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The White Horse, 1950

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The White Horse, 1950 · Kathy Callaway

In a picture dated nineteen-twenty,
my father's sisters lean
over a field in Meeker County,
spare to the bone
straining to see anything
horizon-like. Bad eyesight,
same as their mother—worse the vision,
the more God takes over your face
and Aunt Helen, nearly blind,
was wiped clean.

She married a Nebraska farmer
near Dannebrog, which is near
Grand Island. His land was empty,
room for anything, his face God-red
from the sickle of sky, the good eye
a hole straight through to August.
For years they bent together
over wheat-shocks, woozy in color,
like illustrated figures
from the Bible.

My summer to visit, their house was
plain, its paint shriven by wind.
They had spoon-at-a-time Oneida,
dishes with web-fine cracks and
a door in the ground: root-cellar
for twisters, when cows flew around
and China boards whirled
on haybales. Helen said,
Don't worry,

he'll bring you home.
So when sky slapped hard
with its one hand, the horse
who took only right corners—
his white back oat-fat
for my legs—leaned forward
through rain-tines that spiked
the darkening fields,
oceans tossing in harvest.