

The Land Unravelling

Dusk, cloud-printed sky
closing on earth,
cover of a dark book.
Inside, the old
repeat their story
for what it's worth,
realize the important ties
in a land this size.
Furrows unravel,
farm houses take
root by gravel roads where
discarded machinery rusts,
husks of car bodies
hunch brittle in the field;
little dogs chase down
the sun as the town discovers
one hotel; paint it
green and brown.
Riders murmur, jackets sway
sink sloshes water; sounds
fold around the day.
Too far from earth, airplane
will never know this ground
hugging the train to breast,
rocking, scolding
it along,
hard mother.

Horizon surprises the eye
with water tanks, starched
elevators, wooden platform
with its clutch of people;
spaces waiting to be filled.
Patience at abandoned places
where withered grass pokes
yellow fingers from under the
belly of a forgotten boxcar;
at weathered churches hanging
faithfully on the edge of town.
All the time, Number One West
clings to the rails like prayer,
as if they really lead somewhere;
veering away as if
the direction had a purpose.
Pickup trucks idle at crossroads
where thick wives
corral husbands, their
peaked hats cleave the wind,
arms waving thin
as strips of leather;
these fertile couples
stubborn as thistle,
all their children
scattered like seed.

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