

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 28

June 2008

Before The Wildfire

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Recommended Citation

Capista, Joseph J. (2008) "Before The Wildfire," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 28.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol8/iss1/28>

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Capista: Before The Wildfire

BEFORE THE WILDFIRE

Joseph J. Capista

Walking those endless gravels along
slabs of low-slung cropland and knots
of tallgrass, I felt as if I roamed
the bottom of some enormous bowl
slowly filling with crows and swifts,
the first drops of what would gather across
an electric sky in the dark days ahead.

On the prairie, things change so quickly.
My boots scraped the vein of crushed lime
like a bell in tower scrapes when its tongue
has been severed by a thin preacher whose
mind rings endlessly with burning grief.
And, of course, I still hear that tireless wind.

It whistles hotly between the water tower's
taut cables, thistle and berries beneath
already preparing for their inevitable burst
pressed between thin tongues of flame.

We smelled the fire before the smoke.
Even now I see lush culverts and mingling
bull snakes or dusty whisps of pulverized
mass passing by me and into me as I breathe
air that's traveled overland without rest,
air that mistakes me for some body of water
that will extinguish its burning hems.
We should have known this county, after
dragging itself for so long like a match
against the raspy sky, was ready to ignite.