

A Gathering Storm

He, with dried-apple skin
crouched in serious expression,
pointed to where the Henry Mountains nicked the sky;
bibbed, faded-blue, in jeans,
with no great intentions.

Hands the color of rich soil, sunbaked, trembled.
And from the end of his fingertip, I studied the horizon.

His hip gnawed: the divine gift of prophecy,
or just an old man's curse
to know the future, as still life as the past.

But whether from God or sapless bones,
he spoke his vision: of toads
anchoring their smooth, fat bellies to the mud,
as clouds, angrier than the spindle of a tornado,
clutched distance across the sky—
bleeding color from the land;

a wind to steal your breath,
as from a child's face dangled out a speeding car,
and rain beating down slender stalks,
their green age driven to the ground;

of corn swept from fields . . . bobbing
in the rush of muddy waste;

the cries of mothers clutching children,
and of homeless men with lost dreams.

I listened, a nervous disciple
tightroping the field's bloodline
while he inspected:

a small town prophet,
occasionally spitting out a down-breeze stringer;
spinning revelation, as I, young at summer's edge,
kept a helpless eye on the blue wash of the horizon.

—R. Blain Andrus