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C.O.D. Prairie, July 1993

by Patricia Keir

Only seconds after I feel a damp gust
part the hair on the back of my head,
the probing tips of tall, spindly compass plants
Sway and rustle above it all, roaming oblong paths.
The buttery petals spread out,
probing the fading sunshine,
but some are closed tight like clenched fists
and some have gone burnt umber
dried and shriveled, paralyzed by the hot sun.
Hard edged clusters of pale green rattlesnake master's
stand splayed, and the tough white clumped balls
of the wild quinine
move rigidly against the breeze.
Acorn-like centers of coneflower assert themselves,
push defiantly forward from yellow petals which
bend back even when the wind drops.
Short ice-green grasses pile up then flatten.
As the muggy winds rise once again,
a tuft of wild grass rubs my ankle like a cat.
The blonde tips of the compass flowers
bend politely to each other
to me
to the beauty of the pure and the alien
in a small, cramped patch of prairie
on this late midsummer afternoon.

