

WAITING FOR ACHILLES

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Black
Lawrence
Press

For Lucie Brock-Broido
in memoriam

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ONE BEAUTIFUL NEVER

The black horse
I chased one night
All the way to the shore,
Flashlight & halter in hand,
To see it swimming out,
Mane streaming,
Nostril in the air.
One long *Ha Ha*
Illumined by the moon
For just that moment.

VALENTINO

It's taking a long time,
The thoroughbred heart
Is oversized & strong.

Overcome by colic
& old age,
He gasps, gums blue,

Lying on his side
In this bloody sun.
I'm drinking water

Hoping to dissolve,
Leave, stay,
I can't decide.

We put a parasol
Over his beautiful head,
He strains to rise,

Kicks at the air,
But he will never
Stand again.

His deep animal eye
Holds a part of me
I won't get back.

I retreat
To a little shrine:
Honeysuckle patio, music

In the breeze,
My grandfather telling
Horse stories,

Oaks & high clouds,
So long ago, I am
So young,

I cannot watch
His last breath, his
Side still. Heart

Stop, the black never.
I walk away
From the dusty corral

Into the woods
To the pit where fire
Will not light.

ADAPTATION

Just born, the foal's hooves are soft,
Silky blond tendrils

Soon to harden in the air
Of our empire of dirt.

How vast are the legions
Of dead,

How small the bands
Of living,

How exceptional
To be alive

As this gorgeous, wet creature
Just emerged

From the dark kingdom
Stands.

ODE TO SUMMER: JAMAICA BAY

By August, the horse's ribs show,
Its face wired on the face
Of my old man
Hovering in heaven
His ire of stable stink & mess.

Bands of helmeted children
In same-color shirts
Gallop up & down the beach,
Little armies of summer
Forgetfulness. No fear of drowning.

I gallop up & down,
Trot in circles
On the low tide strand,
Wind a damp promise
Howling away the lines of me.

By August, I start to darken.
September's grip begins to tighten
Eternal return to the harness
Of work, urban autumn,
The drills & quadrilles,

The deeper blue sky, the distance
Closer. The best color
For a boat on the water

Is red. The best color for a horse
Is black.

THROWN

Racing in the open field singing
Feels like forever,

Black neck, flying mane.
Then a rip

The body beneath
Shifts,

Ground rushes
Up, my shoulder sparks.

So much pain,
Such a small shadow in the bone.

Gone is the perfect time.
I ride

Terrified of the purple
Descent, color

Of kings, emperors, popes.
All fall, all.

BAKERSFIELD

Distant hills wrinkled like loose skin on
A cattle carcass,

Salt brush & cedar, dry clay,
This land is a wild Mexico of the mind.

Melancholy horses, oil pumps, scraped
Mineral cliffs

Give way to watered fields, green industry
That oppresses

Workers' backs bent like tables set on
Leafy carpet,

Losses submerged in white-cloth bustle.
The dull land whispers

Its barren secret: memory knows
There is no water here.

HORSE LATITUDES

The past lies in the brine
 Of equatorial water,
Parchment-folded,
Black ink veining where the quill paused.

Rich doldrums
 Full of gold
Where Spanish sailors
 Threw the Queen's horses,
Palomino, the color of her hair.

On the Outer Banks
 Each wave a breaking
Promise of the New World,
 Lost colonies,
Lost ships, wild ponies
 Swimming even now.

SIERRA MADRE

My beautiful mother, in trouble, packs us up.

Los Angeles blazes pollutants, incandescent

Breeze at sunset ruffles honeysuckle,

Long fingers of poplar shadow the lawn.

We head west in a swerve of canyon, blinded.

Palm trees in silhouette like nodding dolls,

The house behind us swallowed.

When I can't sleep, I say Hail Marys.

When I do, it is a day of water at the bottom of the sea.

NOCTURNE

Her bone brow
Frowns at me: Broken again?

My cheek burns.
She is the murderer I run from.

Dodging silver bolts
Like the hooves of a rearing horse,

Mother & daughter
On either side of a locked door,

We rock & weep,
& blister the air.

ARS POETICA

The flight of a bolting horse
& the rider

In a field of sad trees.
A battered sea wall,

Waves seeping through
Porous mortar.

My palm grazing the sheet
After you've left,

The desert of Louisiana,
Poor mistake for a lonely wilderness,

A beam of darkness
Breaking night into pieces.

WAITING FOR ACHILLES

I am afraid & so I run.

If I wave a white flag, he'll kill me,

If I fight, I'll die,

I run

Falling inside every stride.

Where is the hero? Where

Is my swift horse?

Achilles is a tiger, a tank, a raging fire,

Every fear I ever had

In one. I run.

The gods help, especially Apollo

God of poetry & music

& cowards.

I know this will end

Because everything ends,

Sweet life even in the middle

Contains seeds of death.

I see my beautiful wife, my infant son
In their graves,

If I stop running, she will be raped,
He will be tossed from the walls,
I run

Until my brother appears.
Courage flows like a flash flood
After heavy rain,

But flood is dangerous,
Destroys lives & huts,
Washes away precious cattle.

You know how this goes:
My brother is a phantom & I
Am human.

It is fate come at last,
I fight
Brave in the end, just

For the sake of it.