

In the Good Years

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Dead Horses

I like to imagine when horses were unremarkable
as Toyotas. When you wouldn't turn to your companion
after spotting them in a field and say "horses."

I'm alive because an ancestress on horseback
caught a man's eye on Ocean Parkway.
He followed her in his car; they married.

Across the hemisphere, my great-grandfather
hoisted his thirteen-year-old bride
onto a horse and stole her away.

When she saw her mother again, they were both old women.
But I wouldn't wish it undone.
I want to get born.

I never asked my grandmother what she loved
about horses—shattering speed, how their eyelashes
look human, that they're loyal as dogs but dignified?

She owned something like one-sixtieth
of a racehorse; she's not alive but Just Zip It still is.
I tell a friend I'm thinking a lot about dead horses

and she believes I mean dying, the broken

back in *Anna Karenina* or the glue factory.

No. I am thinking of my own dead and how

they were carried. Once saddled across a mare

named Ramona, I was afraid of the burden of my body,

that she would buckle—an animal once ridden into war.

I was a teenager and jealous of the freedom

I imagined belonged to the thin.

Now I know no one feels free,

not even the creature who devoured

the countryside, ravenous for the time

we were allowed in the field.

The Mothers

My aunt's husband left her for a pilot and my parents' marriage stalled when I was too young to notice. Eventually they'd reconcile, but for a while it was two sisters and their daughters; one worked and one watched the children. Our mothers were fourth and fifth children of seven. One brown-haired and one blonde. Thin as models because their mother smoked and would make a single box of spaghetti for dinner. One dropped out of college to live on a boat; teach English in Colombia; scuba dive at night, the jellyfish like lanterns. One married the boy she'd loved since fourteen. Each went to grad school twice. They say unforgivable things, then forgive each other. They teach us our phone number by singing a song. They teach us Miss Mary Mack; disaster preparedness; if you think he's cheating, he's definitely cheating, and if you *don't* think it, he might still be. They teach us never let him see you cry. Between them: three husbands; three daughters with soft, vowel-y names; two sons an afterthought. The boys don't know our mothers the way we do—we met them when they were young and unmapped. When I snatched my cousin's drawing, a paper garden tearing between us, my aunt ripped mine in half, to teach fairness. The mothers fought wildly then, when we were simple enough to be adored. Before we grew up and became less comprehensible—not

proud enough with men, weak, crying when angry. My aunt would say about her ex *I never once begged him*, even though they had an infant: a story meant to be instructive. About this they would always agree, though there were some months the moms didn't speak. They criticized each other's parenting. One loathed the other's husband. In their late middle age, I think of them as flowers once bent toward different suns. They speak almost in code, omit all proper nouns. They make me wish I had a sister, and I do have a sister. When they were girls, they counted airplanes from opposite windows in their twin beds. *I see one. I see another.* But it was the same plane.

Egg Party

The spring my systems go wrong, I throw a party
where the theme is eggs. Chicken eggs deviled

and overburdened. Caviar held precariously
to potato chip by a slick of cream.

The idea is rebirth, claim whatever rituals
remain palatable. Spring of resisting

augury, not interpreting what it means
that one part of my body wants

to kill another part. In the dark
socket of jar, the black roe teem.

Some people are nauseated by clusters:
a shucked pomegranate disclosing its cells,

studded face of a sunflower enough to swoon.
That's not what makes me sick. I spoon,

I scratch the blood from boiled egg halves
with a fingernail. I am now buzzing

with terrible purpose: white blood cells
assemble in my throat like a swarm

of ants taking down larger prey;
I'll be obvious and picture a butterfly,

the thyroid always described as a winged gland.
Meanwhile, I go on chopping dill and tapping

eggs open against the sink. My friend, a twin, helps peel—
cracks a double-yolk and misses her sister.

This spring, in the forest, a small bird hooked onto my palm
with devastating trust. Two sunflower seeds slotted into her beak

as I fit into my life, almost comfortably,
almost equal to the task, the daily braveries required.

At the party where no one is heartbroken, there's a touching
fidelity to theme. The florals and golds. The small wants.

Egg whites fizzing the whiskey in our cups.
The possible fish popping against teeth.