

I come from

a pot-holed crescent
where a faulty street lamp
strobed the fur
of moon-savvy cats;
a post box sunk
in a tarred-brick wall,
its red mouth hard
as a Russian winter.

I come from a house
with a peeling milk-crate
on a cracked doorstep,
cobwebbed with memories
and dried-up flies.

I come from a kitchen
with fake-marble tops,
a whitewashed larder
stocked with greens.

I come from ribs and cabbage,
Goblin meat puddings,
Birds trifles and Vesta Chow Mein;
Saturday nights at Ferranti's club -
Mamma Mia, Fernando,
the Gay Gordons, the Virginia Reel,
a hiss of cymbals
as the glitter ball whirled.

On the way home with a KFC,
cats scrapping in a pitch-dark alley,
teeth sinking through flesh
into bone.

A Horse Attends the “Reading and Writing through John Clare” Workshop at Manchester Central Library on Saturday 27th July 2019

The new stable girl
brought me as far
as the door; I nudged
the polished surface
with my hairy nose:

the room was empty;
I walked to the window,
breathed in sunlight
and rain-washed air
until I felt settled calm.

Minutes later a man
walked in, threw me a scowl;
a woman in a headscarf
sat opposite, didn't notice me
at all. More people drifted in.

My favourite by far
was an olive-skinned man
in a creased, white shirt
who leaned forward,
sent me a wink.

We went round the group,
saying our names:

when it was my turn
I tossed my head, scraped
the floorboards three times
with my hoof.

I enjoyed the poetry:
To see a crow fly in the thin blue sky -
I often watch skylarks, listen
as their throaty trills sharpen
into song.

During the lunch-break a young man
brought me a bucket of water,
placed it gently on the floor;
I snorted gratefully,
drank my fill.

As people ate, a hush descended;
I walked to a bookcase,
a feast for my eyes:
gold-embossed print, historical novels,
spine-cracked tomes.

I wished I could fold
all that knowledge
into my dark horse-head;
a poem every evening
in my blood-warm stall
would be a thrill.

In the afternoon the others wrote
about cherished landscapes, their sense of home;
I composed in my head, trying
to capture an earthy mix

of sweat, dung, barley and hay.

The workshop was over
far too soon; I whinnied
my goodbye, reached the door
with the feeling I was leaving
something precious behind.

My owner met me
at the top of the stairs;
we descended slowly,
my mind wrestling with questions
about my future, my place in the world.

As I stepped onto the street
my thoughts scattered – *like vapours tossed*
Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, -
I kept a steady pace, returned to my stable,
knowing everything had changed.