



Late afternoon thunderstorm builds over the Oscura Mountains. This abandoned ranch with windmill is north of Trinity Site where the first atomic weapon explosion occurred in 1945, Jornada del Muerto, Socorro County, N.M. Photo © Larry Angier

All That Is Left

From "Canyon of the Forgotten" by Virginia Bennett. Published by Timberline Press, Twisp, Washington.

*At the mouth of a red-rock canyon,
near the base of a sandstone cliff,
She stands there, a skeleton sentinel,
with branches arthritic and stiff.*

*And those upturned fingers appear to pray
for water, though now it's too late.
Not far from her roots lies a rusty stove-lid,
and the remains of a barbed wire gate.*

*Not much, you might think, of a legacy,
not much to remember them by.
Yet this site speaks readable volumes
to the wise and experienced eye.*

*And the tree, though now dead, says something,
an echo from a waterless grave.
For it tells of the hopes of a homesteader,
and of the sacrifice somebody gave.*

*She stands enshrined, a personification,
of dreams and desires and grit.
For that cottonwood was the first thing planted
when the flame of faith was lit.*

*Thriving under a pan of daily dishwater,
her leaves a light color of jade.
Barefoot children swung from her branches,
and mother snapped beans in her shade.*

*But, drought sucked the life from the family,
who eventually had to move on.
And, in a few years, the tree also withered,
when its daily washwater was gone.*

*So today she stands guard in the canyon,
and each storm brings a new limb to the ground.
And every year during the spring roundup,
weary cowboys delight in the kindling they've found.*