

Chiefs

The land is dry, Spencer.

The desert blushes with the setting sun
and the sheep bleat at rising stars
and the sudden brightness of the moon.

The wind is dry. It is cold
on this night. Fall is here.

I have been a chief. My tribe is old.
I am old. My people dwindle.
Yours, too. You call them back
with a shepherd's voice. And they come.

Winter is a dry time here. The sheep
stray too far, looking for water.

I have seen you on the reservation.
I have seen you feed the sheep.

Was there a time you did not weep
and wipe the soiled feet of your folk
with that cloak you wore?

Spencer, you sleep today
longer than you did before.

By my fire, you sang such music,
a song made of a quiet voice.
In the night, I hear you whisper.

My eyes are dry, Spencer.
My heart is still.

I see you when the stars walk.

When you come again,
sit with me awhile.
We will sing together in the wind.

—Virginia E. Baker