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## Tending

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# Tending

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*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.

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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.