

WAITING

by Janet Ruth

Beneath the washed-out blue of a blistered sky
last year's grass clumps
 brittle curls, bristly stems
 remnant seed heads
cured by the heat of a brilliant sun
appear as dusty death
 hiding roots and a living center
 —waiting—

Grasshopper sparrow the colors of cured grass:
 deep chestnut tanglehead
 steel gray tobosa
 tawny sacaton
rabbitbrush's secret lemon yellow
crouched invisible in the grass clump's shade
 a bright dark eye
 —waiting—

Deep in the thick-crustud mud 'neath the grass clump
legs and feet drawn in
 lozenge-shaped warty form
heart slowed
thick mucus encases moist breathing skin
 hides expandable bubble throat and bleating call
 Couch's spadefoot toad
 —waiting—

At the rim of a bleached and sere horizon
thin wisps
 catch on the Huachucas
 trail from the Santa Ritas
thicken
boil skyward
 brilliant white
billow into iron gray promise—

And now they are gone like a whipsnake into the grass
 trailing a veil of virga
 a muffled rumble, a distant jagged flash
 and the alluring pungent smell of ozone
breeze dies, sun presses down,
air is heavy and thick with heat and dust
 everyone still—
 waiting for rain