Because we want to take pictures of bears and moose without actually coming near them—though already I have called to you, unloading groceries from the car, when a cow and her calf clopped down our street, taller than I thought, and faster, too—because we want to look like real Alaskans to those East Coast city slickers, those smog-breathers, those subway-riders, our friends back home, we drive down the only highway to the Center where, every five minutes for the duration of our visit, we hear the eerie shrieks of the elk, calling for one another in urgent lust, which at first I decide is the angry scream of a small girl throwing a tantrum in five-minute intervals but which Wikipedia informs me is "one of the most distinctive sounds in nature, akin to the howl of the gray wolf." And later, when we learn from a colorful sign that females are attracted to the elk that bugle the loudest and most often, I sympathize more with the elk and with the caribou, too, locking their antlers into one another because everyone in this Center is in love, including me, because when I stare at you staring at a muddy bison sleeping flush against the wire of her fence, and when I see your mouth move, and then later, before I put my mouth on you, when I ask what you talked about with the bison, you say We understood each other, which I take to mean:

Bison: That woman is a very nice person.
Woman: Yes, indeed.
[an elk sh...]

Love, let’s be the black bear steaks, turning our noses up or the intern—whoever is feeling patiently for a handful of fro our yard. Let’s be those bears eat our fill of this land, then the thick brush, trying to be

CONSERVATION & REHABILITATION

ALYSE KNORR
Love, let's be the black bears that refuse our sirloin steaks, turning our noses up to the Lead Naturalist, or the intern—whoever is feeding us—that day—waiting patiently for a handful of frozen berries flung into our yard. Let's be those bears who come when called, eat our fill of this land, then pad back together into the thick brush, trying to be as wild as we still can.
MOOSE ARE OVER-RUNNING THE PARK
AND THIS MAKES ME THINK OF LOVE

ALYSE KNORR

In autumn, everyone weds—the moose find one another
to mate and calve, tolerating gasps and photos until
an “incident” occurs. Too many dogs off leash.

Too many runners distracted by iPods. Too many reasons
not to trust, not to say about the beautiful thing: That is beautiful.
Like the frosty October morning when the man, whose face
bones were crushed last year by a charging bull, reaches for
his handgun at the sight of a cow with twins. Haven’t we all been
crushed? Haven’t we all closed our eyes once? To love—
just to speak of it—requires a courage only love itself provides.
In this line, the cow and her twins slip back into the trees.
In this one, I hold your hand and we marry in the trees.

The trees marry the moose. The moose marry the runners.
But weren’t we the runners all along? Running toward each other—
toward the call we heard before we even recognized it.

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MR. CHOMPERS

SOMA MEI SHU

Stella says the light in her bedroom needs to be turned on.
I fold the laundry and go upstairs. “I need to go upstairs yourself,” she says.
I dragged Mr. Chompers up there.” He’s wearing a blue t-shirt. It’s her favorite: a pilly, green frog.
“Ribbit! Ribbit! I’m a frog. I fold the laundry. The frog’s in the trees.”

She lingers across the room. Outside, the sun is stronger than ours.

“Mama, I do not like that idea,” she says. “The urge to whine and the idea of waiting for my mother that I change her into the frog shirt. It’s going to be hard.”

“Stella, we’ve discussed this. If you can’t wait, you need to be more responsible. Should I be the one to retrieve it?” Also, I’m reading chapter books. Black Pony is a page turner. I’m sure Stella would love every word I’ve used.

“The light is flickering,” she says. “I’ll go to the window behind me.” She adds, “I’ll catch fire.”

“Is the light really flickering?” I ask her. She holds the stack that I’ve started on the other side of the room.

“Yes.”