

A New Notion about an Old Story

by Nonnie Augustine

A dark girl, quite poor, maybe three, maybe four,
leaned on a statue of a horse and his man.
(The rider rode him in place, but as if in a race.)
Her dress needed patching, her heart needed
smoothing. She'd tried to sell matches through
the cold night, but none stopped to buy, or saw
her at all, 'til up to her came a blond boy who was lame.

"Can you sell those, you think, for some food
and warm drink?" asked the boy who was bigger,
but as dirty and tattery. He carried old apples to sell.

"Nobody wants one. I want to be done."
Tears plopped from her eyes,
left streaks on her cheeks.

"Have an apple, why don't you? I've still got two."
The boy gave the waif an apple, its worm,
and a back-pat to boot. Then it started to snow.

"Do you two like this horse? He's my favorite of course,"
said a girl, almost grown, also out on her own. One eye
was blacked blue, but she'd a warm coat and hat.
"I come here at night, when my Dad's fists fight.
Whiskey's his curse and he's home getting worse."
She pulled the tot to her lap with a plop,
and held the lad's hand. One's smile warmed
another's, till all three loved each other.

Affection moved sooty marble to miraculous marvel.
The horse trembling to life tossed his head
with a snort. The soldier who rode him stretched
every part, laughed as he fetched the big girl and little,
and soothed them to settle in front of his saddle.
Then he scooped up the boy, (yodelling with joy)
put him behind him and they all fit just fine.
After three stomps to get ready, and a whinny-ca-
da-bra, the horse leapt far as the stars.

By and by they arrived at the dawn of a day
in a place deep in memory, where you could ever stay on.
Here were some of us who'd been: woozy with poverty,
frozen from frost, overworked or hardly worked,
displaced and denied, lost in tall grass like balls thrown
too hard too fast. They found grown-ups who cared, children
who shared, enough food, clean water and happy animals.
Missing were bailiffs, blacklists, beatings, blamings,
shamings, and (my favorite part) lies.

