

J. Wesley Clark

DESERT OLIVE

Down from the rimrock
Walt Bell led the piebald mare
afraid she'd fall on the shale-slide
trail. He'd taken the long ride
into the Magdalenas fleeing
from his wife's memories of her
ex-husbands. One had left her
a young widow, the other
a shiftless drifter came home
as a last resort when he didn't
have money for whiskey or younger
women. Walt Bell loved Blanche
because she'd walk with him
under the hackberry trees and tell him
about her girlhood & the way her
Texas grandmother made biscuits
in a frying pan. He loved her when
she brushed her short gray hair
& knotted a pink scarf under her chin.
He couldn't stay in the house
& listen to her cry. He tightened
the horse's cinch. He wouldn't be
the third lost husband. In the foothills
he took his penknife & cut a hard blue
twig from a desert olive remembering
Navahos made prayer-sticks from them.
He talked aloud to God about his wife.