Remember the Moose

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She must have come down from high mountain meadows where bear-grass blooms had dried and fallen, paintbrush put away its colors, and mud-wallows begun to freeze and stay frozen past noon, down along the creek through aspen, alder, and willow thickets to high grass along a road leading to town.

Why she kept on coming you can only guess. Rich green smell of cemetery grass, muted bellow of a distant bull, old path imprinted in her genes, deep doubts, simple curiosity? Maybe she was lost, or came as a reminder of something lost. A moose grazing among the graves on Sunset Hill is an image one might hold for years, turning it over and over, working it into a story or finding it, strangely lit, inverted in a dream.

Remember the moose outside the tent in Idaho, the moonlight and mosquitoes, how she looked like a boulder in the creek until she lifted her great head from the water,
big worldly angel, and turned to look at you with ropes of weeds hanging from her mouth.

By day she strolled among the park's swingsets and jungle-gyms, stopping to sniff the dull shine of a slide or stopping, high as a house, in some child's eye. Parents, sensing danger, tried to shoo her away, but she followed her own calling. Nearly blind after the sun went down, street lights and house lights surrounded her—a confusion of moons. She must have picked one to lead her on. They found her on the Newsomes' front porch, snout pressed against the wall, back legs splayed. Terrified, someone said, as neighbors gathered to watch the wildlife officials load their darts and end her urban visit in a sudden blur of drugs.

Think of Golden Gate Park half a life ago, a day of dancing and chanting, thousands of hairy kids, men, women, dogs with beads and dirty bandannas, a fog of breath and marijuana pulsing around black banks of speakers blasting the twilight with drumbeat and guitar shrieks. Someone smiling hands you a hit of something. You walk off across a baseball diamond toward some tree or siren or patch of grass.
looking for your country. A shock-eyed man marches barefoot mouthing a manic recitation like a fuse burning. You walk and walk into dark and lie down and stare at the moon until it comes down and covers your face with its bowl of white light.

After the drugs took hold the drugs wore off. They loaded her on a truck, gently as they could, drove her out of town on dirt roads, lifted her down into high grass, waited to see her waken.

Think of leaving and coming back. Think what you have nurtured and betrayed. Think of the towns and cities you changed with your absence. Think of the country. Remember the moose turning away, lowering her head into the water, leaving you the afterimage—unspoken words, weeds hanging from your mouth. Remember waking in a colder place, glad to breathe and see your breath.