

Wild Horse Shakes Her Mane

Everyone thought you were broken
in, tamed like that russet mare
standing in the pasture, her calm eye
on a man fixing the fence.

Everyone thought you were living
content within normal borders, but you
leave unnoticed,
wander unharnessed into the first
yellow strands of dawn, hear

distant violins linger over an oboe,
proclaim spring in the Appalachians.

You shed winter from your limbs,
reach into air as if to hold
sound in your open hands,
then give it to the wind again
and follow.

Sandy Shreve

White Crane Spreads Her Wings

She stands at the edge
of a lagoon, still
hunter patiently waiting
for fish, she stands
out, white target in green reeds
where redwings take off,
dive-bomb the idea
of a threat.

You name this moment
white statue in water.

Then the statue opens
each wing like a wave —
you want to learn
all the possibilities
in her elegant strength,
to keep your balance
even under attack
fearlessly
to lift your arms into the air,
expose your heart
without surrender.

Strum the Guitar

All your life you've tried
to synchronize fingers and string,

a fascination that began
tangled in laces and cats' cradles,

the imagined music in a mute guitar
on a cottage wall—

begging your uncle to play,
though an inkling that he'd forgotten

how, crept between his evasions
like betrayal. Years later

you spent hours with the gift
your mother could not afford,

feeling your way into the rhythms
of protest and love. Now you reach

a moment in this sequence
where you can break an opponent's arm

or waltz with what your own two hands
have abandoned, hold

the hope of harmony
in your arms again.

Sandy Shreve

Repulse Monkey

You ease back a step, pass
one palm over the other, reach—

for the cute curly-tailed primate swinging tree to tree
you're supposed to push away. Wonder,
why monkey? Remember

a rigid line of militia in the sixties, those foolish
and beautiful students, watching the visored
eyes of their brothers and sliding
daisies into the muzzles of M16s
as if weapons could be vases.

You'd rather shove the violent
off the face of the earth, but it is
more complicated than that—monkey

is one name for a small
gun, and the delicate mimulus.

You ease back a step,
pass one palm over the other reach
for a stance of praise.

Grasp the Sparrow's Tail

You want to fly with your feet
anchored to the ground, like bamboo
in the wind

where sparrows congregate,
impatient,
they do not wait
long for another turn at the feeder,
are quick to flap chickadees
away from their seeds.

More like demons
than souls released from the bondage
of our bodies, these birds
flick their little tails,
insolent.

You happily snatch one
down from its ecstasy in sky

and as you pull it back to live
on this earth again,
its heart turns to a terror
your fingers cannot bear to hold.

When you let go,
your feathered hands soar.

Sandy Shreve

Wave Hands like Clouds

Wrapped in an aura of warmth,
your hands cast spells —

frost on the lawn becomes mist
lifting, as if to water the stars, while you

sidle toward a world
you must confront,

decorate daybreak with ribbons of shade
and brilliant light.

Dangerous and playful,
the wide intent of your eyes.

There are no storms in the clouds
you create but

they will travel far,
little white arias in heaven's blue

eye, they will crescendo
elsewhere to cast lightning and rain

out of a violet sky.

Double Wind Blows in Ears

This is no place for the doldrums,
though at first your palms are flat,
facing out, calling a halt
to extremes, their opposite seasons.

You reel in summer
from the south Pacific, winter
from Arctic lands,
hold them close, believing

you are capable of taming both
monsoons at once,
that your two lungs can contain
all the howling in the world, transform it

to a warm breeze. You think
you've been turning the wind
into kisses,
but your hands are clenched.

For the first time, you know
how to use your fists, discover
you can strike a blow
at the temple of your enemy.

Sandy Shreve

Snake Creeps Down

You start at the end
of a kick to the groin, one arm hooked
high in the air, the other
folded over your heart. Balanced

graceful as a crane
on one leg, you are poised to grab
Jacob's ladder and climb—

but your foot is on the snake's tail
and you must

slide. You think of the snake, not
as gendered, as devil or deity,
but indifferent, the androgynous
arm of a pendulum, bearing
your weight as you swoop
to the ground and rise into air again,

its inevitable arc carrying you
safely home.

Needle at Sea Bottom

In middle-age you begin
to forget little things, lose them
like dropped stitches. Just yesterday,
even the needle disappeared into the depths
where the misplaced wait

to be retrieved. Now you stroke the air
as if you are crawling through water,
but the movement becomes a dive deep enough
to touch bottom.

All the way down you peer into green
light, caress memories you have long wanted
back, gather them into your arms
until it is time to breathe again

and resurface, buoyantly
empty-handed.

Sandy Shreve

Cross Hands

You have crossed your fingers
until the tips were white with hope
or betrayal, crossed

lines, arbitrary and fixed
borders, bridges, even continents,
friends,
your heart.

Here, in the space between
two willows, their canopy
shading the path you've made
of battle and ballet,
you cross your hands
in front of your face

as if to embrace where you stand,
though you've wound up
at the crossroads
in an endless figure eight—

almost the same place
where you began.