

Inez Hunt

High Country ~
Ghost Town Poems



MT. SHEFFEL

Drawings by Isabel M. Staehle

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The only
soft spot I
really have is
for my friends.

... HIGH COUNTRY

Happy

New
Year

"1974"

D. Trine

Inez Hunt

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Ghost Town Poems



MT. SHERFALL

Drawings by Isabel M. Staehle

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... FOR SALLY ANN

My copper-haired grandmother
Who left me stories for a heritage.

Who knew all about homesteading
With four children growing tall,
And when to use the rod and when to spare
And how to make a poultice out of bread—
And how to spread a spider web on a fresh cut—
Who felt the sting of camphor could cure everything,
And recommended hot tea, even for a broken heart.

Who could remember
How it was when Quantrill took the cow
And shot the boy—
Who kept a pair of white lace stockings,
Bought in Vicksburg when the siege was on,
Folded in her bible with a rose.

Who taught me mysteries of maples
Blowing silver in the wind—

Who died at ninety six, still peppery—
Copper-haired up to the last—
A little tarnished and a little tired—
A little tired of "all this fiddle!"

Gift - Thawer, B. - 5/94

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FOREWORD

These verses sketch the profiles I have seen in the high country. Some are of peaks—some of people and even the creatures which make up the western scene. Sometimes they are strong-boned profiles, clear and articulate—sometimes fragmentary outlines caught faintly in the alpine glow.

I seldom carry a camera as I go. I have known photographers who could catch the elusive, but I am usually grieved to find that my camera seldom recorded all that I saw. Dim figures that are so clear to me, disappear at the click of a shutter. Nor do I find any equipment that can record the voices I hear in these places.

So I choose verse to hold the scene and to tell the story. If I have used first person to record so many stories, not mine, please forgive and remember—they told it to me that way.

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This is high country,
Frigid and wounding sharp and raw
And more than match for any man
Who dares to stay.

I have heard her winter mutterings
And have seen old timers
Cast knowing glances as they said,
"It's the Sisters coming down to close the
pass."

Then I have watched white Furies with their
vengeful hands
Spill avalanche and death.

But I have seen this high country
Thaw and yield and flow
And murmur past a fern
And hide a fawn.

12 .:. GHOST TOWN HOUSE

How does a house die?
First, someone shuts a door.

Then storms strike hard
To shake the chinking loose
And cold settles in a down-draft
Through a sodden flue,
Glass shatters or is stolen,
Leaving hungry holes.

The floors break through
Where memory grows too heavy for the joist.
The rats gnaw tediously along with Time
In little bites.

So, a home dies,
But death begins the day
The one who loves it
Locks a door and walks away.

13 .:. THIN SKIN, THE RED-HAIRED KIND
Story from Clear Creek

They said she was pretty once,
When Grandpa brought her here,
But I never saw her that way.

As I recall,
Her hair, once copper, wore a tarnished hue
Her skin, brown splotched and wrinkled.
Thin skin, the red-haired type,
Won't stand the mountain sun and freeze
And buffet of the dust-grimed wind.

They said she raised her family by herself
With Grandpa up and gone with each chinook
To strike a high-grade vein or chase a painted
face,
But back again late fall
To warm his feet
And eat dried-apple pie
And see the baby born a month ago.

They said Grandma was pretty once
But mountain sun and freeze and dust-grimed
wind
All take their toll—
Especially of thin skin,
The red-haired kind.

He was an ornery one
 And didn't half deserve his turn of luck,
 But Fortune is a whoring jade
 Who doesn't care
 Whose lap she falls into
 Nor where her kisses go
 Nor who lets down her hair.

So Fortune filled his cup
 As often as he drank it dry,
 Until it dripped off both the points of his mustache
 And wet his gaping shirt
 That stretched across his barreled chest.

And so he drowns
 And became numb to either joy or pain
 And never was aware of the exact moment
 Fortune left him--
 Nor even cared.

There is a white church
 With a child-like simplicity
 And ghosts that haunt this place
 Are those of little children
 Sacrificed to build the west.

This was a man's country.
 You seldom think of children
 Except in cemeteries
 Where the stones
 Tell how the epidemic
 Took its toll.

Here in the clean swept aisle
 I see little girls
 In starched white dresses
 Walk to light an inner fire.

Outside, I think of small boys,
 Reluctant to go in,
 Who turn bright leaves in grubby hands
 To wonder, "What is gold?"

In child-like churches such as these,
 The words, "Except ye become--"
 Keep crowding back
 And I shed sophistication
 In the snow-washed wind
 And watch the fall turn cottonwoods
 To altar fires.

I couldn't tell you why—you'd think me
daft,
Explaining why I bought this sagging place,
As useless as a long abandoned shaft
And scarred and lined as deeply as my face.
I can't explain why I can't tear it down
Nor make museum for the curious eye.
I only know it's best the old ghost town
Should slowly gray and with its day should die.
The hall stairway is rotted, soon to fall,
But there's no longer call to go up there,
Remembering wild roses on the wall
As pink as those she wore in her black hair.

I'd rather let it go—be past and done,
An old horse, loved and pastured in the sun.

She wasn't mountain born.
I brought her here
And folks said she would never fit this place
All rock and rough and hard,
And she, no bigger than a bar of soap after a big
wash.

She didn't take to storing things
Or canning like a mountain woman should
With summer's short.
But rather, when the air turned soft,
She danced tip-toe and braided calico into her hair
And later, gathered berries, eating as she picked
Insisting they were better warm with sun
And saying, "Why hoard sweetness like the bees
Who work all summer to be robbed!"

She wasn't strong enough
To fight hill storms.
She couldn't face the cold
And never lived to hush the baby in her arms.

Folks said she didn't fit into these hills,
But I remember that she fit the hollow of my arm.

The ghosts of Cripple Creek walk quietly
 And unobserved, save where our knowing eyes
 remember —
 Save where we recognize the restless shadow
 forms.

Walk along Bennett with its tilting walks
 And ghoul-eyed windows.
 Feel the forms push you as they crowd forsaken
 streets
 To walk their restless pace—a pace born of a
 fever
 That cannot be quenched by death.

Loiter at Sixth and see if you can outline Womack
 As he throws away his money to the crowd—
 Ill-fated Bob, forgotten and as lonely
 As the wind that cuts him through.

Watch the hawk soar upon the hill
 Where a white horse rides straight into fog.
 Watch Stratton dream before the Palace fire,
 No longer puzzled by the weight of gold.

The ghosts walk quietly in Cripple Creek
 And unobserved, except where knowing eyes
 Remember and re-live.

I came out west with him to see that he ate
 right,
 Vegetables and bread and not just meat.
 I kept his blankets clean
 And put a hot iron to his feet on winter nights.

I kept his house
 And saw he stayed home nights,
 And I reminded him about his chores.
 A man has to be told.

And when he died,
 I starched and ironed his boiled shirt
 And folded both his hands.
 The preacher said he was a model man
 And I knew I had done everything I could.
 Then when I buried him,
 I put a granite stone over his head
 And then I put a fence around his grave.

Why did they name the town for the
Postmaster's wife,"
I asked, "instead of him?"

The old timer shook his head,
And wrinkled his brow and filled his pipe.
"Near as I can recall," he drawled, "he was an
outdoor man.

He wasn't much for detail and the like
And little pigeonholes confused him
And he never could remember
Whether the name was above or below.
It didn't matter.
Hessie always did them over anyway.

Besides, some one had to mind the store
And she could boil the beans and heat the irons
On the big stove with the same wood
And watch the baby and talk to customers
While he went out to fish and pan a little on the
side.

He could have struck it rich, you know.
Uncle Sam always sent the check made out to
him
But folks just got the habit of saying,
'Send my mail to Hessie.' That may be how it
was."

The kindest thing you can do for deer
Is to throw a stone and teach them fear.
It wasn't fair. We coaxed with salt.
We fed the fawn. That was our fault.
Now blood lies red upon the ground
Where sanctuary once was found.
The kindest thing you can do for deer
Is to throw a stone and teach them fear.

Walk softly here
Where once they tenderly laid down their dead
So far from home.

Walk quietly
And breathe a prayer for peace
For all who sleep in these blue hills,
Straighten the graying picket fence
That stock have pushed in search of greening
grass.
Fill up the hole the curious coyotes dug.

Brush back a tear
For one wild fragile rose
That climbs a stone where mother and a babe
No longer look upon a sunlit world
Save through the blue eyed flax.

Bow with your heart
To all the ghosts of men who lived by code,
Compelled to play each card exactly as it fell—
The unafraid—the strong—the uninsured.
Who died bequeathing to us all
Dim trails that lead forever to a western sun.

Why he had asked to be buried here,
I could not see—here in this pitiful array
Of tilted stones and markers, and
These thirsty junipers that fought a dusty hill
For root and life.

Down the warm slope, a rattler
Left a finger trail to slide beneath a rock
And sing a requiem.

A thunder mutter threatened to transform
An adobe road to no-bottom grease
Within an hour.

But why he chose this place,
I could not see,
Until I said, "I hate to leave him here alone,"
And one brown rancher said,
"He's not alone, Ma'am.
Why, my baby's right across from him
And Mom and Dad almost beside him,
Though you can't tell with the fence torn down.
Yesterday, we dug it here especially,—"
"You mean you dug it here—yourself?"
We wouldn't let a stranger, Ma'am," he said.

Old walks run strange,
Worn smooth by vanished feet
And tilted as they settle into Time's quicksand.

In Central, once, they laid bright silver bricks
To be a sidewalk for the President.
Now silver bricks and presidents are gone.
One old board walk remains
To breathe a muffled chant,
To all who pass this way.

Sometimes, when I walk on quiet days,
I hear the rustle of bright petticoats
That once caressed these boards.
Sometimes it is the silken step of barefoot child
Who strums a picket fence with broken stick
And drops crumbs of warm bread and sugar as he
goes.

And sometimes I step aside
To let hobnailed and hurried boots
Go striding by.

The Sand Creek sun shines warm to heal
A wound that will not be healed.
The quicksand waits to avenge.
There is a chill under the cottonwood.

Green lizards mark their fine stitched trails
Into the shade of a sprawling gourd vine,
Seeded in Time and a red man's tragedy.

The curve of the creek is a hungry arm
Outstretched in remembering.
The morning deer has printed its track
Beside a broken arrowhead.

Far, off, a wandering wind gathers the sand
Into yellow puff-whirls—
Spirits of old Indian fires
Still smouldering, still smouldering.

Somehow, when you go west,
You can go western
In almost everything but God.

Oh, after a while, you get to thinkin'
Maybe God loves this new country after all,
Raw and big and terrible at times.
Maybe He even likes to walk under the tall pines
In the cool of the day.

But women want a church, white—
Like the one back home.
So you humor them
The way you do when you put the curlicues
On the gables and the porch
And when you put the pump close to the back
door.

After all, it's the women-folk
Who do most of the thinkin'
About the marryin'
And the buryin',
Maybe they don't want God homesick
For a house he knew.

High on the hill
They buried him beside the stony road
That looked across the valley to the town,
Where mines, the dance hall
And the tortuous daily trail
Had pressed for toll.

Someone remembered
To put flowers in a mason jar,
Now dirty and half full of leaves
And some one fearful
Of a vista, far too wide
Placed pickets like brown arms
To hold him fast.

Sometimes I want to say to travelers,
 "Don't go to Gothic,
 That tender beauty with the emerald fire, who,
 By all the old rights of discovery
 And of first love,
 Too swift and sweet to share,
 Belongs to me."

I should not say,
 "Don't go to Gothic,
 To find a town
 Like May Night with a wild rose in her hair,"
 For you will go
 And never see my claim stakes driven there
 And you will not remember,
 She belongs to me.

A century and some odd years ago,
 The lights dimmed and the curtains rose
 And the stage was set with the Rockies for the
 backdrop.
 The spotlight focused on red-bearded Gregory
 Who saw four dollars in his frying pan
 And shouted, "Gold!"

So the wagons came like ants
 And men goaded the oxen
 Over the hardpan ruts.

Framed in a wagon bow,
 Sometimes a young girl-mother came
 With eyes that feared horizons, sear and wide--
 With arms that hushed a baby to her breast.

Sometimes a woman walked--
 Her basque laced tight to hold her heart in
 wilderness—
 Her skirt full-free to step where stride is
 great—
 Her feet stripped bare to feel the temper of the
 dust
 And save her shoes.

And so they came,
 Intending to go back
 But staying past their time.

Now Tabor came and splattered silver across
 the stage
 And broke a heart and found one new
 And women who had burned their skin in
 mountain sun,
 Shuddered and were half-fearful if their men
 should find the lode.
 Some men built castles on the Denver streets
 And some were lonely there.

The drama rolled with tragedy and clown,
 A wispy-whiskered man urged young men
 west.
 The undertow sucked back bewildered Utes.

Men sought a vein in the Mount Pisgah scene
 But made their graveyard there and buried
 hopes.
 A gray-haired carpenter dreamed of a golden
 strike
 And was transformed to Midas overnight.

This was the tide that could not be held back
 As men carved names on granite canyon walls
 While some were trampled under hobnailed
 boots.
 This was the scene where all the leads and bit-
 parts
 Fit snug as blueprints for refining mill.

Some knew this country in a gentler mood,
 To them she gave no fortune but herself.

Sometimes strange figures haunt old trails at
 dusk
 To stalk the sun whose path leads always
 west.
 As though across a western prairie stage,
 Old ghosts line up for curtain call—
 Young Gregory, still dazed by color in the pan,
 Stratton bewildered by the constant weight of
 gold—
 Womack dogged to his death by Fortune's hand.

Faint as through a tear-mist gauze,
 A young girl-mother, framed in a wagon bow,
 Rides with the Future at her breast.

I came from Italy to work
 In Marble Town one day
 And all because with sculpture tools
 I had a certain way.

I took a pride in being best,
 I put the rest to shame.
 I carved the stones for mansions,
 I made myself a name.

I worked on many a masterpiece.
 But it cut me to the bone
 To carve a little curly lamb
 Upon my baby's stone.

We said he was an ornery critter
 Stubborn and hell-mean at times.
 We cursed him, beat him on his tough old hide
 With lash and bolt
 And hobbled him at night to graze.
 Then when the deep snow closed the trail
 We put him out upon the town to beg.

But when he died, we built a monument
 The way folks make up for the things
 They didn't do, or say, or remember.
 We built it out of granite,
 Like the rock that wore his hooves
 Down to the quick.

Here we remembered toil and sweat
 And a brute sort of fidelity
 And our own asininity at times.

Here we remembered that whether we plod or
 race
 When the trail is closed
 We all stand
 Beggars before God.

The sunlight is quiet now,
Lacing itself with shadow
And stretching its warm shape
Upon the ground.

An old house lies sprawled by fire and storm
And rocks have rolled to stone her
Like a fallen woman,
Once betrayed and past the needing.

Here and there an assay furnace
Stands, outwitting time,
While crucibles, cracked and begrimed
Stare with empty sockets into sun.

There in a cleft of rock,
The frost and rime and columbine
Have split with no less certainty than atom
power.

Where once the fury of the strike
Outroared the wind,
The scene is quiet
And the tall pines hush
The grieving of the stream.

They said, "She used to be a madam—
Ran a house across the creek
But hopes folks have forgotten."
But though the Lord made ten commandments,
None is so scarlet and indelible as one.

I looked at her aging face
Tried to read the wrinkles.
Far as I could see, the lines
Were only drawn by Time and told me nothing.

I noted she was growing deaf
And her voice echoed like a room
Where everything has been removed.

I wondered if she did a penance for remembered
sin
Or did she cling to triumph when her hat held
plumes
And when her dress laughed with the swish of
taffeta
And garters glistened.
They said she cried a great deal now
But her tears seemed meaningless—not
repentant—
Just a kind of weakness that comes with years.
And her laughter echoed down a dark forgotten
corridor.

My camera registers the ruin of today
 With textbooks torn and scattered—
 Rusted stove with ashes in the pan
 And wood bin emptied long ago and not refilled,
 And the shelf without the dipper
 Or the pail.

The old platform is smaller now
 Than when we all were Patrick Henry
 On a Friday afternoon.

I walk instinctively to find a certain desk.
 With eyes half closed,
 I run my hungry fingers on the dusty top
 To find a carved and lettered heart,
 Cut by a Christmas knife
 To last "so long as grasses grow and rivers
 run—"

There is a rat-gnawed rope.
 I wonder what would happen
 And what ghosts would wake
 If I should ring the bell?

The night is clear and the wind is still
 And I hear a cry on Heartbreak Hill.

And I recall in my memory
 Just such a night and a girl and me.

The wind was sharp and the leaves turned
 brown
 The night I rode to Cattle Town.

Saturday night and the Bar Magrue
 Rocked with gin and a Square Dance too.

I was new in town and I thought I'd glance
 At who was swingin' in the dance.

So I shuffled in to the fiddler's time
 To find a dancin' gal for mine.

When suddenly I turned to see
 A gal asmilin' up at me.

She was pink and white and gold haired too
 So what was a guy like me to do?

For she fit right into my good right arm
 And I fell a victim to her charm.

A locket hung from her throat so fair
 And a rose smelled sweet in her golden hair.

Oh, we do-si-doeed and Texas Starred
 And that gal caught me off my guard.

And then the caller called out this,
 "Round that couple and steal a kiss!"

So I fell in love while we danced the night
But it wasn't meant to turn out right.

As I good-night waltzed her past the door
She slipped away to return no more.

And the night grew calm and the night grew
still
And a coyote wailed on Heartbreak Hill.

Oh, I've asked all over the valley side
Where they thought a girl like this might hide.

And some folks laughed and they thought me
queer
And said I was drunk on gin and beer.

But one old timer told me then
A tale forgotten by most men.

The story was of Ellie Mae
Who came to Cattle Town, one day.

And her step was light and her face was fair
And she wore a red rose in her hair.

And she fell in love with a certain lad
A handsome buck by the name of Chad.

But a dance hall gal named Mollie Dee
Shot her dead from jealousy.

And they carried her so white and still
To the graveyard up on Heartbreak Hill.

But it's lonely there for Ellie Mae
When the dancers swing and the dancers sway.

And sometimes when the leaves turn brown
Ellie Mae comes back to town.

And sometimes when the wind is still
You can hear her cry on Heartbreak Hill.

It's many years since I came to town
And I should have left but I've hung around.

And I still go back to the old dance floor
To look for her but she comes no more.

And the fiddlers play and sometimes I sing
And I search each face as I weave that ring.

And they say I'm queer and perhaps it's true
But I do what it seems that I have to do.

And I drink too much as an old man will
And I wander up on Heartbreak Hill.

And the past grows dim and the old dreams go
How much is real I do not know.

But I always keep in my inside pocket
A faded rose and a tarnished locket.

And I hold them tight and my heart stands still
When I hear a cry on Heartbreak Hill.

Idealists have always been the losers
 After their fashion,
 Leaving heartache for inheritance
 And ashes to a grieving wind.
 Yet, every loser once faces the grave choice—
 Temptation on the mountain—
 Barter for the kingdoms of the world—
 Protection for the foot against the stone,
 And chooses his crucifixion
 To know one moment of high ecstasy
 Worth all.

Idealists will always be the losers
 To all the Shavian Undershafths—
 To the munition makers
 And to the Caesars of their time.

So it was when Osgood was in Redstone,
 When mercy flowered crimson for a day
 And then passed into memory
 With ashes in the wind.

Note: Osgood was the great humanitarian industrialist
 who fought for the control of the CF&I—and lost.

It was the rocking chair she hated,
 Most white men's complexes she took
 With certain reservations.

She could conform to Monday, wash and Tuesday
 iron,
 The red flowers on the carpet
 Were pretty when the snow came down,
 But the rocking chair she gave wide berth—
 That demon that could reach out in the dark
 To crack the shins.

The buggy was all right,
 Though not like riding bare-back in the wind.
 The stove was bad,
 An iron devil hotter than the white man's hell!

It was the rocking chair she hated,
 Making her seasick; she was alien to the sea!
 It was the rocking chair
 Where white mothers rocked their babies.
 It was the rocking chair
 Reminding of her hungry arms
 That held no papoose of her own.

It is hard to believe, though perhaps it is
best
That the Galloping Goose has come to rest.

In old Telluride where once she could fly,
Halfway between the earth and the sky.

She would jump the tracks and the rails would
break
And the people get out and rub their ache.

And her riders would help repair the rail
Or whatever caused the Goose to fail.

Then back to their seats to count up to ten
And the Goose would gallop along again.

She looks so peaceful resting there
With never a bump and never a care.

But does she feel a sad regret
And does she sit or does she set,

Hatching the mischief she knows so well—
Her own particular brand of hell?

Or does she mourn her sorry plight
And buck and gallop after night

Past Ophir's gold and Lizard Head,
Or is the Galloping Goose quite dead?

Note: The Galloping Goose was a hybrid means of transportation on the old Ophir Loop. It carried seven passengers and freight. It was part Pierce Arrow and part train, ran on tracks and no one ever forgot a ride on the "Goose."

The bighorns come down the Tarryall
Each year to mate and winter
And to rear the lambs
Until the ice breaks and the high ridge
Calls them back.

These were our sheep
To coax with red salt and to guard
With fence and gun and threatening oath.
All through the frost November
We could hear the pistol crack of horns
When two rams fought.
"Using the head in love," we said,
"Brings headaches, but it settles things."

Even the shutter bugs we came to fight
Because they spooked the herd
And chased them into photogenic spots.

Most of all we hated the curator
Armed with paper giving him the right
To one fine ram—the best of course,
To stand magnificently stuffed and stilled
Before uncaring hordes
Who never ventured off the pavement.

Lung worm took some. And some were trapped
And carted off to tourist traps. A few hid out
In higher land to stave off civilization and its bars.

A few still come, remembering red salt,
And the half protection of barbed wire and
posted fence
And profane ranchers who would hold a futile line
Against encroaching tides.

There are just two kinds of women
 And she was that kind—
 Too generous and careless with her heart
 And bound to end up bankrupt.

If she could trace her ancestry to the
 Mayflower,
 She didn't try—out of respect to the ancestor.
 Yet, she had a bond of sympathy with outcast
 Eve,
 The mother of us all.
 And she could point to her profession as the
 oldest
 Though not with pride.

Not always, but sometimes, in the early
 evening
 When the houseboy lit the lamps
 And a red ray fell across her narrow crib,
 She thought of Rahab and the scarlet thread.

Why does that old man cash his checks at
 the Circle Bar
 And leave the half of it for drinks and gambling?
 Does he not know that money which he makes
 Should be spent sparingly and budgeted
 And saved for leaner days?
 This job won't last forever—he should save!
 And well he knows—but all day he has worked
 down
 "In the hole," with dust and sun and wind
 Parching his throat and water will not quench
 The thirst and hunger that is there—a hunger
 for far more
 Than water or for food or gambling or for
 women!
 It is a strange unrest .. a gnawing ... or a
 seeking ...
 Maybe after God, Himself Who knows?

Somewhere within the gin-cloud of his memory,
 he gazes back
 To days when he was young and hoped for much.
 He did not dream that he could be an old man
 Broken down and muckin' on a dam!
 When he was young, he dreamed his dreams.
 Somewhere along the way, he missed the turn.
 Gin helps forget the failure ... wife at home ...
 everything
 Until Monday when you get back on the dam
 again.

Shakily, he thrusts a gnarled hand into his
 muddy jeans
 And brings it out filled with small shiny coins.
 He'll play the slot machine once more although
 he knows
 Even if he hits the jackpot, it will all go back
 again.
 Ten cent offerings to the God of Chance
 From one who lost his luck!

The ticket specifies "today—to Silverton,"
 But I shall scan
 A rhythmic sonnet of small wheels
 That beat out accent on the jointed rails
 To catch a yester song.

I will set Time back
 To breathe the coal oil in the unlit lamps—
 To feel warmth in the old pot-bellied stove—
 To see men, once unafraid of height or depth—
 Remember women whose pale skin belied
 A tensile strength akin to corset steel.
 And I will set Time up
 To reach to future skies, swift scribed by wings
 That may forget these little trains.

I will come back to the coach
 With some whose fancy always measures
 "narrow gauge"—
 Whose boundaries are certain designated seats—
 Who stray no farther than the "Ladies' Room."

These narrow rails go fifty miles or so
 But I shall go much farther than the tickets
 show.

The children wanted to stay home with me tonight,
 But I said, "No. I want this night alone."
 I'm not afraid. A ranch wife seldom is.

I did not cry—not even when adobe clods fell on his box
 Like heavy periods to mark the end and seal the day forever.
 Death could not prime dry eyes that spent their tears on life.

This is the place John brought me as a bride.
 Those are the windows opening wide
 To boundaries enlarged with every year,
 And there—the new barn that we built to hold our gains.

This is the room where I came as a girl and then as wife
 And where my babies first found breath
 And where he died.

He meant well. But times were hard and help was scarce,
 So side by side, he and the horses and I pulled to make things go.
 Oh, I was strong and even when the babies came, I worked
 And he forgot I was a woman with small needs
 And I forgot it, too.
 There was that summer late in life—the one when Ted was born,
 And Jim, my oldest, summer-schooling to get through

And John, resenting his not harvesting the crop,
 And so I drove the team all summer in the field
 And I was brown and burned by sun and big with Ted.

That was the time the teacher came to live
 And she was pale and gold and like a willow in a light blue rain,
 Or like a warm Chinook that sets the brook to surging in the spring.

It was my pride that hurt, and not my heart that broke,
 For I was past that first wild need that flamed and begged in her.
 Old Doc said, "Patience—patience—he'll come back to you"
 And Doc was right for Jim came home and took her from his dad!

I do not know if Jimmy loved her
 Or if he did it just for me. But it was hard on all.

It hurts to see a strong man humbled by his son.

Tomorrow, Jim will bring her here and they will run the ranch.
 A ranch must have a man, I know.
 I'll move all my belongings to this room.
 Death seals no day
 Nor puts an end to memory that will not die.
 After tonight, let her come back
 And I will watch this ranch break her.

The West is fickle,
Freezing or burning with a breath.
She has no consistency.
Once when the sun caught fire
Upon an aspen hill,
She made false promises of gold to me,
But long ago had given to another one
Who found her first.
The rarest thing she ever put into my hand
Was a mariposa
With a hummingbird throat.

The only reason that I stay
Is that I love her.