

# the HARLEQUIN

*Cindy Hunter Morgan*  
**Fire Department Exercise**

Up in the rafters,  
a panicked raccoon freezes  
on a cross beam. Little

bandit, it has pilfered  
baling twine, latch to  
the grain bin, buckle

from a pony's harness,  
owl egg from a nest  
in the eaves. Even its

scat – clumps hardened  
on empty pallets, caked  
on a window sill – steals

the scent of hay.  
It won't make it out, but look  
at what escapes:

swallows sweeping across  
a slate sky, their felted  
wings wiping out gnats,

pollen, words that still  
linger – *goodnight old girls,*  
*stay warm.* Almost

a movie scene, this barn  
burning, but it's only a fire  
department exercise.

No one will run out  
in long johns to save any  
animals. There aren't

any actors – grandfather  
calling Ruthie, Dolly, grandmother  
pressing two sugar cubes

into the palm of my hand.  
The horses are dead,  
buried in mounds beside

the barn, eye sockets stuffed  
with dirt, bones sunk too deep  
for coyotes to pick.

Later, for hours, plumes  
of smoke will swirl  
like chalk dust,

raccoons will raise  
tiny, leather hands –  
wipe *goodbye, goodbye.*

Thank you for reading! Find more at [www.theharlequin.org](http://www.theharlequin.org)