

RYAN CLARK

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Prairie

Here are pasture gates and telephone poles, brush trees mesquite  
clawing at clouds but so short they can only ever grab at the tops

of prairie grasses, and if they are green they are lucky, though the green  
of the highway sign shouting East Highway 62 will always be brighter.

And abandoned houses fall with cratered roofs like words fallen dead  
just finger bones praying outward through the walls and into the clay

just north of the Salt Fork of Red River, soon to crumble down the bank  
as if grown suddenly tired in bending down to drink.

Past the gypsum hills the red dirt goes hiding beneath the dead crunch grasses  
and the wheat that struggles up to the gates begging toward the road.

The world always returns to flat, as if nothing is beyond this flatness,  
only cut and protrusion, a few streams crawling through on hands and knees.

My home is prairie hills is creek bed is bales of hay rolled higher  
than any tree can grow here with this Elm Fork, this sandy braided stream,

this cycling of dead things and minerals and myself, all of us  
here cradled in the crook of the North Fork's bend.

The prairie is a mouth that is opened by force and gradually closes in  
on what it has lost, lips squeezing tight over rock, sod tongue pulling.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ryan Clark is the author of *And Bring My Developing Hands* (Con/Crescent Press 2008) and *How I Pitched the First Curve* (forthcoming from Lit Fest Press 2018). His work has appeared in *Otoliths*, *Panoply*, *Aufgabe*, *Split Lip Magazine*, and the *Found Poetry Review*; he also contributes to the *Spoon River Poetry Review* blog. He teaches English and creative writing at Waldorf University and leads writing workshops at Forest City High School. He lives in Forest City, Iowa.

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