

MICKIE KENNEDY

Painted Lady

My son's childhood horse, her coat a color
between caramel and cured tobacco, died

standing up. When she went down,
she took three rails with her.

When a horse dies, there's an entire day
dedicated to the physical body.

A case of beer, a friend, and a backhoe
to bury her where she lies.

A clutch of country doves
attended the funeral, as did my wife.

My son stayed in the house.
He had already closed this chapter years ago:

too grown to ride.
The grave was a mound of red clay.

Cindy scattered wildflowers.
In the distance, I caught my son's face

pressed against his window, a second-story moon.
When was the last time they ran

their fingers through her mane?
Later that night, when he thought he was alone,

I watched my son drain the trough,
rolling it gently on its side.

Rewiring the Chandelier

Dad was standing on a ladder, his arm lost
in crystal. When the chain snapped,
the chandelier plummeted with him.

He lay there, covered in shattered light.
They tweezed the crystal
from his wounds, took off his boots,

then washed his feet with saline —
the yellow pan turning red.
The doctor said they needed to remove

his little toe, a dangling comma.
I asked my mom if we could keep it,
imagining the toe in our freezer, purple

in a frosty jar. I wanted part of him
entirely to myself. I already knew
I would need a relic.

Barnfall

A lock rusted shut on an abandoned barn.
We used hammers and pry bars to tear
the door from its hinges. Inside,

we took a hatchet to the back wall
and made a window overlooking the acres of corn
his parents owned. They kept their home as rigid as a field.
Reluctantly, each night, we disappeared—

me to my mother's drinking; Ted to his parents'
rancher where, in a detached garage out back,
he hanged himself.

After the funeral, I took
a hydraulic carjack to the barn, crushing
each support beam, then the stairs and walls.
The bone-crackling sound of wood being torn apart.
The squeak of nails pulled from their holes.

The Gamble, 1992

I followed him down an alley that smelled like piss
and falafel, into an incense-cluttered studio.

I was at my thinnest, my jeans
at their tightest. He wore nothing

but a Duran Duran t-shirt, tight around the shoulders.

A calendar nailed to the wall—
July, a naked cowboy.

Blow jobs were low risk.
We took turns—gentle, hesitant,
too nervous to shoot.

I kept his number, a landline,
and kept coming back. Roasted chicken,
rosemary, white wine in a water glass, his hand
on my crotch as he confessed

that he nearly became a priest
before finding his true calling—fingers
on the elastic rim of my boxers.

Because we were in love,
and because we'd been tested, I let him
fuck me—our bodies a white sheet snapping
in the wind. We were safe.
We thought we were safe.

Rods and Cones

Randy is colorblind.
No blues and greens, everything
gray, red, yellow—all
the colors of the cars he's ever owned.

They sell special glasses online,
each designed for a specific color deficiency.
I bought him every pair.

Hands shaking, he tried each one,
willing the blues and greens
to appear. Nothing changed.
I had given him a box of failure.

I should've taken him out for mozzarella sticks,
a marinara he actually knows as red,
taken him into our garden

so he could slip his finger
inside a flower's ruffled mouth.
For a few hours, everything he touched
would wear a dollop of pollen.

A light switch. A roll of paper towels.
His shirt collar. My cheek. Everywhere,
a faint yellow shadow he could see.