Cow Song

By Elena Karina Byrne

For Thomas Lux

I heard them, far-off, deep calling from behind death’s invisible floor door. Their wallow metronome from the after-rain mud was one giant body. Arizona’s yellow arm’s length of light all the way to my own body standing at the edge of their field held me. I moved toward them and they toward me, as if to ask for something from nothing, as memory does, each face dumbfounded ... dumb and found by the timeframe of my own fear, surrounded at dusk.

There was a plastic grocery bag, its ghost body cornered small against a tree, and there was a heavy smell. Desolation is equal to contained energy now. Their heavy bodies slow toward me, my own slow inside their circle without kulning.

Kulning is a Swedish song for cows, not a pillowcase pulled over the head. Here, the mountains could be seen from far away. There’s an abandoned physics, a floor door, my own head-call herding me, in-hearing nothing but them. Bone for bone’s female indicates the inside of the mouth when singing is grief alone and is curved.

You can’t stop shifting no matter how slow. It sounds like confusion in one direction. I wanted to tell you this in your absence. It sounds like the oak, it sounds like the oak of floorboards in God’s head.

Source: Poetry (September 2017)