

The House

Wrapped in dampness, we are soil alive
with slugs and foxglove. Everything moves.

The previous tenants evicted, only
earthworms elongate across the screen.

We see life in moisture. We speak of a house
for chickens and horses for the stable,

but first we haul. Heavy with wet,
we sort hairless dolls, clothes sodden

with rot, a mattress burned to the coils.
Scrap metal in one pile, wood slats

in another, yogurt tubs and a rusted bike
in a third. Who knew that Lego spacemen

don't decompose? These piles are not
our own, but our work gloves dampen

through. All is wet, wet, wet. Snails
weave through ribbons of trash bags.

Three trips to Lowes for PVC piping
and copper caps, a doe sleeps behind

a blueberry bush. Peeling shelf mushrooms
from bark, I ask, *can we eat this kind?*

It's too tough, you say, but it won't hurt you.
You pluck crooked nails. We clear sadness

from the house, find florescent orthodontic bands
in the living room. That night, we curl into sleep.

Tomorrow, you whisper, we'll fix the well,
and I see our shower fill with steam.

Jen Siraganian

My Uncle Offers Me a Cow

It's Christmas Eve in New Jersey,
and my uncle pulls me close to the grand piano.
He doesn't ask about San Francisco
or why I left my job, but *when*
are you going to be a bride?
I pick off the fuzz from my sweater,
wish my glass held whiskey.

He looks at me, grips my elbow, and says,
If you were in Armenia, they would take you
and all the other single men and women...
I think he will say, *shoot us*, because
the Genocide stories start the same way:
they gathered all the men, lined them up,
and...or they took the children,
brought them into the woods, and so on.
But no, I will not be shot.

And you would stand in a circle,
alternating men and women. Then you take
the hand of the man next to you and he
is your husband. Then each couple is given
a cow. I snicker. You need a cow to start
a family. You have until August.
Why August? Why not?

How can I argue with a man riddled
with tumors, a man who has eight months
to live? I mention that sharing
a studio apartment with a cow
might be difficult, but he shakes
his head, *you're missing the point.*

Jen Siraganian

8 pm, Los Gatos, California

It starts with an echo seeping through redwoods, a glimmer of noise emerging across 17, then a high-pitched yell from a teenager, maybe wine-dripped laughter, until it's a howl responding to another, again and again.

The three-year-old, half-clad in a diaper and Snoopy pajama top, bangs on the glass door until he escapes onto the deck. His brother stumbles behind, nearly asleep. Bed-time routine on hold. We clench fists, stretch mouths into Os.

A dog joins in, sometimes a turkey or two mistaking the sounds for mating calls. We merge, a patchwork of fog and loneliness. In San Francisco, they yell for the nurses, but the mountains howl for no virtuous reason.

No, we howl each night because we've been inside for 22, 45, 67 days. We howl so we can forget for thirty seconds, maybe until 8:01, that we are caged and waiting to be released upon the world.

Jen Siraganian