

SUPERSTITION STANLEY AND THE LOST DUTCHMAN MINE

Elongated scrawn with a mat of tawny hair and burro eyes,
camouflaged for chaparral or rocky canyon, smart
as any coyote, he had the look of ocotillo in a drought.
Named for the mountains where the gold still lies,
he dug the prize for other men
down dirty in the Red Cloud, Old Yuma, Oro Blanco.
He glory-holed with the best nugget-busters in the West,
bed-rolled with dust-baggers gone rich to Reno long ago.

His rhyme was covert, bias, unpredictable; his reason
was disrhythmic as his horse that threw a shoe and Stan.
Awhile he was a cowboy till he broke another bone.
Next he probed the Atacosa Mountains on his own,
got claim-jumped, moved to the Apache, gambled every game
in Globe, bellied every Bisbee bar. He was born, he swore,
in a hollow saguaro, his ma a fox, his pa a Utah badger.

He'd disappear for a year or so, and the yarns always
began again. Sprung up like California poppies after
the spring rain, they clung to him like cholla spines
to sheepskin chaps. People whispered he found the Dutchman
near the Gila River. Others said they saw him panning
in the Salt and vowed he grinned then vanished
in a dust devil, leaving a mile-long trail of rust.

Some said the Superstitions hosted secret tribes in caves
above the mine. Lost Dutchman was the kiva hall for all
kachinas, and Stan a spirit-scout assigned to mislead
searchers, bandy them about in piney mazes, raise
their hair with wailing winds and crazed sidewinders.
No recipe for legend ever lacked a cook;
a charro even took it back to Mexico.

Stan surfaced last in Morenci, left over from the past
like a head-frame towering the weeds of a town
turned ghost. He lingered on the edge
of people's knowing like narrow-gauge rails
going to a closed-down shaft. Sometimes he tipped
a waitress chunks of turquoise or malachite
with full bull's-eyes, and sometimes royal azurite.
"True treasure," he would say. "I like it better than
that yellow stuff; this here's a hunk of sky and lake."

He tried to be a cowboy one more time, but pain
was in him deep and, some said, fever in his brain,
the metal kind no love of God's outdoors could cure.
If he ever heard the tales he didn't care. He sold
his mining tools to buy an old wool coat. Late and soon
he'd lean against the wall of the Busted Gut Saloon,
still as a chilled chuckwalla, just as sudden gone.
He lost his gun on a Jack-high flush. That night he died
at Emmy Bresha's boarding house, same as any flesh
and blood man. Some folks sort of grieved.
But no one ever believed he never hid a thing,
and one last semi-precious stone was all Stan had.