

On the Great Plains' Eastern Edge

Sandy Longhorn

People here don't dream of falling, but the opposite
of falling, the drying up and being blown

across the far-flung horizon during the months of drought
when topsoil, hurled by gusts, embeds itself

in every surface—sheets hung on the line to dry,
eyelids, hair up in a braid, firmly clamped lips—

when even good roots can't hold and there's no water
left in the well to wash it all clean. Every year

when the twisters come there's a new story
about your grandmother's neighbor pulled from sleep

and shaken like a tablecloth before being dropped
in the family plot to rest beside her husband,

dead these twenty years, or the minister and his wife plucked
from the closet where they huddled clutching the Bible

and each other and set down without a scratch
in the yard, not even a ripped page to show for it.

When the rains do come, by God's own grace
and after a dozen farmers are dead from self-inflicted

gunshot wounds or a noose swung over the hayloft's beam,
those who remain dream of the swelling up, the washing

away and slow drowning—a different kind of falling.
Our bloated bodies come to rest in the muck

of gray-green lakes. The silt makes room,
shifts in the gloom and the bluegills come, curious,

the pike, resilient, to nibble at cotton fibers,
spitting out buttons and clasps to get at the heavy, rotting flesh.