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You Need To Know About Rain

Elmer Suderman

"You need to know about rain," my father
said, not knowing I was not going to be
a farmer, like everyone else in our family
had been for as long as he could remember,

and would learn all I need to know about
rain from the evening weather forecasts.

"Rain isn't just rain and, hard as it
is to believe, drought here more common,

not just any rain is welcome. A pissing rain,
lasting for several days, can like Noah's flood,
drown out everything, especially wheat,
in the Spring, or a strong wind pouring

sheets of rain across the prairie
can — and does — tangle the wheat stalks
in the muddy ground making it almost
impossible for the header to pick up.

That's as bad as the gully washers
which cut up the land and leave gashes
so deep you have to be very careful
when you cross them with the tractor and combine.

What the gullies don't tear away dries so hard
that topsoil blows all the way into Kansas
where they don't need it as much as we do.
Hardest to believe, but it's true, a thunderstorm
roaring in at the end of an afternoon

Illustration by Jan Bradfield



when it's been over one hundred degrees
in the shade, burns the wheat, steaming it
on the stalk so it won't pay to combine.

Most important though, you have to learn,
and it takes a long time to learn,
and some never learn, that it doesn't
do any good to know all this because there's

not a damn thing you can do about rain.
You just have to be philosophical
about rain and learn, the quicker the better,
that the rains start when they start

and stop when they stop; no sooner, no later."