

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.