WE KNOW THIS DANCE by Riley Gay

Before hearts learn to beat, they learn to listen. They tie their ropes around the nearest song, pull tight, and beg their body to join.

There is a dance this land has taught us. Even the flickering tongue who swallows our fields knows the beat. Each flaming footstep, each breath of smoke, each blade of prairie, each fistful of earth is unpredictable, yet perfectly in time.

We know this dance because the heartland sings it to every heart willing to hear its wide skies and gentle edges. We throb with the rise and fall of golden hills, with the up and down of the day.

We know this dance because our lungs found the patterns in the wind, and they didn’t let go. They found dust and pollen and laughter and smoke. Our chests learned not to sputter, but to breathe one breath and then another.

We know this dance because we have spent our dawns craving to climb next to fire. We watch as it swells with our golden hills. We watch as it swells with the sunrise. We watch as it waits, and as it listens—as it ties its ropes around the rhythm and pulls tight.

We know this dance because this land has a heart that is beating.