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# Reply without Gazelles

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*Sandra Meek*

REPLY WITHOUT GAZELLES

A month for funerals. Lightning strokes  
striking tenanted

fields. Each Saturday we passed  
printed pamphlets, faces coming

off on our hands:  
Rre Modise, seventy years

a dark unpeeling. The sound of spoons.

Morning, one distant shot pierced the heart of—  
No. Morning, we killed a bull

for the funeral feast. Such a wide  
circle to feed. Relatives mud-streaking the windows

to sign grief. Inside, the old story. The black-wrapped widow  
shaving children's heads. Scalps flickering,

smooth bones turning  
a loose socket, blank new world, the too

familiar room. What it's like  
without. Women wake in the borrowed soldiers' tent

nursing candles. Men by the fire.  
Separation. Small

lights in the night.  
Cries of crowned plovers, this

old habit of naming. *What's it like  
to wake to gazelles every morning tell*

*me about Africa.* There  
was this funeral. A lightning storm. An old man

ploughing his field. First rains. Dry ground. Fallow  
rivers of termites.

I heard them digging  
the grave, the laughing pitched

against stones. A pearl-spotted owl  
stuttering against thorns. A sound unidentified moving

through the unelectrified night.

Morning turns with the shovel. Din of roosters. The sun  
in a tin basin, we washed

off death at the gate each Saturday, how we ate  
and ate.