

Market Day

by Penelope A. Thoms

"Foghorns in the Field, Nanna."
The boy woke me from my nodding
so I would know and fill my ears with cotton wool.

For forty years the old man has taken
calves to market come September.
And for twenty five I've stopped the sound.

Cows crying sound like foghorns the boy said,
They did, so: low and deep, their loss filled our
ears for three days and nights.
They stopped. The mourning over.

Early on they were no bother.
I even watched as man and dog
separated calves from cows,
to the trailer and away.

Their pain was nothing to me,
until the war. And my own lad gone.
So quick it was: He hopped the bus,
blew me a kiss and turned away.

It was market day and the cows bellowed
for the soft rough tongues on teats;
Their udders sore and full of milk not taken.

That day I heard them.
And my keening mixed with theirs
to fill the fields and valley, echo off the mountains
and float out to sea.

Since then, it's cotton wool
that keeps me sane. The old man knows
and stays away until my weeping's done.

Then, he makes the tea,
touches my bowed shoulder with one
gnarled hand and with the other, gently removes
the cotton for another year.

Penelope A. Thoms is a hospice chaplain and spiritual director living in an old farm house in Northern Virginia with her husband, two dogs, rabbit, guinea pig and fish. In addition to poetry, Penelope has written a play, "A New Year's Tale," which was produced in Reston, Virginia last year. Her book, "Thin the Veil," was written while she lived in the West of Ireland for six years.