



Kate Medley

WHAT WEALTH IS

by Rebecca Gayle Howell

When you eat the same food as your livestock, your animals, the beasts
 you rear from teat to trough—rear up for tender, the cut—
 when you chew in your mouth what you dump into theirs
 when you know their bodies are not today separate from your body,
 the noise-making heat, green flies all around,
 when the garden yard is stopped short by its wall of corn, its room of corn,
 tall as any useful man, tall as money's gate,
 you know: your hand, rising up and opening, is the devil to which all this prays
 and in your dream you walk in past the gate, into the corn,
 taller than you, into its room, and it's dark here, the husk ceiling
 its own shallow, unlit, selfish sun, and at your feet the path narrows into a limit
 that makes the leaves for a moment look like the ocean folding in on itself or the church
 women praising with their palm fans, the church women who knew once
 what to do, and so you put your god hand up and open to touch the fronds
 thinking they will know what to do, and they are sharp as the stained blade your daddy
 carried, sharp as the cut, and your blood hand is bleeding now, your face,
 bleeding, and you close your eyes and walk because isn't this the way out?

Native to Kentucky, Rebecca Gayle Howell is a senior editor for *The Oxford American*. Her forthcoming book *American Purgatory* received The Sexton Prize and will be released in both the United States and the U.K. in early 2017.