

Poems excerpted from *When the Grateful Dead Came to St. Louis* By Charlotte Gordon

When The Grateful Dead Came to St Louis

I took acid, striped my face red, white, and blue,
and danced five rows away from Jerry Garcia
who seemed, after all, to be just a person,
and the man beside me with an Indian
blanket wrapped around his loins
told me he knew my secrets. He made
the Hopi sign of wonder
on my forehead and kissed me on the lips
during Sugar Magnolia, and so I told him
the two truths of my life: I was failing
high school Biology and my brother
was missing in Viet Nam
It is time for us to get gone, he said.
And I almost followed him
out of the arena, along the breakdown
ramp of Highway 40 to the Landing
and over the edge of bliss
into the hinterland between Illinois and Missouri.
But I stayed behind in the Arena, bought a tie-died tee-shirt
at the snack stand. I'd read Antigone.
I knew how tragedies should end.

Home

There is this story about a boy I know.
He caught a runaway horse.
Everybody else was afraid, but he
jumped up on it, kept it on the streets,
and the point is, the horse took him
home—the boy's home,
the horse's home—which home? —I don't know.
The point is, the horse took him home.

Kickball

I kick that ball
with a whallop
over the heads of the three
outfielders and everyone
wants me for their team.
But one day
I'll run into the woods after a foul
and lo and behold I won't return
and all of the other girls will wonder
Where is Charlotte ?
and they'll venture into the woods
and there I'll be shimmering
in a crown, obviously a princess,
or maybe a saint, named Henrietta.
And I'll explain who I really am
to my friends, my hair long and golden
like toast. My dress is white,
light blue and studded with pearls.
It is hard to wait
until I will be revealed.

Outside

The horse whickers gently like a cloud,
Her old head low in the black field, her coat
ruffling in the bitterness. She knows
about these nights. She's heard me
come before, has never given me away
with her bell whinny get-up call.
She raises her head in hope.
The stars above are sharp
and far as they were in Bethlehem
where the animals spoke,
and as the horse moves toward me,
her white face rising
and lowering through the dark,
choosing me, her breath
solemn on my hand—clover-sweet,
drawn from the bellows of her lungs, wind
from the inside of her creaturely self—
I ask *What do you want?*
and she breathes.