

Sissy-Boom-Bah

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My daddy used to call me a *sis-sy-boy*
because I favored school, reading, critters. He loved
his guns and his blaze-orange hunting; I discovered
my ears and eyes didn't care for such loudness.

All I've learned is this: animals gravitated to me,
and away from a jackass of meanery.
Cats took to scurrying when my daddy
Scrooge-walked nearby, as if a hobnail boot
might come caterwauling for kitty,
aimed with a steel toe. Whereas
I'd go to sleep in the hay loft, only to wake up
with warm kittens planting the flags of their claws
into my territory. I was damn-near happy
when they claimed me as theirs.

My daddy yelled at our dogs, whenever they did their
K-9 digging and not what he wanted. If dogs chased chipmunks
around the oaks for five minutes—Daddy'd howl at the acorns,
threaten to crucify the dogwoods, and when the dirty sinners returned
he couldn't understand why they were always slinking and dragging.

Finally, I got me some gumption and said:
gimme five--I'll have the bounds back
without creating problems. He growled
his consent and contempt. I let those dogs
snuff a bit, called out their names nicely, greeted them
with open arms when they bounded back,
straight to me, high-tailing out of the playful woods,

squirrels barking behind ‘em. He cursed us all.

The beast that ended me and my daddy
finally emerged: an injured horse. Daddy, out of character,
called them his “babies.” He’d connect clip
to steel ring in the halter, give a thoroughbred his full head
to dance on top of working-down-here vets and farriers.
Daddy thought he knew, but he didn’t know
how to handle such animals proper.
Angry, a foot-stomped veterinarian
said “time for you to take over that horse, boy.”
I was a bare-lipped eleven.

I took the lead, doubled the shank’s chain,
snapped the big horse’s head to attention.
I mentally told that colt: *You see what I see.*
I’m here to help--work with me,
let’s stand still together.

The horse abided at perfect attention
for ministrations, and the application
of healing salves. I patted his strong long nose
and scratched his ears. We were good.

The vet didn’t say hell or humbug, chose not to look
at the man paying the bill as I gave the horse back
to my father’s hand, me laughing *that’s how a sissy-boy*
gets it done. The animal at the end
of leather and chain began to pull away.