

Classic Poetry Series

Jean Monahan

- poems -

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Rough Beast

Don't tell a camel about need and want.

Look at the big lips
pursed
in perpetual kiss,
the dangerous lashes
of a born coquette.

The camel is an animal
grateful for less.

It keeps to itself
the hidden spring choked with grass,
the sharpest thorn
on the sweetest stalk.

When a voice was heard crying in the wilderness,

when God spoke
from the burning bush,

the camel was the only animal
to answer back.

Dune on stilts,
it leans into the long horizon,
bloodhounding

the secret caches of watermelon

brought forth like manna
from the sand.

It will bear no false gods
before it:
not the trader
who cinches its hump
with rope,
nor the tourist.

It has a clear sense of its place in the world:

after water and watermelon,
heat and light,
silence and science,

it is the last great hope,

Noah's ark,

Virgin of the oasis
who brings forth milk

under a deadly sky.

Year after year
it follows the bright stars
east, falls to its knees
for the lowliest king.

Except, of course, when the top lip
lifts like a curtain
on a mighty sneer.

Then you may hear,
out of the mouth of that rough beast,
the walls of the wide world
collapse.

Anonymous submission.

Jean Monahan