Lincoln County

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Lincoln County

*Bill Elgersma*

Pancake flat
poured out in God's skillet
and flipped.
The color of the land
a marbled batter of blue and yellow
—an icing of clay.
Eons ago
erosion formed the fruitbelt
by stripping the escarpment naked
—a barren wilderness.

Stone boat
ironic the name
steel runnered, rugged
flounders on the shoals of rock and dirt.
Side racks hold its catch,
low though for stones don't jump,
they grow.

Each spring again
the boat is launched
to fish the fields.
Rising from the deep
frost’s school of pebbles, stones,
become rocks as they grow.

Land so poor
if a rabbit wants to cross it
he’ll have to pack a lunch.
The escarpment
leftovers from secondhand and castoffs
the remnants of the remains
attract people in kind.
The farmers
poor as the land they farm
where fences—stone and split rail—
hold poverty in
as if to sentence those foolish enough to try.

Corn stalks yellow
oats turn early,
second cut is thin on land too stubborn to yield a third,
the clay petrifies and cracks in late August heat.
Stunted crops on stunted land
with stunted trees
and stunted men,
God’s skillet continues to fry.