

Storm Rider

The sunset brands the mountains in the west;
the mesa chills like iron in the shade.
He rides the fence line looking for a stray,
a Hereford huddled up against the cold.

At times the ululant wind spurs up the snow,
like ghosts of white wild stallions in the sage.
He finds the yearling struggling in the wire,
panicked by this too soon winter rage
and wandering from the herd's familiar smell.

His hands thick with cold, he cuts the fence
and slips a rope around the strayer's neck.

Behind him through the snow he sees the ranch,
the house a blur of warm, retreating light.
Supper's going on there in the steam
of the adobe kitchen, and his flesh
yearns for the black stove's piñon-scented heat,
the fresh tortillas and the spicy meat.

But alone now in the rawness of the range,
riding the muscled horse through ice-barbed cold,
there's a vigor in the storm that molds his soul.

He will hear again this chaos call.
Silvered pine trees on the mesa's fringe
will anchor roots and tower in his mind.

—Pamela Hamblin