

franny choi

PASTORAL POEM

The farmwork isn't seasonal
in Vermont. They milk the cows

year round. The leaves brown
and only the white people think

of rest. Orchards get pricked
by cold's first needle, play dead

til there's something decent to drink.
But the cows stay heavy

with silage, with hands, dark
on the hillside. The hard ground

cracks, and city people paste green
paper on the gaps. Guess what color

the glue dries. Hint: it's good camouflage
when the weather turns. The geese make

that noise when they're afraid
they won't make it back south.

My friend bought a lamp to keep
smiling when not even the earth

seems to want us, or wants us
wrong, dug up by the neighbors

after the drifts melt, limp,
already feeding next year's grass.

The city tosses crumpled leaves
to say, *we can always make more of you.*

I want to build us a place
like the house the calf made

when it licked our hands hot,
our breath blued by the moon.

This is how we've learned
to grow in midwinter. We curl

into each other's bark,
boil sugar between our chests.