WE ARE BROTHERS, ONE TO ANOTHER

The great orange ball
has travelled one hour
across the eastern sky,
Eddie Short Leaf rests
under a globe-shaped juniper
and watches his sheep
with clear Hopi eyes.
North Wind has blown across
the red-rock mesa top
and cleared early morning mists
from the low places.
He sees squat clumps of white sage
and prickly pear cactus and mesquite
and knows that when sixth moon comes
he will look
for a new feeding ground
for his flock.

He has promised a new katcina doll
for younger sister, White Fawn.
He takes knife and wood
from his pocket.
This day goes well.
As he carves, he thinks of Black Elk,
white-haired grandfather, who visited
for yesterday’s evening meal.
Eddie Short Leaf is proud
of his wife’s nokquivi—
steaming hot hominy stew
with baked chili peppers—
and of her bread
fresh from the adobe oven.
Her mother has taught wisely.

Eddie Short Leaf sees the family,
circled after the meal,
as they listen to Black Elk
tell of ancient times.
“When conquistadors rode north to Arizona,
my grandfathers’ grandfathers knew little
of protection. They sprinkled lines
of sacred corn meal
but this did not stop
the men on horseback.
Many Hopi warriors died.”
Then Grey Eagle, Eddie Short Leaf's father, tells the family of the great bison herds freely roaming the plains, killed only when meat was needed for food, hides for shelter and moccasins, bones for knives and scrapers, hooves for glue. Nothing was wasted. The Hopi hunter asks the animal to forgive him for killing. Only life can feed life. But the white hunters did not understand. Now the herds are gone.

Red Cloud, Eddie Short Leaf's mother, remembers words of wisdom. "The Spider Grandmother gave two rules: 'Don't go around hurting each other.' The second rule, 'Try to understand things.'" The family nods agreement. Eddie Short Leaf thinks how his nation is surrounded. For each Hopi, there are twenty-five Navaho, but he sees a peace.

Last night, Black Elk reminded them he has not many years left. Each day, he prays to the Grandfather Spirit. "Help me face the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet." Before the family sleeps, Grey Eagle speaks again. "Each of the people from anywhere, when you see in them far enough, you find red blood and a red heart. There is a hope."

As the sun reaches mid-day, there is little shade. Eddie Short Leaf drinks from his canteen and his thoughts rest easy.

Harry Spigle