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Once and for All

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Once And For All

Once and for all I will close my eyes
like a tree caught in raging flames
refusing to ignore the war, airplanes,
feedback from the radio, and I will think
of you in your radar battery
your dented pillow turning beneath cloudless skies
and I will hate the mail, T.V., the passing of time.

I will not listen to what Stephanie says
but instead pay attention to the cow and bull
making love on the crest of pasture
beyond my breakfast window.
When it is over I will hold them to it
like a governess, spreading sweet alfalfa
for the calf at the corner that touches my backyard
and I will not look away.
I will stand in my Redwings at four in the morning,
bending under the low heaving beams
of my neighbors barn, holding an old
railroad lamp, burning oil to illuminate
the birth, the motherly tongue freeing
the fledgling from its sack,
saying, "You are mine,"
saying, "You will always bear my smell."
Returning home through the small valley
I will inhale deeply the fog
remembering what I have seen,
and I will hold them to it.

When it is over I will send her packages
of roses and honeysuckle from America.
She must continue to smile in that Basque way
I remember, and I will remember this
before she goes, before I cry aloud
remembering how she went
with the November mist turning to frost
wool on skin, gloved hands, cold lips in the dark.

(for Trish)

Michael Payne