

Ghost Ranch

by Nicole Zelniker

Mountains in New Mexico are half. The sun
is sweltering heat, sweat, relief; the shadows
are snow, shivering, pinching my skin.
To make it to the peak, you climb through both,

and red parts, clay, and parts
where you think you will slip, loose uneven
footing and hit trees and rocks tumbling down.
I climbed this mountain a couple of times.

Once, I hiked with four friends, the first
explorers in new territory: a less invasive
Christopher Columbus. We took pictures
at the top and basked in temporary glory.

Again, at night, when the red becomes grey in the
dark and slipping on snow isn't a joke anymore.
We peeled off gloves and scarves as we went,
desperate to shed the heaviness of excess.

Before I left, I climbed alone, touched the reds
for luck and browns because I had to.
On the way up I clutched at questionable branches,
the only thing keeping me from falling.