

Deep Abiding
by Michelle McMillan

Clouds gather in the prairie sky,
break the sere infinity of solitude.
Any dalliance is welcome
where sunsets are too wide for lonely eyes,
and a glance that lingers too long on the lips
causes unbearable thirst.
Those clouds will burst and it will rain
but the relief will be fleeting.
A flush of affection never satisfies
the impoverished land.

These sediments of ancient waters
were deposited here too long ago
to recall depths of cool blue light.

I am old now, well worn.
In this displaced sea,
under a hot red sky,
I buried a husband too young to forget
and a child too young to remember
our poor past,
the damp wild green of our homeland.

Vestiges of passing texture this landscape: ruts
left by those who rolled over and moved on, pits
from the strain of weight-bearing hooves, holes
that break a horse's leg in seconds, the echo
of one merciful bullet through the brain, traces
of scavengers scuffed by carcass drag.

All comes to dust and blows away,
settles into compromise,
like the caked foundation on the faces of public women;
those bold, undemanding rudbeckia
who live on dust
and whatever they are given.
Enough to set seed.

Here fresh withers and dies,
cold brittles all to silver,
blends with wolf willow, piles of bones,
the highlights in once-dark hair.

But the roots survive in deep abiding.