

Stacie Cassarino

EARLY DECEMBER, VERMONT

The ground's too hard
to indicate we were here
and a young snowgirl is naming
each cow: *Astral*, *Spearmint*,
China, *Horseshoe*. She's been sledding
down the same bony hill all day, her eyes
steep holes of story, of sky; pauses
in the cold road we've walked
with clouds for breath.

I love the Northeast light, how it rests on things,
on this barn setting into darkness,
on the cows inside, shuffling and pissing.
Her father named the one tagged *Bitch*
after her mother. They call the cat *Elephant*,
the duck *Cheyenne*, and one of the bunnies—
the hurt one—has no name.
She carries it by its neck
and continues her tour of the farm.

These are the bulls for beef, this cow has only lived
a week—we pray for spring.
And that one over there, near the vats,
died when we weren't looking weeks ago
and no one buried it. Smells bad. Seems sleeping.
This is the thing that attaches to the tits.
This is the radio, full of static
we live so far
from the center of town.

*Did I tell you how badly I want to feel
something growing inside me?*

The ground's too hard, and there are hundreds of cows
you'd hardly think it mattered what their names were,
what they stood for. And that one, her calf died
inside of her this autumn, and she stands
in her own puddle of cream and mud.
We mustn't disturb her.

Walking back, we remember the names: *Astral*,
Spearmint, *China*, *Horseshoe*, *Bitch*.
Of the stars, shingled spirit, moon sewn into
the purpling mountains. What her father calls her mother
in certain rooms. How far is China
from Vermont?

We make things ours by naming them.
In this way, we become required.
What if we call this road *Dwelling* and
place our bodies (*Ironwoods*)
in the tall air (*Stargrass*) of this early December,
call the stars (*Attendants*), call love (*Motion*),
call on each other not to disappear.

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