

Shelter

DAVID MELVILLE

Brown pools, warm, wide, those eyes
are what I remember most.
Sometime near dawn she must have stumbled
as she trotted through that tussock,
one foot caught in the coyote trap—
the cable's thin band, sheer and lethal
as garter lace. Beside the fence post
alongside the belt of wind-breaking cedars,
which wound through the barren hills,
Charlie knelt, sighing as he tried to unsnare
her hind hoof. Each pull, the slender wire
sank; each tug she made, that galvanized loop
pinched deeper. Then a blur of silver:

the stake popped loose, shot from dirt.
Impossibly as it whipped past
I caught it. My cousin caught my belt
and somehow, together, two boys held her,
our hands rubbed raw by wire.

To let go was to consign her
to the tangle of limb and needle,
hopelessly strung on pine boughs
in the shelter belt, the long wait for night,
eruption of yips: fang and claw.

We both stood our ground, the doe and us.
Buffalo grass swished against our coveralls.
Around our shins the pasture shifted, softly brushed
the creosote post. Blades, dun and long,
bent and waved in the prairie wind. Our breath
came in huffs.

The slow nod. He let go,
leveled the .22. My eyes never left those
wide pools until he lowered the barrel.
The wire sank—

a silver cord in winter grass.

