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Whipping the Cactus

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WHIPPING THE CACTUS

Back on the farm as I hoed and ditched
the cows watched me all day,
sly cowboys, one leg up on the fence
about to start cackling rays of grainy sunlight
that would burn into my back, or astronauts
happily returned from the trip of their lives
asking directions
to the nearest Air Force base, as I
scooped out oats, swept up around them at night
in the barn they eyed me like that. since then
things have changed. out here in the land of flying saucers
people write books about them, how
they’ve been taken in, mentally raped
and ever after fall down in the middle of parties
foaming and babbling like epileptics. one man
full of confidence and fun offered them whiskey
and in revenge they cut off his hand.
but what happens to others won’t happen to me
because I can imagine it, the defense
always with me out here on the ranch,
the cows that stumble around through the scrub brush,
girls mewing through their noses for lost love,
and the cactus that long ago ran in
from the range to stop stock-still,
shocked at the house,
deserting lieutenants, shamed idiots kicked out of school,
or those spacemen who long ago came down to earth
in disguise, but sucking their thumbs day after day
don’t know if they want to go back
as if they want me to whip them
out of their sadness of the past, their future.