A Cow’s Reveille

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Abstract

I OPENED my eyes to a cold, gray-speckled room and tried to make myself believe I wasn’t awake. The sun wasn’t up yet, but it would be soon, because I could see my brother’s bed on the other side of the room. I figured it was about six...
My Galaxy

*by Ann-Marie Bjornstad*

*Modern Languages, Jr.*

Lighted into life
They say I am drunk with my galaxy.
Too soon I am intoxicated.
Bubbles of rapture curdle off my fleshy lips.
Reputation exploited.
Dissolved to crystal despondency.
And bar-room floors.
Cat-eyes meteor my convulsed stars into absinthe
And blue and green are my hearts.
They told me my kidneys held the wastes of
Adam’s life,
But I laughed... and sparkled scarletly
From a vintage ageless and blind.
A swollen tongue drinks from my kidneys
And flesh tipples in the misery of my drunk galaxy.

A Cow’s Reveille

*by Neil Gustafson*

*English, Sr.*

I OPENED my eyes to a cold, gray-speckled room and tried
to make myself believe I wasn’t awake. The sun wasn’t
up yet, but it would be soon, because I could see my brother’s
bed on the other side of the room. I figured it was about six.
In a few minutes Dad would be calling me to go after the cows. Gary had done it the morning before, and it was my turn. I pulled the covers over my head, and curled into the patch my body had prepared for itself during the night. I contemplated sliding one leg down into the cold part of the bed just to see if I could stand it, but I had done that a thousand times, and every time I pulled it back. Maybe he would oversleep and forget to call us. No, he never overslept, but maybe the cows were already home, and I could sleep for a few more minutes at least.

The darkness pulled at my eyeballs, as I strained wide-eyed, but unsuccessfully, to see the clock on my dresser. The room began to lighten a little, and I could see my breath escape me and spread out into the air, only to be disintegrated in a second. But there was always another breath to follow, and be disintegrated. My brother rolled over and groaned. Maybe he thought it was his turn, but it wasn’t likely that he would forget.

“Gary.”
“Huh?”
“Your turn to get the cows, isn’t it?”

“Sorry.” I was losing all my hopes of getting out of the job, but it was hard to resign myself to accepting it. Nothing to do but wait for Dad to holler. I figured it was probably the coldest day in ten years, or something nifty like that. Suddenly, the yard light came on. Soon now, I thought. I heard Dad gently slamming the refrigerator door shut, and quietly banging the coffee pot on the stove.

“Neil, it’s after six,” the hated call crawled up the stairs. Of course, I didn’t answer; you just didn’t answer the first time. He didn’t expect us to answer the first time. Now he would go over to the counter and turn on the radio for the morning weather report and maybe some early markets. I heard the ugly, nasal voice, “—and hog prices should be up a little today. In Omaha—” But the hogs in the feed lot, clanging at their self-feeders, soon drowned out his voice. It was everybody’s breakfast time. The dog barked at something, or maybe he was just clearing his throat.

“Neil, come on. Quarter after six.”
“Cows home?”
“Nope.”

“Okay, I’m coming.” Then I had to decide how to get out of bed that morning. You either slide out slowly and freeze only partially at a time, or you jump out courageously, throwing the covers back with determination. But this morning I wasn’t the courageous type, so I slid out sort of cowardly, touching only one bare foot to the cold linoleum floor at a time. The instant both feet touched the floor, I had no choice but to scramble to get dressed and rush downstairs to the warmth of the oil burner. As usual, I could expect a cordial welcome from my father, who had no idea what I had just been through.

“Morning!”

“Morning, Dad. How cold is it?”

“Coffee?”

“Yeh.”

“Six below in Shenandoah; probably a little colder here. But I stepped outside, and it isn’t too bad.” Not too bad? It sounded bad enough to me.

Three cups of coffee and a little moral support from the weather man, who promised the sun would be out today, got me to the door, dressed and ready to go. As I stepped outside the wind hit my face and bare neck like cold, hard water. Pulling my head down between my shoulders, I started walking west toward the cattle shelter.

The hills were all the same color, sort of a black, and it was hard to see one hill-top in front of another. It was like the horizon had no perspective.

Since I was only walking, my legs had little circulation, and they began to feel hard and taut in the cold air. Even two pair of pants couldn’t protect them from that kind of cold. The northwestern wind burned my face, and tears drained from my eyes and mucous from my nose. Trying to wipe my nose with my glove wasn’t too pleasant, since what I had wiped on it a few minutes before was now frozen. Soon I had to turn around and walk backwards. I could see the glowing horizon; the house and other buildings in the distance had an almost rosy-colored outline. The weatherman was right; the sun would be out today.

Behind me I could hear a few bellows from cows with
painful udders, so I turned around and faced again that continual slap of air rushing to escape from the cold north. Steaming bodies, warm and damp from sleeping in fresh manure and straw, arose from their beds, as I yelled a cow's reveille at the top of my lungs. A few refused to be moved by mere sound, so a friendly kick or two was needed here and there. Once they were up, they stood stiffly, hunched their backs, coughed up breakfast, and started out on their half-mile freeway to work.

We were heading home with the wind at our backs. My nostrils thawed out; my eyes cleared themselves, and I breathed deeply of a familiar air. It was a quiet, beautiful morning.

Prohibition

by Ken Kaiser

Architecture, Sr.

No drinking until five and it's always five or so something or other; hours, years, seconds or maybe apples or peaches which can't be divided into one another or multiplied for that matter—one never knows, and even fewer care these days at least so it seems which may or may not be obvious to the casual (or otherwise) observer. And so we'll raise our glass it being now five past five in the P.M. of our Lord nineteen hundred and the devil may (he will anyway) take the rest. So drink hearty gentlemen and the ladies too for the glass is falling and the sand is scattered on the dusty floor.