

BARBED WIRE

On the high plains you can look down
a line of fence posts recalling
boundaries, their wire with its
boot spurs or four-pointed coils
rusted and trailing, the houses
gone to the roots of prairie grass
in soil dry as the leavings
of a pencil eraser. In bad years
thunderheads with rain squalls
legged it onto waste ground
on their spidery lightning, while
fair-weather cumulus piled up
on the homesteaders' horizon.
Barbed wire ratcheted taut
was stapled to juniper posts if near
wooded bottomland, otherwise
tied to three-sided columns chiseled
from limestone outcroppings.
Community came through the top strand.
Where settlers had telephones
but not yet lines on poles
they ran connections to their common
barbed wire. Crank the wall box
to set bells ringing along the line
and sometimes voices could reach
a dozen homesteads over
a noise like fire in prairie grass:
the circuit rider's arrival ...
a player piano even-up for seed ...
a shivaree next week.
And in the growing season you'd pray
to lift the earpiece for word

relayed from a boy atop a windmill:

It's raining on the badlands.

It's on this side now and coming.

It's at the crossroads.

It's going to fall everywhere, everywhere.