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Buffalo

Joe Sills

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Buffalo

I am preparing the cereal when you enter the kitchen, showered and wet and naked. You watch me pour the milk, you nod your head for me to stop, you allow me to push your seat under you. But you don't eat. You are dripping over the linoleum and are entirely nude. I put away the juice and ask if you are hungry and you say, well, not hungry, hungry. Perhaps this is a polite way of saying that I have chosen an incorrect word.

We walk to work. Stray dogs sleep fearlessly on fractured sidewalks. A shoelace drips from a telephone wire, a jetliner slips into a cloud, I sip my coffee. A dog stretches and then sneezes into the morning and I think, bless you. At the end of our block is an odd patch of road, mysteriously purpled. We step over it and our feet hit the other side in eighth notes.

I sip my coffee, you squeeze my fingers, up ahead is the subway. Your hand glides up my back like an afterthought. You take my finger and scratch your nose with it and say, those aren't dogs. They are chapped lips that have swelled, fermented, and have by accident become dogs. You release my finger and I let my arm fall as a pendulum. On our right, two dogs sit patiently in the street. They are coated in ringworm, they don't even have fur.

You stop walking. You tell me you forgot your gum at the apartment. I ask if this is specific gum. I explain that there will be the possibility of future gum. You swat my chest. You grab my skin. Even when you're asleep. Each morning, I wake up, I roll over, I put my finger in your palm and you react as if you are nothing but brainstem. Lately, when you're in the shower, I've heard whistling. Perhaps this is a natural response to water. You enter the kitchen, you're dripping over the linoleum. I ask why the mute don't communicate by whistling. Our train is coming. It pushes air through our legs. I sip my coffee and it hurts when I swallow.

The doors slide open and we step in. I hold onto a bar and you hold onto me. All of this happens simultaneously. I floss while you sit on the toilet and I pretend not to watch. You cut my hair over the letters you are reading. The mailman groans and holds his knee at the base of our porch. We peek at him from the window as if he's a mysterious bag of oranges.

You tap at places on the bedroom wall and tell me you need the hammer. I ask if you're planning to hang that picture of us. Picture, you say, wringing out the word in your mind. I nod, yeah, picture. You tell me to stop watching you while you're peeing. You call me a word that I don't know. Before we fall asleep, you say that buffalo has more than one meaning, and that it is both a noun and a verb, and that a string of eight 'buffalo's can exist as a sentence. You say all this while you use my finger to stir the inside of your bellybutton.

In our train, dogs have settled into clumps. This is due, you explain, to gravity. A meteor once landed on a dog in Egypt. Galaxies slide into each other and are not at all embarrassed. I wake up, I roll over, I pick a cut fingernail from your bra strap, I put it with the others that sit together on the bedside stand. We sit in the kitchen, we stare at your cereal, we walk to work, these aren't dogs. They are useless containers. They are beanbag chairs. You point to one by the doors. I sit down and ask you to join me. You pretend to take off your shirt, you pretend to twirl it around your head and fling it into my face. Perhaps you are bored.

The doors slide open, we step out. The station floor is strewn with dogs, but these aren't dogs, they are worn, breathing rugs. We wipe our feet and I feel a hundred different pieces crumble, like stepping on a sack of twigs I brought down from the attic. You are scraping dead skin from my ear.

I roll over and take back my pillow, I watch a tissue that has caught in your hair. I sit up and assemble a paper clip necklace. I'm pouring the cereal. You sit down. You are naked and dripping and staring at the tan flakes that settle into your bowl. I don't like to waste food. Here, I'll help you with it, and I grab your spoon and eat while bending over you. Perhaps you have forgotten what hungry means, and I only need to show you. You stroke my neck. We crunch our way out of the station. You say, these aren't dogs. Your hand slides under my shirt, patting at my skin, feeling for a stud to drive a nail through. I sip my coffee and remember that I am holding coffee.

The surface is covered in a patchwork of fur. We trudge by that building made of orange bricks. Alleys full of clotheslines. Green balloons tied to a car antenna. Teeth thrash out of seams and gnaw into red skin. We wade through new smells and you tug at my bicep in regular, frantic intervals. I wake up, you're still sleeping, I roll over and squish my nose into the back of your head. Above us, a shadow streaks by the edge of a skyscraper. It collides into another shadow with a muffled pow, they break apart, they form efficient spheres.

Perhaps you are confused. Maybe you have mistaken hungry for another word. Maybe that word is buffalo, though I hope not, as I know only one meaning. You offered to tell me another if I found the hammer. I bargained up to three. In the basement, there are cardboard boxes that contain objects that are never used, yet must be accessible, like a promise. I opened one. It was full of label-making equipment and a clumsy yellow lamp. In the next four boxes were your old notebooks. When I came back to the bedroom, you were already asleep. Books hung over the side of the bed.

You appear paler and aerodynamic when you are wet. I once planned to jump out of a closet and scare you, but was afraid you'd put a hole in the ceiling. You wake up early so water may evaporate from your skin before you require clothes. I wake up earlier. I stare at the words that have fallen into your bellybutton. I know that a buffalo is a wild bovine mammal. It has short horns. It has a muscular hump and grazes obliviously in a prairie. Perhaps this is a clue. If faced with multiple possibilities and a #2 pencil, I search for ovals to darken.

You stroke my neck. No, you pull at my shoulder. I turn towards your face, still damp. My mouth is full of your breakfast. You pat at my cheeks, making some sort of childish music. Some food dribbles down my chin. You wipe it away with your bare hands and smile as if I have caused this. There is grain smeared on your palms and I wonder where you plan to put it. We are on our way to work. You forgot your gum and you look as if you expect me to fix this. My solutions only have right angles. Take a five-day cycle of antibiotics. Bring the mosquito-repellant.

Perhaps I am confused. I am scheduled around states of warmth and dryness and food consumption situations. I have tried to manufacture words that are dense yet pliable with shiny moving parts. But my mouth is too small. This is what I see: Puddles of oil. Chalk drawings on

sidewalks, graffiti on walls. The neck of a beer bottle. Dogs. You own two thesauruses. I once asked how our conversations could possibly satisfy you, and you reminded me that we never speak. This may have been communicated in whistles. I whistled, doesn't this count as speaking? You whistled, I forgot my gum. We are on our way to work, our pace is slowing, this living carpet has risen past our waists.

Discarded umbrella. Rusting fire escapes. Tree stumps, swaddled in concrete. Wet noses push into the soft contours of our knees, forcing us to kneel. You squeeze my fingers, I squeeze yours, we accidentally make fists with our other hands. A tongue explores my ear, I ask if you want juice, I'm pouring the cereal. I roll over, you're still sleeping, I reach for the book splayed over your waist and flip the pages by your hair. Strands rise and settle over your nose. You wake up. I say, hey, I brought you a lamp. I reach past you again and flick it on, further proving that this is, in fact, a lamp. You pinch some of my hair and twist it. You trace a line with your thumb to the corner of my mouth. I wonder if you're wearing a bra under these sheets. You touch my throat. You turn off the lamp and say thanks, as if this is what you asked for, as if this is what you meant.