

The Stiltwalkers

We arrived on horseback. Villagers pooled
around us, faces kind & open. We drugged the water.
We constructed their poverty from scratch.
Poured wine on each other's heads, laughing,
dubbing ourselves kings. Introduced a new law:
each foot of each villager would be severed
& upon each stump a tall wooden stilt be sewn,
so they could not escape the woods. They turned
on us. My comrades fled. I heard the stilts on
cobblestones at midnight like a thunder.
I escaped my palace to the brink of a deep barranca
singing my death chant & hurled myself in.
I survived. Now I walk among them, disguised
as an old woman, feet strapped to stilts,
ankles blistered, toes smashed. They eye me
at market, but I do not break. I hobble to my room
under the stairs. Peel off the mask & wool dress.
O, freedom becomes them. They have grown eloquent
in walking. Running faster than we ever could.
Tall as birches. Their young born that way:
attached. I hear their voices, drowning phonemes,
through the floors. I do not make a sound.
I am afraid to look, but each night I peek out
at their street dances. They lope like puppets &
never fall. Women gyrate in a ring around the bonfire.
Behind, the men jump, ever higher, calling for love.
Women catch them. Everyone begins to spin,
these giants, arms upraised, slowly, then blurring—
impossibly—& sing in a collective low
moan the joy of their dark hearts like gods.

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