

## Two Poems

MAXINE KUMIN

## The Unfinished Story of Boomer

Praise Be  
as in *Praise be, it's a filly*

and Hallelujah  
as in *Hallelujah, it's another filly*

are middleaged mares now.  
Their dam Boomer is ancient.

She is the daughter of Taboo,  
former slave in

a drug scam running  
cocaine from Miami

to Boston under  
the trailer's floorboards.

When the state  
sold her to the slaughterer

we bought her back  
for 30 cents a pound and

bred her to a little  
Arabian stud with a clubfoot.

33 years later,  
Boomer has Cushing's,

an end-of-life disease.  
*We'll give her one*

*last summer on grass,*  
the vet said cheerfully,

stroking her mane.  
*Pick out a good place*

*to dig the hole.*  
Mid-August.

Boomer is sleek,  
gleams like a waxed

Mercedes. Canters  
uphill to pasture,

trots down.  
I try to imagine

the sweet tasselled fields  
without her,

the blind glass of midnight  
without her

peremptory whinnies  
to summon the others

when lightning  
shatters it,

the way  
the little herd will

close around her absence,  
the way they'll go

on grazing, mouths slobber—  
full of the last clover.

## Tails

Weekly we tried a different remedy—  
 mustard, cayenne pepper,  
 a slurry of garlic and vinegar—  
 and still the filly nibbled and nibbled  
 until by spring, when the blackflies came,

strands of horse hair strewed the paddock  
 mornings, as if ripped loose in combat.  
 All four of our broodmares  
 as well as kindly bachelor Jack  
 she bobtailed up to the dock

like those Stubbs portraits of racehorses  
 their tails sheared off square—  
 for some cosmetic ideal or  
 to make them run faster?  
 Who can believe we used to do that?

A vital appendage, the tail  
 arches to say *come closer*, swishes  
 to say *stand back*. It swats insects.  
 Clamped, it's a protective shield.  
 Fanning, it cools body heat.

Old-timey advice: poplar tops.  
 We bought a cord of lopped-off  
 skinny boughs and scattered eight or ten  
 for nightly treats. Sometimes I'd wake  
 to hear the hollow persistent *thock*

of teeth at work in the dark.  
 The filly transferred her passion to ribbons  
 of bark and bobtails grew back. In the spring  
 we heaved those naked ten-foot rails  
 into the gully. In May the grass came in.