

I Always Loved You, Life

You have showered me in riches. You have hurt me beyond measure. But I am getting tired now. I started the battle early, and the warrior woman's arm is lowering her bow.

I wore a coat of many colours, became what the world wanted me to be. Claimed my freedom by melting into walls. Sometimes you could see the fissures. I did what I needed to do in the anonymity of plain sight.

I lusted after the steppes of my mother's forebears, my long mane blowing in the wind. My DNA remembered that I honoured the goddess, cared for the land, herded, and told the stories of old.

Didn't know what it means to belong.
But I always was a quick learner,
my deceit well practiced.
You never quite found me out as not of your pack.

Glamour

Aunt Lil wore her black hat at a coquettish angle,
its little veil pulled over her forehead.
She was Arpège and blood-red lipstick,
long, pointed fingernails to match, nylon stockings,
everything I wanted to be one day.
She bought me 'Schillerlocken'*

My uncle was a lawyer,
a tall tree in a forest of lesser trees.
He seldom bent down to my ten-year-old,
somewhat undernourished body.
With a stentorian voice he hinted
that I was making a nuisance of myself
just by being a kid.
I found out later that he had always thought
my mother a creature of a lesser race.
She didn't speak like one is used to hearing.

It was whispered behind fluttering hands
that Aunt Lil had been a barmaid.
Now she was the wife of a professional,
was perfume and lace, and a deep-red slit
replaced her mouth when she laughed.
Which she didn't do often.

The idea that this childless couple would look after me
for ten days while my mother went back
to East Germany (in danger of being sent to a Russian
gulag if caught) to sort out the lives we left behind in a hurry
had been hammered out between the women.

Uncle Fried looked at me across the huge dining table
as he would a fly and frowned.
'Has nobody shown you how to eat
with knife and fork, child?'
My voice not quite steady from fear:
'We had nothing to cut, Uncle.'

Foxtrot

Giggles behind clammy hands,
starched skirt, five petticoats.
Only this morning 'they' –
on the other side of the hall -
wore short pants and dirty faces.
Yesterday I beat them at math,
apart from the volleyball that
nearly killed Werner.
We were worried but had to giggle.
He was always such a prat.
Today they are stiff
in their Sunday best, and with their
awkward stance they've become ETs.
Some are still drifting.
The teacher is at her shrill,
most schoolmistress best:
"Boys to the right, girls to the left.
Choose your partners.
Foxtrot please, band..."