

Come To Me

You didn't stay
even when I begged like the terrier
did that night for the leftover cornbread—
because we always eat chili and cornbread,
honey on the spoons
when we're done.
If my knees had cracked open the floor—
if you would have seen the way my nipples weep milk
and spots of blood—

On Saying Goodbye

It is Thursday and you try to clean
the stinking goldfish bowl; the Oranda
died three days ago.
The sides are caked in algae and the beginnings of mold.
You gag. Lock the bathroom door
and leave it.

The mail has stopped coming on
Fridays and Saturdays. Not like it matters—
no one is writing you. Don't need stamps
in the corner or a return address on the back.
What about Sundays? Remember—
the mail never comes on Sundays.

By Monday you are canning applesauce.
You bought the last brown sack of pink ladies—
all bruised. With the peel stripped away
and cores browning you imagine how long
it would take the sauce to rot
if you didn't can them properly.
You decide you'd have until next week,
but decide to keep the jars in the freezer
—just in case.

This Tuesday you check the answering machine
your grandmother gave you—it uses a little cassette tape.
The first is a pause and hang up,
the second is your mother: your dog showed up
at her front door. She didn't let her in.
Then minutes of white noise.

Wednesday you open the freezer door. The jars have cracked—
you wonder if you can peel it off—
the glass.

Beasts of Burden

You studied dromedary camels and found
their single hump
and indefinite native habitat
to carry a mysterious charm.
Unlike horses, they kneel
for passengers and freight, passing through
the Sahara with a backpack of fat
and docility. It's hot here, and I know
you wouldn't recognize me anymore—
hip bones have been buried
in a dune of flesh and soft bone. The highest
mountain, my belly-button.
The baby continues to quake inside
after I've gone to sleep. This place gives fevers.
I keep a picture of her fingers in my
backpack, and maybe it's best you ambled out—
no water, food, or decency left—traveled west
to find an oasis. Blame how you've forgotten
on sweat dripping off your upper lip.
You heard rumor of water and shade.
The nomad found me while you were still a scrap on the horizon.
The nomad said good fortune is brought to the unborn by the eating of a camel's heart.
The nomad said I had to kill it myself.

Buffalo Dream

i.

I've been sleeping on my parents' couch lately—
I forgot to pay my electric bill, and the lights
in my apartment don't turn on. I've been forgetting a lot recently.
I left the phone off the hook, left my daughter's hat in the nursery,
even left the dog in the cold two-bedroom until someone asked me where she was.
Today I talked with my brother—
he was complaining because his macaroni noodles were hard.
I told him I can't even eat macaroni. The doctor's said it's because of gluten.
Gluten is in everything. They said it makes my intestines swell up like sausages.
And even though my brother said he wasn't enjoying his macaroni,
he ate it anyway, and told me about the bison in Iowa.
They think there were millions of buffalo right here.
My head is on the table. My ear is curved toward the baby monitor.
Her breaths as smooth as the horizon.

ii.

I crawl to the floor of the kitchen
and rest my head on the coolness, and look at the linoleum—
the sticky orange juice stain, the cheerios, the dog's slow tail—
they are all still there. No, I won't mop tonight.
Sweeping is out of the question.
The dog doesn't need to be let out until morning.
All she said today was *No* and *What's this?*

iii.

There are days when all she does is scream.
That guttural throat sound—it pushes you
to pull at your ears.
Just be quiet for ten damn minutes.
After an entire morning and afternoon of it
you put her to bed with hopes:
she'll be quiet and go to sleep, but she doesn't sleep.
Her eyes close, but her mouth stays stay in red shape of an 'O,'
screaming. And you can't be sure of your own limbs—
whether or not you can control them.

iv.

The dog comes come over,
sits next to your head, ears alert
because you are talking to yourself,
What's this? What's this?

v.

You drive to Montana to see two million buffalo
grazing on yellow plains that smell like Iowa.

You call it home, build a house made of sticks,
and at night the coyotes howl.

The sound knocks over your house,
so you sleep in the middle of the buffalo herds,
and paint yourself brown with river mud
so they'll receive you—and your daughter's red
hair curls, her skin beings to bronze, and she turns
into the buffalo empress. She never screams,
and you make a pot of macaroni and dump it at her feet
as a sacrifice—but the noodles are not soft and she banishes you
to the mountains.

Why I Never Married

I've never liked beets
because they are always bleeding.
The supermarket sells fresh ones,
soil still soaking their roots;
they come in sets of three.
Every Monday I buy one for my daughter.
At home I rinse off
the dirt, then boil it for thirty minutes—
afterwards, thick skin slides off
under the pressure of my palms. The pan is filled
with deep, red water, and stains the sink
when I drain it. Hippocrates used to use
beet leaves to bind
wounds—they're bitter, but I eat them.
My tongue remembers their flavor:
sitting in the backyard, I tried to dig
up the tree roots when I was nine. Maybe it rained.
Or maybe it never rained,
and I had to get the hose from the front yard.
But I covered large stones in slick clay—
my arms and elbows shit-brown,
and offered the mud-pie to my brother.
He climbed into the rusted army jeep
ten feet away. I dared him to lick it.
I pretended to lick it first, saying *yum* over and over.
As I reached out to him
I heard the screen door slam, my mother's voice:
Don't you dare make your brother eat dirt!
I licked my lips, dried dust in my mouth,
and gagged. My daughter offers me a bite
of the beets on her plate. I pretend to eat.