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RUSSIAN THISTLE

C. Michael McKinney

Tumbling weeds pop seeds that chute,
fall, roll like boulders
bouncing through badland canyons.
They wedge between rifts
of red clay wafers
cracked and curled
by prairie drought.
Only spring's wet hand
can cure the crust,
heal soil over seed
that will swell, divide,
and explode to emerge as a tentacled bush.
The thistle rounds in August
and brittles in December.
When the northwinds rock
the balls of thorn,
they snap at the base
to roll across pastures
of winter wheat
and reseed the barren prairie.

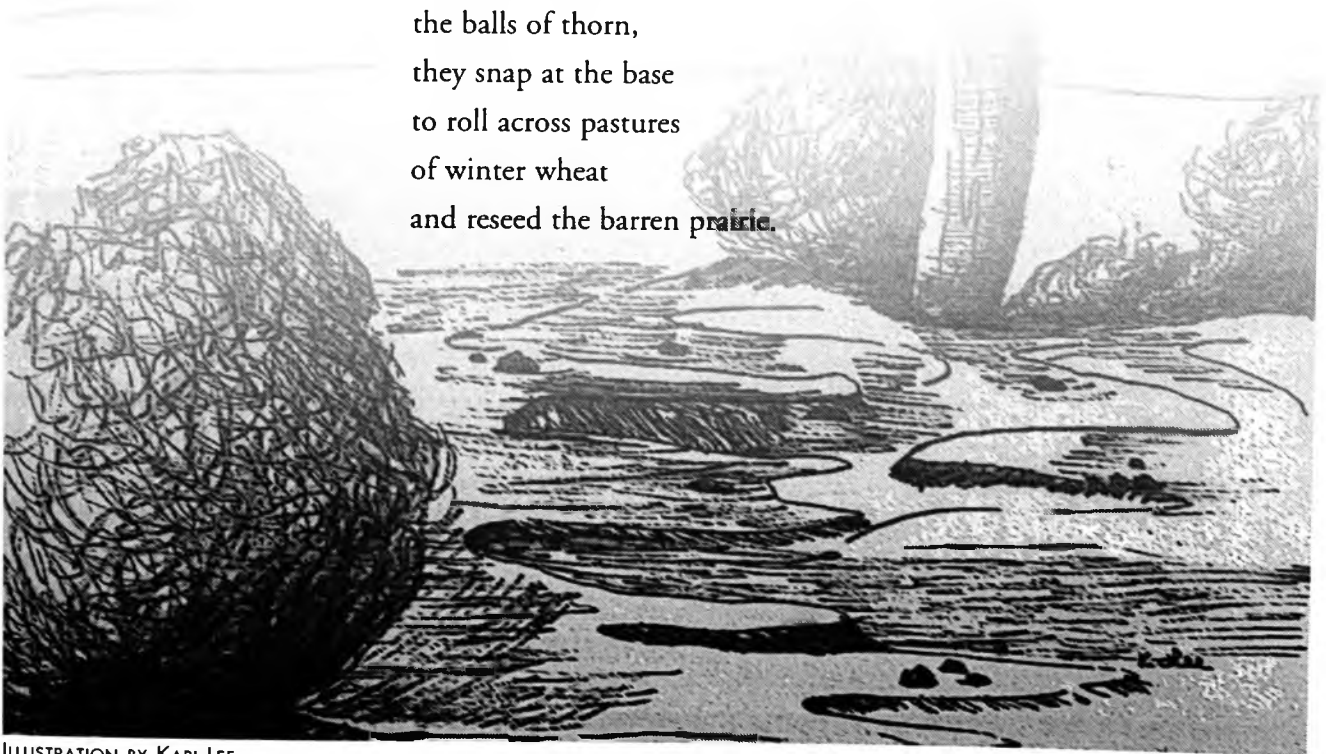


ILLUSTRATION BY KARI LEE