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And Now the Milkcow

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AND NOW THE MILKCOW

And now the milkcow
at the end of her tether
has gone crazy,
heelflies in swarm after swarm
over and under and into
every soft spot on her body,
her eyes the eyes of an idiot,
now flat, now crossed, now rolling,
her tail switched down to a stub,
each nostril a flaring of thick mucus
flecked with foam.

An omen, Anna calls it,
the end of her wet dishtowel
like a bullwhip popping.

Yet in spite of the towel,
in spite of the soapweed pot
I set to smoking,
the flies keep coming on,
until untying the rope from the tether pin
I lead the mad-eyed Guernsey
to the deepest hole in the pond.
Blood from a hundred pinholes
clouds the water,
and the cow threshes blindly,
bawling, lunging, at last
falling on her side,
her udder on its way to sinking
leaking a pink to purple milk,
her large head following under,
as if content to drown.

Anna there to see it all.
This is an omen, Jacob, she says,
and like a marked man
looking to be clean
I throw the end of the rope
to the center of the spot
where the beast went down.