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Domesticity

by Dale M. Kushner

When the fields outside town have been twice disked,
and the furrowed black earth
is scoured with light,
cattle get brazen.
The warming ticks of March

gentling down their flanks
sets them to lather and kick
at the slightest knuckle of wind,

as though spring-sun could lift
the anchor of their domesticity
and ancestor ghosts
come loosened in their blood.

A farmer's fortune is hobbled
by luck: gentle rains and beveled sunlight
can easily slip back under
the icy coma of a March sky.

But season after season, each day is the same:
the farmer drives the herd
over muddy tractor ruts
to a split-oak gate where the largest cow

lows and lows
to be let out into pasture.
Night after night, slung against his barnwood door,
he counts their return—the single-file cortege—
their headhulks obediently lowered

for stanchioning.
He must shackle them
before a slice of moon can hook itself
into the blackness of their eyes,

rouse anarchy in their bones. As once, in winter,
mucking out a starlit barn, he heard
his girls begin to stamp and moan in their stalls,

their silver breath
so hot, if he'd touched it,
he'd be burnt forever.

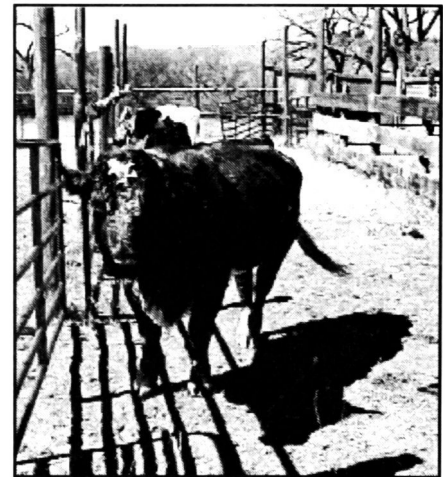


Photo by Joel Kendall

