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Tending

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Tending

Bill Elgersma

It's just the way it is,
they say

the locals
in absolute earnestness
not smug, just knowing.

The phrase sounds alarms
ambiguity, the lack of specificity

But then sickness comes.

Pushing open the front door,
a counter full of casseroles entered the house
before the owners returned from hospital,
the more familiar found the freezer
complete with cooking instructions
on the lids.

Just the way it is.

And when the house burned,
before the trucks had left
they arrived
hammers and saws to seal out the winter chill
and food like a first cousin,
sitting on the counter again.

A town of its own
with its own, within its own
to castigate, love, encourage,
reprimand and chastise,
but only its own.

And when the boys
too fast, too young—

They took the mangled wreckage
stained dark where life leaked out
to bury deep among the other mangled wrecks,
soon to be crushed.
Keep the prying eyes, the busy bodies out,
no stares, no gossip.
No one asked

just the way it is.

And so

The indiscretions:
lovers in each other's arms
political, religious, business related,
simply disappear.
The girls pregnant, the boys jailed,
Arnold teetering on his bike at 9 a.m.,
even his dog gone from the alcohol,
Jane brought home by family,
and funded
after losing hers

The town has its maintenance crew
It's just the way it is.