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MARY OF THE ROSES

Oh, I know we see her small,
almost a child, one more forgiving
victim, but suppose it was not like that
at all. Suppose she was a tall woman,
let's say six foot two, and built
like a Michelangelo statue, hands thick
as potatoes, with veins like great rivers.

Suppose she had seen what the little boys wagged
behind the bushes, and could roar like a lion
at a good joke, her laughing hair shaking all the way to
her knees.

Suppose her back was tough as bark,
sunbranded dark as the blood rose.
Not like the painted white ladies in museums
with skins soft as wet napkins.
As she balanced a full jug on her head
She sang with a knowing kind of woman sadness
and danced with big wide feet and big wide hips
and big loose joints so the water swirled
round and round in the clay, now and then
catching the air with its wings.

And one day
her eyes rebellious and black as ripe grapes
while hauling water from the stream
she lifted her skirts to fan herself a bit,
and seeing she was alone slipped off her clothes
and stepped into the current, letting her laughter
roll out of her mouth like thunder,
letting the river roll over her back
wetting the springy tendrils of black hair
at the sweaty nape of her neck.

And suppose the angel was sent
thirsty and fainting over all the earth,
searching for someone who could love
without anything miraculous about it,
woman of the ordinary shoes,
and there by the stream he found her
startled, laughing, naked
rising unashamed from the water,
her breasts like suds slipping wet
over her folded arms, and he cried out
with love for her,
and the sound of his cry
filled the desert
with roses.

Armour-Hileman
Iowa