

## *Claudia Emerson Andrews*

### **Stoic**

He has brought again the dozen fall calves;  
 they bawl and slide from the cattle-hauler,  
 but she knows by dusk they'll have found their path  
 prescribed along the fenceline. By morning  
 rain will have washed the shit from them, and, clean  
 as from afterbirth, they will travel  
 the spiralled pasture; stoic, they will learn  
 to read the sky and know what kneeling down  
 can save. She sees one has a white heart  
 figured on its forehead; all carry black  
 markings on their bodies as if continents  
 were mapped here, and the charted unknown steams,  
 shudders on its ribbed shelf, unnavigable.  
 Better known, the doe-goat he stakes closer,  
 then farther; her rope, taut as a compass  
 needle, sweeps toward the magnetic elsewhere  
 that lies beyond gnomon fenceposts, beyond  
 the grid of windrows, beyond the distance  
 that holds her in coincidence. The scythe  
 swings against the stable wall, bears the arc  
 of some skeletal sextant, horizon-dulled,  
 mirrorless, useless in this rain-fat grass.  
 She can — she tells him over heavy-laden  
 supper platters — tell one calf from the others,  
 but she hears her voice rise with the steam  
 past its leaving, dissipate into silence,  
 as the meat, complacent, falls from the bone.