noise across the field and he stares unbelievably as the animal stumbles into a light-footed trot, coming at them. Judy must distract it, he thinks, she must wave at it and split its target so its run will miss them all. But she

doesn't. The hooves begin to hit the ground faster, an accelerating rhythm of one after the other, then in unison, bucking the front part of the stallion higher in quick shaking jerks, as the head lowers, swinging from side to side, until he sees the length of hair stretching down its back.

The second charge has more purpose. Guy screams at the horse, finds himself taking a rash leap towards it, and for a second he is across the animal's neck, lifted up, moving across the ground – he sees the grass blur as his separation from the others increases. A glimpse of the horseradish leaf, then of his daughter standing as rigid as a small scarecrow, white with fear, whiter than he's ever seen her before.

He falls forward from the stallion and seems to be overrun, run over, slipping down the animal's front under its head and his cheek becomes smeared with a great wipe of wetness from hair or skin, and then the relief to be falling, to be separate from the horse at least, although he sees it in terrible closeness, even the swinging motion of its throat, brushing him off, and the hardness of the animal getting even harder and more solid as he falls beneath it. Soft marshy ground here and the stallion's front leg punches into the mud like a steel piston right by his face and Guy gets splattered by drops of soft wet mud and is then alone again.

The field has a kind of stunned silence to it as Guy lifts himself on to one elbow and sees the oak tree and Judy and Freya still standing a little way from it. Judy, wanting to run to her husband, holding herself back to be with Freya. Both of them look so relieved, so happy in this little instant, it's a sight which fills him with love, their care, their absolute loyalty. The others are safe. He must have been brave, leaping at the horse like that, and perhaps it balked as a result, at the last minute; the danger's over now. He looks at Judy, and surprisingly they smile at each other. It's a strange moment, but it's really there, a warm smile between them, no sense of panic or recrimination or anything other than sheer relief.

He lifts himself up, a little groggily, and limps towards them.

It's actually a surprisingly little distance to be together again, and he hugs them, he's winded and defeated but he was their best chance, and then he looks for the stallion, knowing he's now acting instinctively, without caution. He's declared himself – he's declared that their life came before his. It's given him a wonderful sense of rightness, to be thinking this way.

'It's OK now,' he says, and then he says, 'where is that thing?' and he sees it trotting in a wider circle, collecting itself, the bastard, getting its breath back.

'The horse is so strong,' he says, absurdly, to the others, and he looks at the animal as it shakes itself down again, as if shaking off the memory of the man who'd briefly hung on its neck.

The first attack, yes, that was terrible, but the second one, I won that, he thinks. It's been scared off. Learn your lesson, and as he looks at the horse now he wonders how long it had taken to better this animal. It hadn't been agile. When it came at them, it didn't even try to deviate from the run. There was no disguise to the direction. It was determined, but it was really just a blatant show of bullying aggression and force.

There was an element of sport too, to have faced this thing. The stallion's runs had been brief and had clearly taken their toll. It had seemed petrified, even as it ran at them. Disorientated. He sees it across the field, breathing too quickly, its snorts and whinnies almost overlapping themselves. He imagines its great lumbering heart jerking rapidly and beyond its limit, and he wants it to die.

'I think it's over now,' Judy says, calmly, bringing his attention back to being with them. She's holding him tenderly and he notices she has the book of poems back in her hand, she's picked it up, in itself that smallest of gestures must mean the danger has now passed. The stallion has proven its point, it can go back through the gate to be with its family, if there is one, it can receive their gratitude and adoration if that's all it needs. He sighs with relief, and crouches down to take a breath, and to make himself equal with Freya, to be on her side, her support and

friend. Freya comes to him, so upset, so terribly small, her love for horses shattered, and he holds her, feels her warmth like it's the most precious substance the world can offer, which it clearly is. She whispers to him in a dry voice that she wants to go home now, can they go home now, and he smiles and says yes, let's go. And as he holds her and nestles into her neck he hears Judy's dead calm voice whisper *Oh no, oh dear God no* and Guy doesn't even look, he just pushes Freya away, pushes her to get behind that tree, that great solid tree, Freya can run round that trunk all day – the horse is too frightened to keep this up for long, and Guy has his daughter safe behind that commanding oak, at least, when the stallion begins to face him a third time. When he turns to confront it he discovers he now has a stump of wood in his fist, it's not a branch but it's heavy. The block of wood has been by their feet all along, but only now he's realized it's in fact a pretty good weapon. He can use it like a brick to club the horse on the jaw. Maybe break a tooth, or he can try and jam the corner of the log into the eye. He's capable of anything. He's seen this animal up close, knows where the patches of skin might be softer. He's earned an understanding of this danger, and a right to be cruel.

Guy has made this fight his own now, and the stallion knows it too, preparing itself, its head swinging in small movements from left to right. Perhaps a horse cannot see absolutely straight ahead, he thinks, abstractly. He knows that whatever happens at the end of this run the horse will lose interest, will stand panting in the pasture with total indifference and he and Judy and Freya will be able to walk calmly back to the gate as if nothing happened. He'll be able to brush the mud from his jeans, wipe the sweat from his palms and internalize the fear as his own, protect them, make light of what's happened. He sees its eye and flash of hair across the head, the spot just high of the mouth he will dig the log into. Guy braces himself for the arrival of the force as the animal canters at him, knowing instinctively that the tiny colourful disturbance at the edge of his vision is wrong, a wrong

thing, his daughter, abandoning the tree in a reckless dash. She's stumbling in little trippy steps across the grass in what seems to be a crazy intersection towards the stallion. Guy hears a simultaneous panicked shout from Judy and he knows this next second, this next momentous second, could become the worst moment of his life, the worst moment any man would ever have to witness, and he's struck rigid with the sudden overwhelming effort of keeping the impossible from happening, the effort of keeping these things apart.