

Barn Cat

I have heard the talk, how my aunt — accused
 of suicide by what she refused — let go
 this place and herself. Now we're all here
 to divide among us what she has not
 already willed away — what mattered most,
 or not at all: the sunken house, the brace
 of swayed mules, querulous hens, the outbuildings
 skeletal, wind-scoured.

Her root-cellar empty,
 the stable still groans, magnificent with hay;
 from under it, one of her barn cats, nameless,
 staggers and stands. I can see she's been days
 dying and isn't done yet: a maggot-burned
 dissection bares hip-bone, living sinew,
 the shank alive with flies. This is no wound, this
 rude decay. I know I could go to her
 house and find loaded, still leaning behind her
 kitchen door the single-shot .22
 and with mercy kill what has refused the place
 where animals go to die, kill what has risen
 out of resolve, inspired, and moves towards me,
 as if towards death, who will not despair
 to save her, will not mistake this sudden taming.