

Homesteader · *James Galvin*

From the section mark back of the meadow, straight north to the river, the telephone line and snakefence run together. The split rails cross as if they were prayerful. Deer jump over, grey wolves slide beneath.

In the kitchen a man lights a match. A basin of water with soap and whiskers keeps moths from the lamp-flame. They paddle in circles and are faithful. There are places for these men, all the same man, to drift down alone: the tie hack, the water witch, the drover, the builder of houses according to stars.

Wind in the lodgepoles is like the good son who combs his mother's hair. She talks to him steadily: about the six-pound hammer in love with the anvil, about their issue of hinges; something about the grindstone, the telephone wire, snowshoe tracks to the river and trap-lines lost under ice. She tells him how we sing and cry, lie down in the distance and think we sleep.

Mouthpiece, earpiece, crank-handle and wire, the phone reaches to the only other man in forty miles. By the end of December the line is down from the weight of snow or the elk walking through on high drifts. The snow leans in like bad advice, eyes take on a more distant shade, the stars brighten accordingly.

Every time it snows again it's like his body filling. A wire runs in and breaks under drifts. The man picks up the earpiece and listens. It clicks and rushes. The broken wire-end is like a nerve in the snow. It's a conversation with the way things are.