

SOUTHWEST DRY SPELL

Scorched. Singed. Nothing tongues can pronounce
is brittle enough. The right words would crack
and craze like old pottery and crumble to dust,
another foul taste to grind between our teeth.

Cattle lying down may never get up. Already
their wrinkled hides smoke with black flies.
Little else moves, ears and tails too limp
to flick off the biters, more desperate
for moisture than blood.

This dirt-colored heatscape has stopped respiring.
Two months since a creek ran through the landscathe,
longer since rain fell. Gray grit fills the creases
in upturned faces searching the glare. Sky threatens
to combust. The only shade is between cows' ribs,
underlining their misery like prison bars
they tried to pry open to escape the jailer sun.
Stilled windmills are stark brands against its setting,
burnt into submission, blades welded to silence.

Lungs hurry to expel each breath. Forced
to draw another, they swell again on 104 degrees
until rolling thoughts of unresisted drowning
displace wisps of green breeze fantasies.

Now, wind would be another enemy, a big broom
robbing us of whatever future the earth holds.
Our brains are full of blips, short-circuited logic.
Each synapse sputters, sparking another non sequitur.
Friends don't look at each other. Sentences dangle
unfinished. Women's eyes no longer make tears.
Men's mouths are too rigid to swear.

We import more water at rising cost. We eat from cans
and boxes, press iced tea glasses to our foreheads.
We shake brown dust from teddy bears and books.

We add supplements to the last desiccated hay,
not for weight gain-- just to give the cows strength
to beat their hearts. Knowing no one will buy them
or the land. Not even at the price of bone.

--Glenna Holloway