

Husbandry

You watched me watch you vault the stockyard,
choose your cut, part calf from cow.
You flung the young bull onto its heaving side,
smacked it into the dust,
tied its splayed legs to the iron rails.
Terror buried its pulse, drilled holes in its eyes.
Pinned and fetched and dragged and yoked and broken,
It surrendered, like me.
Fear rose from its flat, wet hide
and hung over the yard.
Your blade burned cold and hard, a quick incision tore its sack.
Severed its future.

Less stressful when they're young, you laughed –
and tossed its stones to the waiting cattle dog,
each one an insult.
The calf's hot blood stained the air,
your hands,
the dirt at my feet.
The job swallowed you, showed you a man.
The induction made me retch
Its wound seared in my memory.
You released the animal with the slip of a knot.
It hauled its bulk upright, bellowed its indignance,
then, reduced, sought its own kind.

Easier to handle when they're done, you said.
Selection, the earlier the better
Cull the bull right out of them
Raise good stock, yield good breeds
Its meat's more tender
Choice cuts are better for consumers.
I could've said the same about you, I said.
Domestication, the earlier the better
Steered in the right direction
Processed for market, no undesirable traits
Tenderness the desired result.
I watched you watch me too, like a dirty secret.