

Drift in the Midst of Place

CHILA WOYCHIK
for a friend

YOU SAY YOU LIKE IT WHEN I TALK ABOUT the things I love. So let me tell you. I love the sea from a sea-less Iowan countryside. I love the soft rumble of a train passing from Davenport to the Great Northwest—here from the seat at my desk. I love a Rocky Mountain peak as I trudge across hiking trails around a nearby lake, the smell of proximation. I love my aging body and today's wrinkles, the gray that wasn't there yesterday. And there are days I love the thought of dying, that great release from unfulfilled hopes and desires only minimally met, to what may be something more. But this isn't what you meant, is it?

People trip through our life. Like you. Me. Some dance and sing; others clunk; but we listen for the chimey within the clunk, and when we detect that one right note, well, sometimes we let them and their chimey clunk into our chorus line too. Not everyone gets it right the first time, so we brake for the occasional jarring melody.

I hear your melodies on a breeze that hefts then empties itself in the echoes of a million brave souls loosed of their chains and wandering the world of humankind, Marley-like, telling tales scrawled across a divining sunset, on a cross stuck hard in frozen Arctic tundra, or in the creviced face of a nomad who has seen too much beyond the Great American Dream and "God is Good All the Time." The breeze hefts and an avalanche of stars falls around me.

A centuries-old tree hugs the hillside across the way. Its top branches bare, it's a balding yet distinguished specimen of nature. Hawks roost there, and owls. Eagles and other birds. The predators eye the valley below for mice, ground squirrels, and rabbits. With one graceful swoop they find their next meal, carry

it off to feast, and complete that odious cycle of ending one life to extend another.

We're beyond a line here, beyond city, into rural, a paved road slightly traveled on one side of me and hills and trees on the other. We're close to it, so close we sometimes forget which is more important, or at least prettier.

My Acadian blood prefers the trees. I bought a cast iron Dutch oven once for fire pit cooking on select days. I imagine wolves but see sheep instead. I dream of buffalo and a black cow bellers. The world lies heavy with a lingering mist and our eyes see only shadows of what we believe to be true. If I rip the veil away, will smoke rise from a burning bush and an arrow pierce my heart? I can only hope.

But you've heard these stories before. This or that sounds familiar. The trees, the birds, and an endless trail of coyotes. A sky that's blue blue blue; a sunset that drones. You're tired, but of me? I prayed it wouldn't come to this.

I hope we can go on, and that my tiny domain can somehow find a place in your vast universe. The gaps in our distance fill with memories, and days ache under such circumstances. We are but a shapely mist in the minds of those who knew us once—a name and year or season, photos, cards, emails. And if we're lucky, undeleted voicemails.

One day my lifeless bones will drop into a deep dark recess, and a handful will mourn for an epigrammatic moment in time. Then the world will resume as if I was one of many to pass and many to come. As long as the roses get watered, nothing else will matter.

Today, the wraiths of Place stand tall enough, here in my simple country miles, here where every new sunrise is a study in chastity and a sunset is as welcome as any old friend.

Adieu.

