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After the War

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JOANNA ELEFThERIOU

AFTER THE WAR

LOOK AT THE guns. Look at the horses, rising. The wife in her wife-beater. The musket. Look at the men. This is our history.

In the year of our lord 2019, a massacre.

We had been trembling for months. The men who rode us had been trembling for months. In the barns, buckets rattled against walls. They rode us at night instead of the day. I thought it was their trembling, I thought it affected their clocks, that the clocks rattled against the walls, and the minute hands bumped into the hour hands because they were rattling because of the humans who for months had been trembling.

We watched as the men and the women pulled stones from the earth and piled them around their houses, walls around walls. They pushed us to run faster and their children to pull triggers.

They trusted no one but their guns. History has not recorded the name that started the war.

Women fuel war, it's well known. Cleopatra, Helen and her thousand ships, Deborah, Queen Anne, and Margaret, several Margarets. So one or two women were faulted for the war of 2019 which wiped out all women and men but there is no real record. No one knows how the bodies began to be blown up. No one knows when the dying began.

Will of God or will of man, the debate rages. Half-heartedly we

pay tribute to the humans, who ended in the war of 2019.

I started trembling myself, along with the men and the women who rode me, when I was a foal. It was 2017 and the world didn't feel right. The older ones told me I was just growing up, that adolescence feels weird whether you're a human or a horse, but I knew it wasn't me, that it was the world. Not going well. The older horses scolded me, said stop seeing monsters where there's only darkness, tame, tame darkness, and while I feigned sleep they whispered *we have seen this before*. They whispered *the men with the skin that burns, they are burning, there is something in them, not their skin, that is burning*.

No one rides us now. We eat what we want. We gallop the plains, as it were, and when we die, it's a claw tearing into us or a tooth. The days of death by metal expelled from a gun, they have ended, they are stories now, which the horses born after the last war only half believe. They think we made up the humans and their guns to frighten foals into mutual respect, into love for other horses, into civility, into those emotions that we, at our peril, keep trying to scare into the young.

At times, I miss the feeling of a rump on my back, and I miss feeling ferocious and strong with that human on my back, so easily broken, trembling, determined not to die.

I gallop the plains, and ask why.