

## Two Poems · *Carol Potter*

### HERDING THE CHICKENS

I think I thought if I could convince you that out in the country  
in 1958, it was common practice to climb up on the backs of horses  
and drive the flock of chickens to the upper pasture

in order for the chickens to clean their beaks and to  
shake the dust from their feathers; I think I thought  
if I could convince you that each one of those 200 chickens

wore a bell around her neck and that our cows  
had silver halters and the milk went in a white river  
straight from their udders into the cups of grateful

school children, I think I thought if I could convince you  
of this we would both be convinced. No Problem.  
Nothing to worry about. But the truth was, I couldn't

sleep that night, the first night in your bed.  
At 4 A.M., I could hear a woman down on the street  
calling to someone, "Please, please, don't leave me

here." You were asleep. I could hear the car  
idling on the street. I lay beside you  
looking at the light coming through your lace curtains.

I wanted to pull you towards me, wanted to ease my body around yours,  
but I stayed still, wishing I could fall asleep.  
The woman on the street, crying, called out

twice, three times, then someone yelled, "Get out of here  
or we're calling the police!" It was raining, the wet leaves  
flattening on the New Haven streets, and I felt like I was

in some brand new country, the way the sky stayed lit  
all night long and you lying beside me. The next morning  
I told you about driving the chickens to the upper

pasture and we both laughed  
because at that moment  
it looked easy. I didn't tell you I couldn't sleep,

didn't tell you about the woman crying or the car  
idling three stories down or the rain falling  
all night. When you think of me, I want you to see me

sitting tall on the back of a tremendous, dark horse—  
how easy I ride that horse  
while my brothers and I, laughing,

herd 200 chickens into the upper pasture.  
I want you to look up and see the white chickens  
clucking through an acre of green—

400 white wings glinting in sunlight.  
The chickens, dignified.  
The children, beautiful.

#### WHAT WE DID WITH THE CHICKENS

After eating Moo Goo Gai Pan at a table with two women  
we had never seen before, having heard about one woman's  
heart condition and her husband's difficulty  
with his neck, how it bent one way but not the other, then the other  
woman  
told of the dress she bought for her niece's wedding and why they  
didn't  
go skiing last winter, my daughter and I went out on the street  
and stood staring into the window of a Chinese grocery.