

## *Under The Dakota Sky*

My God! The size of that Sky!  
A grand blue cavern  
Of steady breezes  
And questionable weather.  
A haven, welcoming every man to see it for himself!  
And welcome they do:  
With big farm arms that wrap around you  
And pull you into the Dakota fold.

North Dakota:  
Where the world has come in common cause.  
Colossal dreams find room to spread out.  
The curious come to watch.  
And the cunning come to separate others from the rewards of their labors.  
Where the Lost come to find themselves  
And others to simply get lost.  
Where the energy of the land and the people  
Ease the pains of personal pasts  
And open hearts to future possibilities.  
Where nothing seems impossible when you're standing in a field staring up at the sky!

They all come:  
Fortune hunters.  
Well-to-do and downtrodden.  
The hopeful and the hopeless.  
The last-call dates on a Saturday night while the bar-keep sweeps up,  
And the cellphone talking cardboard sign holders and hustlers.  
Old and young.  
The workers.  
The husbands and wives and children  
Sleeping in cars and campers.  
Enduring the heat and the cold  
The rain and dust and snow.  
Renting rooms for a Penthouse price.  
Working where and when they can.  
The New Sooners of the Northern Plains.  
Where perseverance is tested.  
Where reality meets dream  
Stiffening the resolve of some  
And breaking the spirit of others.  
And some will go,  
Back to the past.  
Their past.  
Slower than they came for sure,

Knowing they tried, if not hard enough.  
And, in time  
Some will return, feeling the pull of those  
arms.

A little late,  
But ready to settle for a simpler reality,  
While others' wicks burn low,  
Then out.

North Dakota:  
The raucous  
The timid  
Bookworms and Fullbacks  
Geniuses and Fools  
Sons and daughters  
Fathers and Mothers  
Men and women sent by Faith  
And men and women because of the loss of it.

The world has shrunk  
And settled into the embrace of the big farm arms of the Dakota.  
In the end  
There will be winners and losers  
Sharing a common bond, that others, never hearing the whispers of their own heart's desire  
Can ever understand.  
They, the few,  
They came.  
They tried.  
They experienced it all.  
They risked all.  
For all.  
Winners, losers, settlers.  
And it will live,  
Long,  
In their souls and in their lives and in the stories they will tell their friends and families.

North Dakota:  
Where dreams come to be wrapped in big farm arms  
Pulling them into the Dakota fold.

## *I Was Here*

Fragrant earthen air  
Draped damp and heavy over the skin  
A testament to a long drought's end.  
The sky:  
A Van Gogh in a swirl of black and white,  
A fading starkness ending in a steady grey drizzle  
That rides low and fast across the knolls.

Once I was here.

That sun bleached clapboard at the end of the gravel:  
Once ivory, shimmering in a summer's sun.  
And the porch:  
It could hold twenty!  
Lanterns abound!  
Laughter all night,  
Rising to meet the stars who would hold on to it for the future!  
And those fractured glass panes held lace  
That would float on Spring's breathe  
And filter the light of those within.

I was here.

I remember the smoke:  
Rising from the chimney  
Caught by the wind  
And sent nigh-on a ways  
Telling all in its path  
Fresh biscuits, a meal, a feast for few or many,  
Was about to begin.  
All were welcome!

And that tree.  
My old friend the tree:  
Who heard me whisper curses and promises.  
Who hid me in green leaves  
When I didn't want to be found.  
Who helped me see beyond the below.  
My sweet tree!  
Time has stood still!  
No bigger.  
No less full.  
A silent sentinel to a sanctuary of childhood fantasies.  
Its branches, a comforting hug

From the realness of everyday life.

I was here.

Those fields,  
Over there,  
They were high.  
High I tell you!  
And ripe as gold!  
It was my Savanna!  
Golden fields stirring in every gust,  
To the left and to the right,  
All beneath a sky so deep a man could get lost in it!  
Like Midas,  
I could reach out my arms and all that touched me  
Was gold!

And when I tired of chasing the wind's eddies through my stores of gold  
My knoll was the throne of my kingdom.  
I would perch atop the Too-Big-To-Move Rock of years pass,  
Legs crossed,  
Arms leaning back,  
And watch the grain,  
My Masses,  
My Subjects filled with adoration,  
Wave to me!  
And the tree would bow in the breeze.  
And the smoke would rise.  
And the lace would dance in the windows.  
All to herald the coming of another feast!

I was here.  
Right here.  
I remember.

But, now,

I am here.

I will go.  
It's best to leave what was as it is.  
To visit too often,  
To remember too deeply,  
Is to risk the red clay earth reaching up and grabbing you  
And holding you back.

But,  
I was here.

## *Crawdaddy*

Flat footed double kneed squat,  
Hunched over the little stream  
In shade cast by Catalpa leaves of the Great Climbing tree.

Slippery green mossed stones  
Line the waters edges  
And boys with sticks for levers  
Giggle as they lift the grey rocks of the bottom water.

Crawdads clamber away in all directions  
Swishing bottom silt  
Abandoning room they found beneath the rocks  
From prying eyes and the mischievous ideas  
Of curious minds.

Laughter mingles with the mid-morn's sweat,  
Cooling in the windless summer's heat,  
Then runs the spine and arms  
Glistening on the tanned arms and backs  
Of young boys conquering worlds  
Of their imaginations.

Another stick  
Another poke  
And Granddaddy Crawdaddy tries to scurry again  
Silt rising one more time  
Then  
A stick goes under the belly, and  
Flip!  
Out pops 'ole Crawdaddy!

Landing hard on the bank  
He rolled himself over and disappeared  
Back into the water.  
This time downstream,  
Where the water is even cooler  
And there are no prodding sticks to contend with.

And boys grown bored leave him to his life.  
They have other worlds to conquer  
On this summer day.

## **In The Twilight before My Dreams Begin**

In the twilight before my dreams begin,  
I often see images.  
Vague,  
Sepia in color, I'd say,  
Blurry on the edges like an old newsreel come to life.  
Images of people.  
Human beings.  
Ten Thousand score  
If I had to guess.

In a drift to slumber  
My mind's eye gathers the faint light for one more look.  
I gasp.  
Like a far flung wheat field they stood.  
A winter wheat.  
A field so vast that not even my imagination can see the other side.  
Undulating under a gray canopy, racing forward, a harbinger of storms.  
They moved with a sea's rhythm  
Waves in sync  
Swirling  
Swaying  
A perfecting of orderly chaos,  
Moving ever forward  
And always moving my way.

Every  
                    Night  
                                    I see them  
In the twilight before my dreams.

Those masses,  
Those people.  
Not the well to do,  
But the disenfranchised.  
Not just youth,  
But the aged and ill.  
These are not people of the self-assured and privileged,  
But the meek and needy.  
They did not come with overflowing pockets and visions of grandeur,  
But pockets thread bare and worn and empty.  
They have given everything asked of them,

This field,  
These people,  
This storm,  
And they have received nothing in return.

*And*

*They*

*Are*

*Angry.*

Night after night in the twilight before my dreams begin,  
Grasping for sleep,  
Catching only rest in fits and bits,  
I grow closer to the masses.

I see faces:

Mothers holding babies

Loved ones pushing wheelchairs

The strong helping the weak

Young men, locked arms, in the defiance of righteousness

I see the hollow stare of their eyes.

I hear voices

Of anguish and anger

Of discourse and denunciation

Of defiance and dread

And I feel the rage beneath the towering thunderheads

Of their righteous indignations.

I smell the crowd

Their sweat

Their sweet

Their stench

Of youth

Of age

Of life

Of death

The smell of humanity.

I shake their sweaty palms

Great two handed pumping shakes

Kisses on my cheeks welcoming me

Reverent nodding of old men's approval

Bringing me into the fold.

I am lost in a dizzying circle of faces,

And sounds,

And touchings,

And smells,  
And I am absorbed into the masses like an ant back into the nest,  
My arms locked with their arms, and I realize:  
We are not single grains but a field to nourish the future.  
All the same.  
Independently united to stand  
And sway  
And move  
Ever forward  
Sometimes in silence  
Sometimes with a deafening roar that rattles bones and changes minds and has every man  
seeking his own redemption  
All future saints, every one.

*Damn the cursed twilight that allows me no peace!*

That vision of truth that lands like a sledge  
Bringing me back to center!  
When next the twilight falls before my dreams  
I am no longer the watchman  
But the watched.  
The Watched  
Whose mind wanders at the edge of sleep.  
I am the crowd.  
The masses.  
The people.  
The We.  
The Us.  
I rub shoulders  
Call out orders driving them down the street of Titans  
Home to those little people of great greed  
To whom we made everything possible  
And in turn ignore us in our needs.

We move up the stairways of the modern Parthenon  
Where a tiny few dressed in black  
Cast down their decisions upon us, without really knowing us,  
As though we have no voices of our own.  
In an instant they are humbled by their lack of omnipotence.

We are the storm that has been gathering in plain sight,  
To be reckoned with,  
Escape and appeasement no longer options!  
We will cross the land,  
A great wind of our time,  
An unholy alliance of the masses,  
Indivisible,



Courageous,  
Determined,  
Fearless,  
Gathering the fury of others like ourselves as we go.

In my twilight  
We move in sync  
A rhythm of sight and sound  
Placing fear in those who need to fear us.  
A grand dance of defiance  
A right foot stomp with a gut level grunt  
A bellow from the hungry bellies of two million voices saying:  
We're coming!  
*WE ARE COMING!!*  
A left foot drag with  
A right foot stomp  
A grunt from our hungry gut!  
Step by dragging step,  
Stomp then grunt,  
Drag then groan,  
Stomp then grunt,  
Drag then groan.  
Louder!  
Closer!  
We may fall  
But we move forward  
Ghandis, everyone!  
Mandelas among us!  
Sister Therasas in linked arms!  
Free men and women,  
Each knowing the possibilities of their stars.  
Each step girding their loins for a battle of self-sacrifice!  
Onward!  
Onward!

And in the twilight I see a Dawn.  
Is it real?  
Will it last?  
Can it spread to shine on all?

I do not know.

But I do know this:  
There will always be watchmen  
Who in the twilight before they dream  
See an image.

They are in it  
And they can only go forward.  
Ghandis, everyone.  
Mandelas among them  
Sister Therasas in linked arm.