

Poems by Jennifer Faulkner

Wyoming

Wind

Usually from the West, but sometimes from every direction
It can feel like it is being turned on and off

Gusts

Whipping dirt against your nose and cheeks and chin
Then, as if pausing for a breath so you can take one too
It eases completely

Sagebrush

Unique smell

Which blankets the desert

Fresh after spring and summer rains

A calf lays low beneath it, shaking, instinctually not moving

Protected from the weather and predators by the grey blue stiff shrub

Space

Room to move and breathe and think

Landscapes free of people and people's doings and dirty

Vistas

Of beauty and loneliness you can feel heavy in your chest

The place on earth my soul and body were born

The place on earth I roamed from and back to

Her lakes, her mountains, her desert, her meadows

Her harshness, her comfort

I am hers

One of a Kind

So stubborn
So determined in your path
You were born of California, but you are made of Wyoming
Her wind, her cold, her dry
I remember you once taking my hand, raising it to your red cheek
"Feel how smooth the wind makes your skin," you said to me
I pulled my hand away, self-consciously
I had seen the wind on your skin many times
Sometimes breaking the waves of a baking sun, carrying dirt to any exposed crease
Others, it numbed your skin blue through your prickly beard and mustache, frozen with ice cycles
Your face
Dark intense eyes peering above wire-rimmed glasses
Begging me to be intelligent but daring in my actions and my mind
I suppose this is all you ever asked of me, to be one of my kind

In all my time of knowing you, you've known your kind
Your kind works, like that is what they love
Your kind smell of ponies
You know the smell of their hair soaked with sweat and dirt and sky
Your kind smell like diesel and leather
Your kind have thick hands swollen with work and sun
Rough at the knuckles, spattered with freckles and scars
Your kind can ride horses, motorcycles, tractors, and time
And even still, you are one of a kind

Because although others can do what you can
Never have I seen all of these doings from another man
You taught me so little by telling me so
Rather, you taught me so much by doing what you know
To work a cow
Get free from the mud
To stand tall
To talk back and listen too
To trickle water with precious care on dry dirt so as not to wash her away
You taught me how useful a wrench and cheater bar and a block of wood can be
You taught me how to keep going when I am tired
You taught me what true love looks like
It looks like passion and hardship and commitment
It looks beautiful and now, after 31 years, I know just how rare it is to find
But you did
Is this the reason you are one of a kind?

Because of a good woman's love and the power of this earth?
I think so
I think you are blessed because you have had the courage and integrity to replace your dreams with reality
You have been arrogant, strong, relentless
So you may be humble, grateful, and free
I am so grateful, father of mine
To have had you in my life
You have been a son, brother, husband, father
A cow man
In all of these
You have been one of your kind