

Saturday, March 6

What I Think of Death, If Anyone's Asking

Let me tell you about the cows, how scientists driven
by some dark need to see them digest, really see it,
cut holes in the sides of twenty and inserted glass
ringed with plastic there, riveted it to their skin,
creating in each a porthole, so that when they stood
together, sleepily chewing, at the icy edge of a Missouri
sunrise they looked not unlike a fleet of cow ships, moored
illogically to a barn, bobbing o a sea of frozen sod.

Let me tell you how I stumbled, nineteen and drunk,
across a field to touch one on a dare – *the window*,
the boy had hissed, shoving the bottle at me
for one last drink, *it has to be the window*–
how I moved, stubbing my feet, shivering woozy,
eyes half-mooned from groping, and was almost there,
hoping the boy was watching, impressed
and aroused, his eyes blazing with the joke of it all,
how then, from nowhere and all at once the long arm
of time's elliptical arc swooped in, wrapped me
in its cello-thin line, how I stopped, looked at the cows,
wondered what they must see coming toward them,
what monster upon them now, mad with curiosity
and no doubt a map of what to peel back next,
having already torn open and plexiglassed
their stomachs, would it be their hearts, or would I take
their souls, unto the paper layers of their thoughts,
pull the thread of their breath to unravel the tones of their lowing.

I am telling you how I reached the point I always knew
would come, when I was at once too old and far
too young, how I know, really knew for the first time
how there's a wildness in us, how that made me sick
but I couldn't go back, so I went toward the only cow
who watched not me but the sun, pink as a newborn,
heaving itself through the trees. I went to her, leaned
my head on her back, the sun growing, the boy

turning, her belly reflecting the last of the stars.

Maud Kelly