

They entered through a small side door in the middle of nowhere on the outskirts of the city. Few words were exchanged. It was an abandoned warehouse. The lights inside the entrance glimmered dim from an auxiliary generator.

They came to see a performance and paid a small fee at the door; an usher directed them up a dusty stairwell — everything smelled like cement. Upon entering the main room another usher, this one wearing white gloves and thin, gold glasses, gave them programs.

The woman they had come to see fancied herself artistic.

She sat before them in black pants, wearing a crisp white shirt. She looked like a beatnik — fringe cropped flat against her forehead. She smoked a cigarette but the theater smoking seemed more accidental than anything else. The woman was preoccupied. Other than a gurney and a medical table, the room was bare and sterile; its contrasting cleanliness — the scent of industrial soaps, for instance, or the polished sheen on the floor — added some teeth to an already pervasive aura of perversity. There were no pregnant women in the audience.

People sat down on bare wooden benches, which rocked slightly back and forth; they were not perfectly balanced, nor was the floor perfectly straight. Because the room was cold, everyone kept their coats on. Most left hands in their pockets. A few people smiled nervously. A husband squeezed his lover's thigh with kind attention, as a comfort to both of them. His lover, however continued to study the woman smoking in front of them.

Some forty people assembled in this room. Formal gowns peeked out beneath woolen coats. The leather of fine shoes glimmered, except where dust from other parts of the building collected on the surface.

A doctor entered with a lab coat. He wrapped the artist's arm up to make her vein bulge, then popped this vein with a needle. Being used to the operation, the artist did not pale but winced slightly. She closed her eyes. Behind her a projection flickered with an aerial view of a woman's bare chest on an operating table. Because of this projection most of the audience would misremember her performance; they would recall her nakedness, and forget the projection entirely.

The doctor pricked her other arm this time to draw the blood out, her human blood — to create a vacuum on one side so that the horse's blood on the other could come in more quickly.

When the horse begins to take over it seeps inward — soaked up by human tissue, the horse spreads through and quickens, stretching to consume like fire does air, like man does the earth.

In its original body, the beast was passive, docile for an eternity of service; here, having entered a new form, it gallops through arteries and sweats through pores.

The artist's veins are read and swollen: you can see through her skin where it puffs up angry, containing as it does its new blood: greedy to possess, consume and digest. Her face remains placid. The cigarette, abandoned in its ashtray by her feet, smokes itself.

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William Harvey performed many vivisections over the course of his career. He plotted the currents of veins, examining what valves allowed fluid to pass one way, while denying its recourse. These small membranes guarded the body's balance and reason, to ensure, like so many bodies of water, that our blood was not subject to the moon.

He cut open dogs and watched their pulse, to see where and how they drained. Blood was a mystical element, he thought, possessing its own invisible magnetism. He believed it was the source of spirit.

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East and West split in the Renaissance when Western doctors began to cut open the body, examining its parts as one might a clock. The former considers the body a singular whole, treating all misgivings through the surface.

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The woman became a horse, she said, right before the people's eyes. They saw her transform. They saw her face grow every more horsey. As her human blood let out one side, she drew the beast inside of her, fainted but a moment and then came too, her eyes expanding differently to the light. Her sense of smell ever more acute, she snorted and stamped her foot. The doctor quickly put a harness around her head with a lead attached. He tied her head to the chair and she waited, patiently, as an elephant tied to a tree with a very fine rope.

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Not so long ago a girl was told to shoot the family horse. It was old with age and tired of life. She used to ride it as a child. It had been her companion for as long as she could remember; they were the same age. Although her mother taught the young woman how to shoot a gun, killing the horse was her first experience of taking life from a friend. The woman believed in her mother's kindness; her mother possessed an unflinching morality. The girl brought the horse to the edge of their property: the farthest pasture, as far away as possible from the barn, from their house. She brought her boyfriend also; he was a good hunter and knew how to clean a corpse.

It was easier than she'd expected, shooting the animal. The hardest part almost synchronous with pulling the trigger: she heard a bang and watched the animal's expression change as it exhaled and fell down. It's eyes, cloudy with cataracts, went glassy. They became mirrors. Something, clearly, had disappeared. Her lover cut a knife through the horse's gut and its guts slipped out and the girl took off her clothes and slipped inside the horse and fell asleep, prolonging their inevitable supper. She did not want to eat anything.

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The artist became a horse right before the people's eyes. Their haunches had gone numb with the bench. A woman sneezed in the back. The artist came too and shook her head and her harness chimed like coins where it connected to the lead. The doctor brought out a pair of stilts with horse hooves at the end so that the artist could climb into them. When she walked back and forth – the doctor holding her head (she seemed nervous) – there was a clacking of hooves. Her stilts had been fitted with horseshoes.

Far in the distance, in a faraway and presumably dirty room, they heard a rhythmic clapping of hooves sounded. The artist stopped short and raised her head. She seemed to prick her ears, trying to listen to the distance between sounds. She snorted. The clacking sounds offstage grew nearer and more precise. The artist shook her head as a dark horse came into the room led by another doctor. The horse shone, almost cherubic it was so plump; a horse from the Age of Reason. It flicked a perfectly groomed tail like a switch. This animal was calm and composed.

The first doctor untied the artist. He led her to the horse and together, doctors, horse and artist paraded around the room, their feet sounded like drums warming up, out of sync but warm.

The audience clapped as well.

After the horse left, the artist took off her stilts and resumed her chair, where the doctor once more drained one sort of blood and replaced it with her original human kind.

What horse blood had run through her, they froze on separate petri dishes as artifacts of hybridity. Each member of the audience took one home, and the artist sold the rest at Sotheby's for a fortune.