

Paying the Bills

By her tail 49 has dragged my dad
from the barn to the farmhouse porch.
He rests a minute, stands, dust
of the gravel drive rising
from the gulleys cut by his heels.
She is not stupid; she knows the smell
of slaughter on that trailer. In seconds
she'll kick at his ribs and sprint again,
yank him over the vorted fence, away
through the corn to the chicken coop.
Who is more stubborn, more animal?
She in an hour will climb the ramp
in her heaviness, beaten, he in a year
will running, bucking, be hauled
to the suburb, the factory, torn
by his heels from his earth.
But for now, each other's simple danger, they
go tensing, Homeric, bound
in their clash to the dust they rile—
as if such strife could undo
their fortunes, could settle their debts
in the books of men.

