

Mark Wagenaar

HORSE FARM

In the half-slatted barn's shadow the blaze
of tiger lilies gives way to blue cornflowers

the horses would never touch, & tangles
of clover on the way to the fenced meadow,

an unaxeled Chevy next to it, a swarm of wasps
angering around the engine block. Not much left,

not even an old farmhouse to go with the barn,
but from the hayloft or roof, a view of a road,

& trees that give way to the escarpment's edge,
so that when the leaves fall you can see the lights

on the lake below. I dared not go in, after they found
her, hanging from the barn's central beam:

to see the empty air that would not be empty:
something, I knew, would conjure the body

on the air. I didn't know her, & wished to. The color
of the breeze in her hair. The strata in the whorls

of her fingerprints, beyond anything my twelve year
mind could imagine. Did not know, & hurt

for her one terrible moment. For that aloneness.
I feared her tongue. Her eyes, her *yes* to the end, here

in the middle of nowhere, where the sun was strong
on her hair, & through her hair, when she led the horses

from the stalls to the field. I can see them. A line, nodding
hoof-then-hoof walk, the gleam from foreleg to flank,

a shimmer that runs from the beginning of time & back
across the face of the earth to reach you. And this barn,

this cenotaph, was too much for someone else,
who dared its quiet, its emptiness, & climbed in through

a wall. Ungagged the red kerosene container's half-rag,
& shook out the acrid tongues onto the hay of long years

in corners, in empty stalls, listened to the silence
for a long moment before he struck a match, one spark,

then fled as flames swept every inch of the barn, hooves
crackling as they climbed, until they reached the roof to leap

as the roof fell, as it collapsed like a chest beneath
the weight of flame. The way a life can fall in on itself.

Topple beneath expectations, or grief, & so lose itself
to the weight of loss. Smoke, visible two towns over,

billowed up, smoke of this pyre, something for her absence
to look upon for one night, just one, until the flames

consumed even their own thirst, & the smoke disappeared
above the field where the horses are buried.