

# The Gift Horse

Ernesto: Several years ago I maxed out my credit card for an Aspen ski trip. Perfect snow. Perfect day. You know, fresh powder, hot sun. I was flying. No falls, no fears. It was a buddy trip. Just a bunch of friends hitting the slopes, checking out guys. So that night we're coming down for dinner, and the lodge has this huge-ass two-story stone and slate staircase, just suspended over all the free-standing fireplaces and leather couches in the lounge below. And we're laughing and talking, and I'm on. I'm just cute and knowing it. And it happens. My foot somehow catches on the back of my boot and in a very fast slow motion my face is making its way toward the stone steps, and I hit, completely aware of my front teeth shattering. For an instant time stops, and then in fast forward I'm falling again. Trying to grab something, a banister, a wall, and I'm ricocheting off like a rag doll. Seventeen or twenty-three seconds later...I'm perfectly conscious lying in a heap, looking up two stories, and before I black out I think, wow...Antonio looks great in that sweater, and Jesus, is that my blood? Five fractures, four breaks, one concussion, and several graphs later, I'm fine. My right shoulder hurts when it rains, my nose and teeth are better than they were before...But still, going on five years now, and I have not once walked down stairs without holding onto both bannisters and looking at my feet. I'm an elevator man. But this. This is such a different kind of recovery...and I still don't know what to hold onto. For safety. And I can't find the goddamn elevator.