

JAMES MCKEAN

Pilgrims

Postmarks closer and closer
until you knock this windy day.
We have waited with towels,
syrups and salt. Our water is warm.
We hold your hands
that shaped our names and complained
in cursive beneath the crooked Chinese stamp.
Leave that pig misery behind,
we say, unwinding your blue scarf,
and speak to us of poppy fields
before the stone flower of Mount Kailash,
of walking and walking
until your bags lay here.
You spin in place, boots off.
Words. Now flesh. Ten thousand miles
for a tub, yours each year,
your hair longer, gray, braided,
wound twice. Water runs behind a door.
We imagine your unpinning, fingers
dressed with soap and permethrin,
our gift, until the holy lice of Lhasa
circle counter-clockwise
down the drain.