One evening amidst the silence of an artists’ retreat in rural Ireland, Mekeel McBride of Kittery suddenly heard faint, distinct music from a room below -- "a sweet, odd shock," she writes, that made her feel as if the music came from everything around her, “intrinsic and also completely otherworldly.”

**Strauss and Cows of Ireland**

by Mekeel McBride

From my room at dusk I watch the cows in their late graze. Great clouds of gnats hang over them, gauzy as a bride’s bouquet. Downstairs, a radio. Soprano’s aria swells so delicate and pure it must be unrequited love but just what the opera is I can’t tell from here, though later learn: Strauss, Der Rosenkavalier. Cows continue to drift the dusky pasture, luminous, as if fed on candlelight instead of grass. They pass with heavy gentleness, now and then stopping to lean toward our windows with little regard for human arias that reach them though it conducts through me a sweetness: distant opera and the wandering of star-tiaraed cows in darkness.

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