

Mark Farrell

GOAT SONG

I gripped her chin and snout together
then drew her head up cleanly
and my dagger
fell
and
cut
 and the tearing of her throat and
the gushing of her sounded blood flew
past her teeth and out
 the hot jagged
 hole I made—(in this)
I heard the future that would be
 her fuzzy head falling
sideways
 —stunned—
I weighed it all—
 her shudder being
my shudder—
until
 No, I would not die like that—
 and standing my full height,
I padded down the footpath
to find him there—my brother—
playfully arranging his vegetables
and fruits
 (their despicable burning to God—
to burn to God—
 to dare to burn to God)

—and to this busy pageantry
I cleared my throat—
 "I have heard His word,"
I told the kneeling frame
 "and it echoes heavily in my mind."
—a tiny, ironic smile—the only reply,

then a shrug of the shoulders,
but when he turned back to his burning
my fingers locked
through his sheep's hair

and I slew him—
for I
was the chosen
of
God

And all of these countless blessings later,
these so many years of mostly contentment—
sometimes, even on the clearest of blue days,
the sky will crack with shame, with choler—

My wife and I are too old to vault
the fear we once did,
but that shrewd, good woman still
never fails to oracle it,
clicking her tongue at the sky,
always interpreting—that He says that
—I did right—

And as her croaking
dissolves into the heat,
for the most part I just nod
the silent agreement
that is familiarity and age,
infirm and comfort—
but at other times, I can't help myself—
and gravely shaking my head
tell her that He says that I was
Unlawful—evil

At this, she throws her arms up and
scolds—

my set thin smile—
—then fussing, grumbling back
to her slow
labour

Mark Farrell, "Goat Song"

but always,
 after these times—
it rains down

joyously
on our
great-grandchildren

their high laughter,
their singing