

She had some horses by Joy Harjo

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 long, pointed breasts.
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 savior.
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.

From *SHE HAD SOME HORSES* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1983)

Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation – by Natalie Diaz

Angels don't come to the reservation.
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—
death. And death
eats angels, I guess, because I haven't seen an angel
fly through this valley ever.
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—
he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical
Indian. Sure he had wings,
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,
kids grow like gourds from women's bellies.
Like I said, no Indian I've ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—
Nazarene church holds one every December,
organized by Pastor John's wife. It's no wonder
Pastor John's son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.
Quit bothering with angels, I say. They're no good for Indians.
Remember what happened last time
some white god came floating across the ocean?
Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels
up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing
velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,
we're better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and
'xactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.
You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they'll be marching you off to
Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they've mapped out for us.

From *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2012)

Penny Men

(for Emiliano, who came to live, and die, picking grapes)

These are the men from Mexico's boot, the ones
who fell out from a hole in its bottom. They are bony
but well-attached as scissors. When they become
hungrier, they will cut their own stomachs
in half. They come to live like loose change

in a country that drops its pennies
and leaves them there; in a country whose jingle
of coins muffles the sound of backbones cracking.
These men squeezed through the gate, that slot,
and found the backroads with crosses

on which the grapevines wave their leaves
like dollar bills. Green, edible, the vineyards
promise to feed--to stuff--their pockets
though the cups of wine aren't theirs
to drink. Thirst concerns the boss no more than heat,

nor how much of it garlands each head.
After work, their faces glow sun-flat; they resemble
copper *centenarios* with dust instead of a bridge
over the nose, with a rust-heavy hinge for a mouth.
These faces promise to reveal exotic lands

and languages. But the bridges are impassable,
distant as the waters of a river on a map,
and the tongues are too tired to speak.
They sit beneath the pines for shade,
their heat-suffused hair steaming off. Precipitations

of sweat clean off their arms, those thin pokers
that have been stirring ash all day. They express no
criticism here, no shame. Their ears build up dirt
into stones inside their wells, at times confusing
the memory of a woman who speaks inside their sleep.

To stretch out the afternoon breeze, they play
blackjack and twenty-one, gambling bottle caps
instead of silver. Slowly, the darkness in their eyes
blends with the shadows; the sparkle of the caps
and beer can tabs ascends into the canopy of sky.

Beds are too luxurious; back seats too cramped

and sticky in summer. The men prefer cool car hoods,
their own hands for pillows, the privacy of twilight.
The moon, their second mother, knits their sleeping
coats, which always fade away with stars.

Some dawns, not all the men wake up so quickly.
One man always sinks too deep in dreams, clinging
to the woman he wishes he'd never left--the woman
who throws her voice toward the North, whose words
stir up a breeze for all the men below.

:: Rigoberto Gonzalez, in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review* #6 (1995)

homage to my hips

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

By Lucille Clifton, from *Good Woman*

In Praise of Their Divorce

by Tony Hoagland

And when I heard about the divorce of my friends,
I couldn't help but be proud of them,

that man and that woman setting off in different directions,
like pilgrims in a proverb

—him to buy his very own toaster oven,
her seeking a prescription for sleeping pills.

Let us keep in mind the hidden forces
which had struggled underground for years

to push their way to the surface—and that finally did,
cracking the crust, moving the plates of earth apart,

releasing the pent-up energy required
for them to rent their own apartments,

for her to join the softball league for single mothers
for him to read George the Giraffe over his speakerphone

at bedtime to the six-year-old.

The bible says, Be fruitful and multiply

but is it not also fruitful to subtract and to divide?
Because if marriage is a kind of womb,

divorce is the being born again;
alimony is the placenta one of them will eat;

loneliness is the name of the wet-nurse;
regret is the elementary school;

endurance is the graduation.
So do not say that they are splattered like dropped lasagna

or dead in the head-on collision of clichés
or nailed on the cross of their competing narratives.

What is taken apart is not utterly demolished.
It is like a great mysterious egg in Kansas

At Pegasus

By Terrance Hayes

They are like those crazy women
 who tore Orpheus
 when he refused to sing,

these men grinding
 in the strobe & black lights
 of Pegasus. All shadow & sound.

"I'm just here for the music,"
 I tell the man who asks me
 to the floor. But I have held

a boy on my back before.
 Curtis & I used to leap
 barefoot into the creek; dance

among maggots & piss,
 beer bottles & tadpoles
 slippery as sperm;

we used to pull off our shirts,
 & slap music into our skin.
 He wouldn't know me now

at the edge of these lovers' gyre,
 glitter & steam, fire,
 bodies blurred sexless

by the music's spinning light.
 A young man slips his thumb
 into the mouth of an old one,

& I am not that far away.
 The whole scene raw & delicate
 as Curtis's foot gashed

on a sunken bottle shard.
 They press hip to hip,
 each breathless as a boy

carrying a friend on his back.
 The foot swelling green
 as the sewage in that creek.

We never went back.

But I remember his weight
better than I remember

my first kiss.

These men know something
I used to know.

How could I not find them

beautiful, the way they dive & spill
into each other,

the way the dance floor

takes them,
wet & holy in its mouth.

See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16207#sthash.w0mELMRZ.dpuf>

My Father Teaches Me to Dream

By Jan Beatty

You want to know what work is?
I'll tell you what work is:
Work is work.
You get up. You get on the bus.
You don't look from side to side.
You keep your eyes straight ahead.
That way nobody bothers you—see?
You get off the bus. You work all day.
You get back on the bus at night. Same thing.
You go to sleep. You get up.
You do the same thing again.
Nothing more. Nothing less.
There's no handouts in this life.
All this other stuff you're looking for—
it ain't there.
Work is work.

Different Ways to Pray

By - Naomi Shihab Nye

There was the method of kneeling,
a fine method, if you lived in a country
where stones were smooth.
The women dreamed wistfully of bleached courtyards,
hidden corners where knee fit rock.
Their prayers were weathered rib bones,
small calcium words uttered in sequence,
as if this shedding of syllables could somehow
fuse them to the sky.

There were the men who had been shepherds so long
they walked like sheep.
Under the olive trees, they raised their arms—
Hear us! We have pain on earth!
We have so much pain there is no place to store it!
But the olives bobbed peacefully
in fragrant buckets of vinegar and thyme.
At night the men ate heartily, flat bread and white cheese,
and were happy in spite of the pain,
because there was also happiness.

Some prized the pilgrimage,
wrapping themselves in new white linen
to ride buses across miles of vacant sand.
When they arrived at Mecca
they would circle the holy places,
on foot, many times,
they would bend to kiss the earth
and return, their lean faces housing mystery.

While for certain cousins and grandmothers
the pilgrimage occurred daily,
lugging water from the spring
or balancing the baskets of grapes.
These were the ones present at births,
humming quietly to perspiring mothers.
The ones stitching intricate needlework into children's dresses,
forgetting how easily children soil clothes.

There were those who didn't care about praying.
The young ones. The ones who had been to America.
They told the old ones, you are wasting your time.
Time?—The old ones prayed for the young ones.

They prayed for Allah to mend their brains,
for the twig, the round moon,
to speak suddenly in a commanding tone.

And occasionally there would be one
who did none of this,
the old man Fowzi, for example, Fowzi the fool,
who beat everyone at dominoes,
insisted he spoke with God as he spoke with goats,
and was famous for his laugh.

from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* (Portland, Oregon: Far Corner Books, 1995).

Bluebird

By Charles Bukowski

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say, stay in there, I'm not going
to let anybody see
you.

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I pour whiskey on him and inhale
cigarette smoke
and the whores and the bartenders
and the grocery clerks
never know that
he's
in there.

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say,
stay down, do you want to mess
me up?
you want to screw up the
works?
you want to blow my book sales in
Europe?
there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too clever, I only let him out
at night sometimes
when everybody's asleep.
I say, I know you're there,
so don't be
sad.
then I put him back,
but he's singing a little
in there, I haven't quite let him
die
and we sleep together like
that
with our
secret pact
and it's nice enough to

make a man
weep, but I don't
weep, do
you?