

The Farm at the Edge of the World

If I could name them
if I could pull their names out of the dark
bring them to light, see their features,
put a name to those faces I knew
in that early garden world on the edge of the city
where the farm was only four blocks away,
the farm with cowbarns, paths cobbled, splattered
with rich black mud, the pond, the ducks
slap-sucking feet in mud, and chickens, cows
herded from fields mooing low swaying slow
over new-paved roads, a scattered uneven hoof-sound,
into the farmyard, mud caking legs, the mooing,
I can see them now, the farmers' sons with thin switches
behind them, shouting, I can hear their voices,
the mooing, I can name them now, Fred Cook, Albert Cook,
Cookses Farm — the cows shambling into the barns
to be milked, then the placid farmyard,
the dairy where the milk ran into churns, one of the sons,
Albert or Fred, lifting the warm milk just come from the
cows in big pails, pouring into the funnel, while I watch
the liquid slipping through the bars of a purifier
flowing filmy milk-white, a thin skin stretching
never to break till it trickled in the churn below . . .
I have walked the four blocks with a jug, through the farm
gate, through the yard, the smell of horse and cow, past
the farmhouse to the dark dairy, waiting on its cold stone
floor chill on the feet while Farmer Cook thrusts his arm
down into the churn into the froth of the milk and I always
expect his arm to come out white as bone pulling up the
measure, once, twice, and a little bit more a third time, more
than the pint — then carry it home careful, no running,
no slopping it over the rim of the jug — sometimes
a splash of milk, a white stain on the sidewalk remembering
the farm, the white skin, white bone all gone now, pulled
down, stones there now, a butcher, the carcasses hang,

no black mud, no dung on their clean yellow fat,
 but the white bones show through, a white splash,
 the stretched skin hasn't stopped running through bars,
 this white film running, those faces, those names
 in their white skins . . .

Peter Stevens

The Cocktail Party

tonight i observe you,
 maintain my distance,
 as you stand so languid
 in these crowded rooms.
 they meet you, greet you,
 again and again,
 detaining hand on sleeve:
 your legend draws them close,
 though legends often lie.
 you with your wives
 and mistresses, ladies
 of talent and beauty;
 you with your tragic past,
 your very magic future,
 you endure all this : noise,
 crowd, perpetual intrusion;
 you have your confidence,
 your success, easy charm
 impartially dispensed . . .
 i have known that manner,
 later will know again that smile
 — a last obliging gesture —
 your hand between my thighs.

Linda Pyke