I wouldn’t live in the buffalo cave

even though Grandma nearly cries
whenever I hand over a string of words
as muddy as her dollar store pearls,
raves to our long line of relatives thank God
we have a family artist on a starry night
when we’re burning hot dogs.

Those early Spaniards made bison
beautiful—ocher coats smeared
red as blood as in the crevices, eyes glazed

from the kill. I imagine if Van Gogh
dusted over his own thin fingers,
we’d find the same agile form

stamped on that damp wall in replicated
negatives. But my hands don’t belong
in this cave, where the oldest artists

made sense of stampedes
and knew the exact stance of a boar
pulling up tubers in summer.

Grandma hopes to see my book
before she’s a skeleton. She doesn’t know
how I sit dumbly at our dying campfire

and run a stick in circles through the dirt.
And while I labor to master the animal’s flared nostrils,
the buffalo cave is long complete.