**Carved**

Marilyn Hilton

I was seven when the men slaughtered a calf

and hung it from a rafter in the shed.

The animal swayed on its chains,

mouth slack open, eyes dull.

Blood ran from the gash at its throat

and pooled on the concrete floor

a foot beneath its snout.

One man plunged a blade into its abdomen,

then tugged downward through the flesh.

Intestines burst from the seam,

a stomach tumbled into a wheelbarrow.

The other men scooped out the rest:

liver, lungs, heart,

and blood dripped

onto the calf’s own quivering entrails.

Steam floated from the cavity,

I pressed my mitten to my nose

against the shock of death, the stench of life.

One man sprayed a hose on the floor,

another swept the blood down the drain.

The calf swayed.

The men warmed their knives at the heater, then

pared the calf’s hide from itself

rump to shoulder, separating flesh—

like making a cow coat,

like slipping a sweater off a girl.

And what hung from the rafter

was a carcass with the head of a calf.