Norm Sacuta (nsacuta@oznewmedia.com) works as a writer and editor for an educational on-line publishing company in Edmonton. His work has recently appeared in The New Quarterly, Grain, and the anthology Threshold, and he is currently at work on a short story cycle. He says of “Morning After the Rodeo,” which comments on the gay rodeo held in Calgary each Canada Day weekend, “if people find a poem like ‘Morning After the Rodeo’ politically problematic, that’s a good thing: the whole event is problematic.”

No tent is without an open invitation, every open shirt is a pale imitation, just what’s expected, so expected these parents newly arrived, awaiting the exodus of buggers tell their children to stay arm’s-length from those boys who step a bit too gingerly into the morning. These real men, real cowboys, real ones except the children know now not to come close just like real ones except, flowers bloom inside those big men’s jeans when flaps flip open and boots, a bit too pointy, point into the morning – real enough, but not really convincing anyone. The children keep their distance.

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But it's their voices wake us
and we drown back into syrup, two-stepping, stuck,
convincing ourselves, excepting ourselves
from all these children
who have been warned

*keep your distance.* The distance between convincing
and a convincing cowboy. Yesterday
one stepped out of the camp shower, tossed back
the wet curtain where a half-dozen men waited
to wake up, and woke up suddenly
his immense body a chest beyond any gym and we all
thought *this is it, this is real*
*but faggot-none-the-less!* We were proud of
his accomplishment. He left quickly
blushed the same embarrassment as Marilyn
seeking some acceptance of his other skills.

But who's here for that? A bull-rider, sure
except we watch not the event but how it feels.
So much animal jabbing skyward one moment
his loaded jeans push down on the back, rising. Imagine
ourselves not the cowboy but between him
and the Brahma. We are ground
into nothing but him, and dream of it.

(He knows it, too. Would not fuck anyone like us.
Wants a mirror without what goes on in his head.
Someone to hate what he is
and love, watch, oh, and blow him
while he rides.)

You see, cowboy, there is this one tragedy above all:
that love, falling hard, head-over-tail,
a great love need not be returned to be great.

Last night a tall, thin queen with eyes
so mascara thick they were Miss Kitty's,
crossed the dance floor in cowboy boots
fit for a concubine, a pink blouse and red wranglers —
her black hat correct except a wig
shot out its sides like Rod Stewart.
And the panic spread too easy
cowboys two-stepped wide around her
as she wriggled to the patio,
disgust following like a snake’s hiss —
exposed, exposed, hear them

not a real cowboy
but even the Marlboro man has his toes
up around his ears, here.

Ride home to this morning.
The children keep, keeping their distance and
their parents wait for the fakes to rise
so the campsite will be safe.

Of a Sunday morning, ruined
by this rodeo’s last, late ride.
They miss their morning paper by the campfire,
the photographs of car crashes, real captions
full of empathy.
They’ve cried over these
for want of fame, a need — some tragedy not too close
to befall them.

The world is full
of victory banquets, great big buckles
and purses almost big enough to make a living.