

A FIGURE

KATHERINE GAFFNEY

I've always seen the horse as stronger than her. She once killed a kitten with her feet—not my mother, the horse in her stall, when the kitten, blind and mapless, wandered in. But my mother

could have killed it, if it came to that, just as she's killed the pain of betrayal by the two stalks that hold her upright, by far not her first betrayal in this life. First the knees and now the hips.

She could have been a permanently praying crone on her then unbending knees. After her hips, she should have been a fixed stone figure, hands thrown up to something unearthly.

But she turns to the earthly, working to lift the right leg and then left over the wooden threshold that is the stall where the kitten died and my horse's plate-sized hooves nestle into pine chips.

All she wants is to stand next to her, to place her hand beneath her tattered mane, to take some of the bristling white hair with her, ribbons of achievement. To, for a moment, use the horse as her third

leg for then she would have six, even better than the three, she thinks, she works with now. What a sight she'd be using a horse for a cane, having a horse for new legs. She could be modern myth. A figure

mothers would tell their daughters of, not to fear something larger than them like failing bones or time or horses, but to take them in stride; the stride my mother is working to regain. But that takes time my mother doesn't believe she has, though she would never say so.