

BARBARA RAS

Herd

I felt hands cup my eyes, lower the lids, and hold them
until they stopped shuddering,

like in the story,
when the girl covers a horse's eyes to calm it, release
it from standing watch.

You and I stood next to each other
in a business meeting, yes, at work,

shoulder to shoulder our invisible shadows smoldering.

Then I lay down on my side, stretched out my four legs,
a horse able to sleep, safe with its herd watching.

In my body I felt the warmth of the ground
connect with the hot of the sun,
a current carried the feel of your starched shirt and the grit
of dirt against my cheek.

Your name drifted away
into pallid clouds, mine started to follow, and a tongue
new to me in reach reached to lick them back.

Or maybe it was you who lay down like a horse giving
itself to dreams.

Your muscles twitched. Heat rose
off your body like remorse exploring the air for mercy.

All this I knew, being your herd, and sharing your restlessness
for tall grass, wind playing over a prairie that hides
bird skull, a brass brooch, teeth.

Could our colleagues smell the horses, the horse heat, the horse breath?

I heard “oysters,” whispered in my ear as if I had asked your favorite food.

No, I’d asked how many carrots a horse eats in a day.

We didn’t speak of what we didn’t know
how to hold in our hands.

As always the day fell.
The night caught it as always.