

## A Short History of Arm-Horses

*From a sculpture by Adrian Arleo*

A WOMAN wakes from a dream of horses  
With horses for arms. She can't explain why  
This would happen to her. She loves horses  
But has never wanted to be a horse.

Not in whole or part. Yet, she is part horse  
After trading her human arms for wild  
Horses and her loyal thumbs for horses  
Who follow their own will. These arm-horses

Refuse the bit and bridle. These horses  
Obey horse instinct and coarse whim. These wild  
Horses rub her neck. She thinks these horses  
Are amorous men disguised as horses

Or horses who think they're better horses  
Or better men. Of course she wonders why  
She would associate men with horses.  
If she's a woman, then her arm-horses

Must be women. The God of Arm-Horses  
Must be a woman as well, or else why  
Would God, with equine wisdom, give horses  
To her? She kneels in the Church of Horse

But how well can she pray with these horses  
Pulling her away? How can she clasp wild  
Horses together like hands? Arm-horses  
Are profane! After all, if these horses

Had replaced her breasts, then breast-horses  
Could have filled her children with wilderness.  
If her legs had been transformed into horses,  
Then she could have run with other horses

## Poems by Sherman Alexie

And raced into a kingdom of horses.  
As it is, she doesn't understand why  
She is haunted by horses, why horses  
Decide what she holds onto, why horses

Choose what she releases. With arm-horses,  
She can't dress herself, so she walks out wild  
And naked among humans and horses  
Who can't tell if she is human or horse.

At first, she frightens the real horses,  
But cowboys desire to break her wild  
Horses, though they all hope her arm-horses  
Are female, as they want her horses

In a sexual way. Her arm-horses  
Are beautiful. Then scholars ask her, "Why  
Don't you guest-lecture about your horses,  
About the meaning of all arm-horses,

About Indians living in the horse  
Culture, and their relation to the Wild  
West in general, and to your horses  
In particular?" But her arm-horses

Must be white, she thinks, because the horses'  
Skin is white, and because her skin is white.  
She doesn't know Indians or horses  
Who think they're Indian. "Not all horses

Are Indian!" she screams. "My arm-horses  
Could be Black Irish! Or they might be White  
Russian!" The pressure to name her horses  
Is tremendous. The Feds want her horses

To be naturalized. "Those arm-horses  
Are alien," they say, "foreign and wild.  
They could be terrorists, so your horses  
Must be interrogated." Her horses

## Poems by Sherman Alexie

Buck and bolt with fear. She loves her horses  
And is surprised by that love. She asks why  
A woman like her loves these arm-horses  
More than she loves her arms, why these horses

Have grown to love her back? Her arm-horses  
Pull her toward freedom in the wilderness.  
But she screams at them to stop. These horses  
Must go alone, so she gnaws her horses

Loose with her sharp teeth. She knows these horses  
Must leave her body and live in the wild.  
The horses understand, because horses  
Know the differences between horses

And humans, between the dreams of horses  
And the dreams of women. Into the wild,  
The arm-horses run free. Free of horses,  
She falls into sleep and dreams about arms.

## A Country of Deer

*From a sculpture by Adrian Arleo*

STARVED by winter, this deer is dead.  
So I lift her sepia head  
And carve her eyes out with a spoon.  
I want her sight, though it seems cruel

To force this trade: my eyes for hers.  
This is my face, but her tears blur  
My new vision. With these deer-eyes  
I am cousin to deer. I cry

## Poems by Sherman Alexie

Like deer. I now see why deer grieve:  
The barren ground and bark-stripped trees,  
The gut-shot buck, electric fence  
And men with guns. If I was a friend

To deer before, then let me stand  
With deer at war on other men.  
Let me teach doe and buck to rise  
Against their foes. With these deer-eyes,

With hoof and horn, let's raze cities,  
Let's burn the stores, and then release  
The animals from their prisons.  
Deer, hear my call, share my vision:

With these new eyes, I see the deer  
Who is my wife. I mate with her  
And, astonished, sire the fawn  
Who shall be king and shall be queen,

And help us end this time of men.  
If I am friend, though I am man,  
Then let the deer take back these eyes  
(I will not fear my sacrifice)

After we claim our victory.  
Please let me roam in a country  
Of deer. Let me be blind and wise  
And I will feel with hands for eyes

The changed landscape and new weather.  
Please, let my name be remembered  
By herd and clan, in blood and fur;  
I am the man who once was deer.