

SHE HAD SOME HORSES

She had some horses.
She had horses who were bodies of sand.
She had horses who were maps drawn of blood.
She had horses who were skins of ocean water.
She had horses who were the blue air of sky.
She had horses who were fur and teeth.
She had horses who were clay and would break.
She had horses who were splintered red cliff.

She had some horses.

She had horses with eyes of trains.
She had horses with full, brown thighs.
She had horses who laughed too much.
She had horses who threw rocks at glass houses.
She had horses who licked razor blades.

She had some horses.

She had horses who danced in their mothers' arms.
She had horses who thought they were the sun and their
bodies shone and burned like stars.
She had horses who waltzed nightly on the moon.
She had horses who were much too shy, and kept quiet
in stalls of their own making.

She had some horses.

She had horses who liked Creek Stomp Dance songs.
She had horses who cried in their beer.
She had horses who spit at male queens who made
them afraid of themselves.
She had horses who said they weren't afraid.
She had horses who lied.
She had horses who told the truth, who were stripped
bare of their tongues.

She had some horses.

She had horses who called themselves, "horse."
She had horses who called themselves, "spirit," and kept
their voices secret and to themselves.
She had horses who had no names.
She had horses who had books of names.

She had some horses.

She had horses who whispered in the dark, who were afraid to speak.
She had horses who screamed out of fear of the silence, who
carried knives to protect themselves from ghosts.
She had horses who waited for destruction.
She had horses who waited for resurrection.

She had some horses.

She had horses who got down on their knees for any saviour.
She had horses who thought their high price had saved them.
She had horses who tried to save her, who climbed in her
bed at night and prayed as they raped her.

She had some horses.

She had some horses she loved.
She had some horses she hated.

These were the same horses.

by Joy Harjo

THE DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

*Given my disposition, I will always be
circuitous, precocious, an Embellisher.
- Lucie Brock-Broido*

Given my character, I will always be
the fir out my window—slow to act, to make decisions.

Given my disposition, I will live my life in one place,
not trembling like the aspen, but swaying
like the heavy spruce, troubled by forces larger than me—

the wind, the rains, the sun. Do you know what radiant
means, I asked the pretty child at the party
who was not aware of the word that she was wearing.

When you come, the beginning of a letter I wish to write,
when you come, this summer, when you stay with me.

Given my disposition, I will always be retractable,
with my father's long hands and feet.
If I want, glittered and posturing. If I don't, like the willow,

slouching. Given my temperament, I can be found
where the wood-orchid spreads, under an awning of pines.
In the pale hour, before dawn, which belongs to deer.

Boëhme believed that god marked each object with a sign
so that humans would know which ones would cure.
Walnut, for brain injuries, headaches. Rosehip, for snot

and tears. Bone-knit, the common name of comfrey.
If form is of the essence, what do the magicians have to say?
If you know, keep silent and say nothing to the scoffers.

To employ the doctrine of signatures, you must identify
the shape of your distress. The shape for grief—
a charred tree. A broken wing. Or maybe not the shape

of the disease, but its location. Where fear might be found.
The nerves. A trembling mycorrhizal web. Given
my disposition, in old age, I will be susceptible as the wind.

A Lion in Winter

As long as the lions are rampant, I will stay
With him.

As long as the clouded leopards

Surround the clouded bed with their gold & cirrus
Air, I will be there too. I was reading

When the winter shooed-
Away the fall and whitely lit the oil lamps of early

Dark. The night was turret-shaped in childhood,
A bunch of mint and mane and swale.

What will I be when he is husk
To himself,
Some flax or ghost of lynx in later winter light.

- Lucy Brock-Broido

YOUR HEART? IT IS A FROZEN ORANGE

Your heart?—it is a frozen orange.
Inside it has juniper oil but no light
and a porous look like gold: an outside
promising joy to the man who looks.

My heart is a fiery pomegranate,
its reds clustered, and its wax opened,
which could offer you its tender beads
with the stubbornness of a man in love.

Yes, what an experience of sadness it is
to go to your heart and find a frost
made of primitive and terrifying snow!

- Miguel Hernandez

LOVE SHOULD GROW UP LIKE A WILD IRIS
IN THE FIELDS

Love should grow up like a wild iris in the fields,
unexpected, after a terrible storm, opening a purple
mouth to the rain, with not a thought to the future,
ignorant of the grass and the graveyard of leaves
around, forgetting its own beginning. Love should
grow like a wild iris
but does not.

Love more often is to be found in kitchens at the dinner hour,
tired out and hungry, lingers over table in houses where
the walls record movements; while the cook is probably
angry,
and the ingredients of the meal are budgeted, while
a child cries feed me now and her mother not quite
hysterical says over and over, wait just a bit, just a bit
love should grow up in the fields like a wild iris
but never does

really startle anyone, was to be expected, was to be
predicted, is almost absurd, goes on from day to day, not
quite
blindly, gets taken to the cleaners every fall, sings old
songs over and over, and falls on the same piece of rug that
never gets tacked down, gives up, wants to hide, is not
brave, knows too much, is not like an
Iris growing wild but more like
staring into space
in the street
not quite sure
which door it was, annoyed about the sidewalk being
Slippery, trying all the doors, thinking
If love wished the world to be well, it would be well.

Love should
grow up like a wild iris, but doesn't, it come from
the midst of everything else, sees like the iris
of an eye, when the light is right,
feels in blindness and when there is nothing else is
tender, blinks, and opens
face up to the skies.

by Susan Griffin

WHAT DO WOMEN WANT

I want a red dress.
I want it flimsy and cheap,
I want it too tight, I want to wear it
until someone tears it off me.
I want it sleeveless and backless,
this dress, so no one has to guess
what's underneath. I want to walk down
the street past Thrifty's and the hardware store
with all those keys glittering in the window,
past Mr. and Mrs. Wong selling day-old
donuts in their café, past the Guerra brothers
slinging pigs from the truck and onto the dolly,
hoisting the slick snouts over their shoulders.
I want to walk like I'm the only
woman on earth and I can have my pick.
I want that red dress bad.
I want it to confirm
your worst fears about me,
to show you how little I care about you
or anything except what
I want. When I find it, I'll pull that garment
from its hanger like I'm choosing a body
to carry me into this world, through
the birth-cries and the love-cries too,
and I'll wear it like bones, like skin,
it'll be the goddamned
dress they bury me in.

- Kim Addonizio

SEPARATION

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

by W.S. Merwin

BLESSING THE BOATS

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

by Lucille Clifton

SIMILES

The night was as black as . . .
The child trembled like a
His hands were gentle as. . .
After the earthquake, the city looked like. . .
My grief was like a . . .

DOVES

My hands are like two birds,
doves, you might say.
They fly through the air
searching for light in the shadow.
When my hands saw you,
they became transfixed.
I'm afraid they'll go crazy
if they can't light on you.

by Gloria Fuertes

MY PEOPLE

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

by Langston Hughes

HAIRS

Everybody in our family has different hair. My Papa's hair is like a broom, all up in the air. And me, my hair is lazy. It never obeys barrettes or bands. Carlos' hair is thick and straight. He doesn't need to comb it. Nenny's hair is slippery--slides out of your hand. And Kiki, who is the youngest, has hair like fur.

But my mother's hair, my mother's hair, like little rosettes, like little candy circles all curly and pretty because she pinned it in pincurls all day, sweet to put your nose into when she is holding you, holding you and you feel safe, is the warm smell of bread before you bake it, is the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed still warm with her skin, and you sleep near her, the rain outside falling and Papa snoring. The snoring, the rain, and Mama's hair that smells like bread.

by Sandra Cisneros