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First Spring on Roosevelt Drive

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First Spring on Roosevelt Drive

1.
The morning the spotted calf was born
our mother who wore one-inch bows in her hair,
who crowded into size seven shoes,
saying it was the width she took,
not the length,
our mother who looked away when the neighbor
lady nursed a baby
that morning mother stared at the cow Dad
bought cheap because she was too old to breed.

The old cow's flanks wet mother's head, bent
to nipples, caked and pink as tainted meat.
And she lit into the house, scrubbed her clean
linoleum, dark hair touching breasts, bound tight
as the round cheeses kept in the wellhouse.

2.
Outdoors, we heard mother stoke the stove.
She marched to the chicken coop then, grabbed
the oldest hen,
gripping its neck in one hand,
swinging clockwise twice
until the twist and easy give.
And she tossed the head, letting the rest
of the chicken run.

Mother dipped the dirtied hen in a scalding
pot, singed each wing hair. Then two sweeps
into the naked cavity, and we saw the clump
of yellow eggs she'd been reaching for.
For lunch, mother mixed the last powdered milk, set out brown bread and the stewing hen. She cut the rubbery eggs, ate each herself, saying only the old cow would come fresh in a day or two.