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## Airlifting Horses

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B.H. Fairchild  
**Airlifting Horses**

Boy soldiers gawk and babble, eyes rapt  
in what seems like worship as the horses rise  
in the bludgeoned air. A brush fire is swarming  
roads and highways, and the last way out is up

or a flatboat in the lagoon. We used to drop  
the reins and let them race there, hurdling  
driftwood, heaps of kelp, waves lapping the sand  
in a lacemaker's weave of sea and foam.

Now they're startled into flight, and the air,  
stunned and savaged by the propeller's flail,  
beats us back. Its sudden thunder must be a storm  
their skins have for the first time failed to sense.

Cowering beneath the blades, we have cradled them  
like babies, strapped them in slings strong enough  
to lug trucks, and their silence is the purest tone  
of panic. Their great necks crane and arch,

the eyes flame, and the spidery shadows,  
big-bellied and stiff-legged, swallow us,  
then dwindle to blotches on the tarmac  
as they lift. The cable that hauls them up

like some kind of spiritual harness vanishes  
from sight. Their hooves pummel the heavy wind,  
and the earth they rode a thousand days or more  
falls away in hunks of brown and yellow.

Even the weight of their bodies has abandoned them,  
but now they are the gods we always wanted:  
winged as any myth, strange, distant, real,  
and we will never be ourselves till they return.

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