

1964

Desert Ironwood

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Recommended Citation

Burlingame, Robert. "Desert Ironwood." *New Mexico Quarterly* 34, 2 (1964). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol34/iss2/9>

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ROBERT BURLINGAME

DESERT IRONWOOD

Like lead (but not mahogany)
 it will sink in water, though water seldom
 touches it. It roots only in warmest-wombed
 earth—heavy, remote as a Papago,
 and impossible to cut.

No man (or woman) should
 look upon it casually. It demands
 fixed attention, stag's gaze tied
 to a bath-naked Athena—this calm beauty
 branched beneath the weight of licentious heat.

Ironwood. The name stands for glory,
 raiment so subtle only a god's eye may know it.
 But who will overlook its midnight shade, the
 limbs firm, dusk-grey, deepforked? Who
 will refuse its dark noon of love—forever green?

JESSE STUART

OUR WINTER

Our winter mountains here are desolate
 Where austere lines are written on the sky;
 A chicken hawk flies over with his mate,
 High in the cold he gives his hunger cry.
 Our corn is husked but fodder's standing out
 Where cornstalks glisten on the barren hill;
 Cold, biting winds blow fodder blades about,
 Light weakling things bend to the wind's strong will.
 These gray-starved hills are cold and empty now
 Where birds fly over hunting scattered grain,
 Birds that found sustenance behind my plow
 In spring and summer, search this field again.
 These scanty grains the hungry birds have found
 Scattered from ears where foddershocks once stood
 Birds cannot peck loose from the frozen ground,
 Another winter night, they won't have food.