

Holly Karapetkova

LESSONS IN KINDNESS

There were just a few at first, colorful—
I let them stay. But in a week the whole
house swarmed with ladybugs, sunning at windows,
prancing across the bath tub. When I saw
one piss on my toothbrush, I lost my cool,
began to slaughter them by the handful.

But I didn't learn. I took a dog instead:
saved him from the pound, scrubbed him, gave him food
from my table. The first time he ran off,
I cried, searched the neighborhood. But by the fifth,
I'd had enough; the next time he ran
I locked the door. I didn't let him back in.

By the time you came along I'd figured out
how not to sound too interested. I let
you carry on with all your unexpected
acts of kindness—picking up my jacket
from the cleaners, keeping the soap I love
in your bath (though it made you break out in hives)—

while I'd show up late for dinner—or forget.
You waited at the bar three hours one night;
it was December; you couldn't start your car
and, of course, I wasn't home. You weren't sore,
"You should've called," was all you said on the phone.
But I was stunned; you never called again.

