

Cruellest of All Are the Gods Who Never Frown

by Michael Meyerhofer

I am tired of goats walking on ledges—
how calmly they disregard their own peril,
how even those nubby little horns
seem less like swirls of keratin
than middle fingers poised above faces
that have evolved into wide, permanent grins.
Maybe it's our ancestors' fault
for wanting smiles on their milk cartons
instead of missing children.
Did you know that goats sometimes
get their heads stuck in fences and have to wait
until a farmer comes by to free them?
It's the horns. To remove them
is called *disbudding*. It takes a tool
like an Inquisitor's pliers, castration bands
that resemble swollen wedding rings,
and a big glass of water to soak them in.



Photograph: "Goats" by Aparna Pathak (@aparnapathak04). "Cruellest of All Are the Gods Who Never Frown" was written by Michael Meyerhofer for Rattle's Ekphrastic Challenge, July 2015, and selected by Timothy Green as the Editor's Choice winner.

