FRANCIS BLESSINGTON

To Market (Scrabster, Scotland)

A bullock shambles through the maze and bows, reverses fast the lane along our siding. “Gie 'im back!” I slap along the long slit till he rears quick rumbles, a murderous pirouette to an empty pen, and calms; then climbs the ramp with clattering hooves—at last bolted in. The speckled snout gapes and glistens as my son reaches for the quivering drool.

Down the gangway, along the breakwater to these barnboard barricades, the other black one-year-olds nuzzle my son’s hand through the openings and fasten eye-to-eye. Three times their age, he backs off, sees himself reflected below a scar down a drooping lash, hears the pounding of the thwacking across mouth and flank.

He won’t watch the red arm at the stick’s end, hammering the cattle into lorries to feed further in Aberdeen, unlike the still lucky on Orkney.

The ferry waits. My son stares at the pen’s muddy center, like a fresh grave in the green. I lurch about. I muster “To Market. To Market,” as our steam whistle implodes, “Forgive! Forgive!”