

ROBERT COOPERMAN

The Ranch Wife Thinks of the Vagaries of Being in the Beef Business

When I first married Rick,
 he took me to a slaughterhouse:
 "So you'll know how our cattle go
 from cropping sweet grass
 to being steaks and burgers."
 I winced to hear the bellowing,
 men with hammers waiting
 patient as baseball sluggers;
 the stink of blood, feces, and fear
 smacked me in the head like waves
 of panicked flocks rising into the sky.

I tipped like we were shooting in a raft
 down the Roaring April River in full spate,
 and thought of turning vegetarian,
 or just fasting forever, like a Buddhist.
 But I can tuck into a T-bone now,
 like I was born a carnivore, which I was:
 though Mom picked out our meat
 wrapped in clean plastic, she'd tell me
 about accompanying her mother

to the butcher shop, and watching—
 aprons bloody as battlefield surgeons—
 as butchers hacked sides of beef into steaks.
 Mom declared it was like watching
 sculptors trace figures in slabs of marble.
 When tourists hold their noses

at the stink of cattle, I want to tell them,
"This is what real folks eat.
Don't like it? Go back to Boulder
and stuff yourselves on veggie dogs."

Good Lord,
I've become Rick's mouthpiece
without even realizing it.