

Color Wheel

by Chalon Emmons

I remember red dogs, two of them, Irish setters, who bounded with their silky copper hair over the green hillocks at the end of Loop Road. This was the seventies, when all things good and young and promising bounded down gentle slopes, through waist-high grass with waving seedheads, under an effervescent sun.

I don't remember the dogs' names, but I do remember the kitten Eureka, black, who replaced Eureka, white, crushed by the left rear tire of the sunshine-yellow Toyota. My mother was driving. Her hair was long and brown. It fell in two thick curtains around her face. It was morning. A school day.

I remember the brown pony, Prince, who stood guard in the field on his four hooves, each packed tight with dirt and manure that I was supposed to scrape away with my steel hoof pick. I was nine years old. The pick was cold and heavy in my plump hand. My hair was gold and sparkled in the sun. I tugged at Prince's slender leg, his backward knee, his knobby ankle, but the hoof with its hoard of dirt would not lift from the ground. I crept away, and folded myself through the split redwood beams of the fence.

I remember the white-and-brown cow, Dolly, who met her end at the end of my parents' marriage, far away unseen in the fields, dead by gunshot. I was standing on a sunny patch of lawn just outside the sliding glass door when I heard the report. It echoed around the valley, around the redwood stumps and the outcroppings of fern and Queen Ann's lace and tangled blackberry. The dried mud-ground pitted with hoof-prints, tough knots of grass. You had to be careful when you ran. Paper-wrapped packets of frozen ground beef in the meat locker at Fernbridge for a year after that. My mother picked up dinner on her drive home. Yellow Toyota in a new driveway.

I remember the tan guinea pig, dead of dehydration. Through the wire bars of her cage I viewed her body. She lay stiff on her side, stretched out, as if in her guinea-pig dream she had been running through grassland, open and close to the sky. My guilt was blinding white on the summer morning of her death.

I remember the red crab, our mutual wariness when we surprised each other in the concrete alley. This was in Bangkok, when I was five or six. She will be dead by now, the crab, along with her freckled shell. She must have tiptoed up from the canal, where the water was flat and brown. I was barefoot. The soft hair on my legs would have glimmered in the tropical sun. There would have been bruises up and down the shinbones. They would have been an inky wash of colors: purple-black, yellow-blue, orange-green.

