

summer barrels past

Cecily Nicholson

(for NC)

i.

it was a print, Alex Colville's *Horse and Train*

there once were as many horses as people

two and half million pounds of shit shoveled daily

horses walking in giant wheels

once every motor was a horse

horses whose job it was to walk in a circle

horses who did everything

horse flu shut down the economy

sixty percent of them died

imagine sixty percent of our engines

stopping right now and only half of them starting again

ii.

growing up we always had a pack of dogs, usually four
held in prestige among many familiars
them and a few cats we let indoors
though we loved every bird, mouse, tadpole, crayfish
froze in a spring frost we grew more conscious of weather
wide skies read power lines hum dove coos
the leaves turnt dirt melt change on the breeze creaks
and rain the gravel trucks of spring full by slow
then empties in summer barreling too fast past our hillbilly stake
mother threw potatoes later hard to explain
to the police who got called in from a county over
drove out to say "ma'am you can't throw potatoes at trucks"
them all polite as we stood with our pack and stuck to our guns

good scent of gasoline barrel in the barn era
the distribution of labour spiders and must
hay trouble lifting bales except straw wood
picked rocks currants weeds veggies berries
chewed all summer on comfrey
hungry dreams of ice cream
and brown kids special someday
hanging out after school
at the donut shop smoking or working
at school as much as possible
and on lunch hours learning extra
down with the av kids shop and drama
or running track pitching backstops
wishing behind trees running everywhere
creaks staid knees and the odd knuckle
some doc visiting said I was growing
full height ache at thirteen gangly
like a horse could be when they said wiry
because of wires I suppose the episode
under the steel moon on top of blue snow
barefoot that drive to break free inexplicable
homing soars over property lines and fences
that chestnut mare skipped across ditches like
she knew we could only hope to board her just
escaped at night no doubt she actually flew home

singing comes from the red church
service in Tagalog tonight
at home on a roof top a garden of sorts
I still can hear the only audible english
lyric "love" in flat intervals
lifted up pleasant as cooking smells
so well in this building
on every floor
consistently good meals are being made

walking through the courtyard I was invited
to conference after talking with the gardeners
of roses I admire all year their red
even when dry and pruned
on the way to the train
my pauses for roses more
for black uncles I miss
invited to conference by a young woman
I could not racialize or assess
her dress mint pastel mid-waist
like the women a farm over
growing up yet here she is ochred
and she has invited me to conference
of which I thought academically, no word of god

*approved development surrounds us the most sound
six days a week 7am to 7pm construction
in our neighbourhood the normative hums
our relief emanates narrative thick with sistering rhyme*

not giving up course we're not going give up