

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

*Jeff Santosuosso*

### **Dignity on the Pasture**

Cows can birth calves  
formed inside out.

The spine never closes in development,  
and everything else goes wrong.

The vet reaches in to grasp a head,  
forelegs and hooves.

Instead, he grabs a handful of liver  
just like at the butcher shop  
but warm.

The calf will not survive, of course.

The only solution is gentle removal  
of the pieces –

for they must be removed –  
and some type of dignity on the pasture.

There is a cow, there is a man.

There is a steaming pile in the grasses  
to be removed

for some type of dignity on the pasture.

The cow will return to grazing.

for she is sturdy and reliable.

The vet will calf the next cow

for he is sturdy and reliable.

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### A Yankee's First Winter in Texas

I know what it's like to stand in a sweatshirt  
when the white at your feet,  
the gray at your temples,  
and the squalls in the wind suggest otherwise.

I know how to inhale through the nose,  
exhale through the mouth,  
layer myself for outdoor exercise.

I know to go gloveless while my knuckles fight freeze  
to pull and to push and work unencumbered  
to stand on a layer of earth hard like the great granite  
along our Winnepesaukee,  
within these quiet, ancient peaks,  
along our scattered islands,  
beneath our white-winged grosbeaks.

I've boarded, bladed and 'bogganed  
these trails, these ponds and hills.  
I've used my boots for two goalposts,  
dried my socks on warm windowsills.

Texas winters are sweatshirt winters.  
Jackets are not needed.  
Winters are boardless, untobogganed, bladeless,  
winter's an autumn receded  
to thin air.

Winter is time's own blood  
running through its veins.  
The Granite State, the Lone Star State,  
it's time's cold aging pains  
aching through the windy crags of the north  
and this basin's deep, wide plains.

**The Sound of Lilacs**

Someone there  
is throwing lilacs in the air.  
But the lilacs are not falling.  
They're calling me to where  
the scent fills my nostrils,  
and I breathe  
for I am no wastrel  
of spirit.  
I move near it, can nearly hear it,  
reaching for the lilacs  
gliding on the breeze,  
abiding me like the very springtime  
songs that chime all around me.  
I open my palm  
toward the warming  
blooms that drift away  
tomorrowing my today.

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### Sage is Dying

Blue eyes still milky from her birth  
pink lips still milky from the breast  
Sage grows into death.

Her mama knows this.

In lamplight as soft as her hair  
in swaddling as soft as her seal at her mama  
she suckles,

life passing through to her lips and into  
her struggle.

Mama's breast empties  
as her heart fills.

Sage will die soon,  
a twinge, a vague infantile uncertainty,  
a relaxation and a release from what had given her life,  
a cooled warmth and  
a stopped heart.

A mother's gasp  
the seal of her own lips broken,  
her own release from what has given her life.