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Prairie: Gordon, Nebraska, August 1916

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PRAIRIE: GORDON, NEBRASKA, AUGUST 1916

1

Clouds out of Pine Ridge and bad memory,
maybe full of hail. There was just enough room
in the lizzies for a tripod, for the five
poses there among the new ghosts of wheat,
the Black Hills north beyond the shot.
If these were the cameraman's friends, they
didn't let on. The photographer:
unidentified, probably some free-lance
for the upstate *Bugle*. Probably out
for the standard shot of crops, the people there
props and scale for the square miles of tawny
wave and weather.

2

Not so the stone camel
Thomson studied at the Ming tombs, although
the man, his flute, were certainly there for scale,
but more than that. Every other beast
goes down on its knees for the five hundred
years behind it, and the sky—the sepia
sky nothing in the shot's afraid to bear—
suggests the first of hills beyond
this field with its focused weeds.

The man

is studying the path. On it lie
the feet of pilgrims crossing scrapes the great
blocks made. Beneath these, the first sea.
Beneath the sea, the path.

3

And like a field
of stone and men, that wheat went on. It hailed,
but not that day. *Lunch was eaten, fun*

was had by all, the caption might have read.
Someone turned around. Both cars turned
and headed back to town and normal August
afternoons. The photographer, unnamed,
left town.

The Ghost Dance had ended. Gold
had been discovered in Dakota.
More history was somewhere, and he drove
toward it: west to sunrise, south
to Almen's earth and sky. It would snow soon.
He might get lost. But prairie knew his
feet now, and he, the horizontal view.
What does it matter, after years
and miles, after clouds, the current blossom
of the sea, I'll never know his name?
It doesn't matter. It's enough the wind was perfect.