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For Willa Cather

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Now whatever I glimpse qualifies the vast disc whose rim is the horizon. Past cornfields rumpling to the world’s edge and over, past haystacks shaped into great coarse-grained breadloaves, I am driving alone across Nebraska. I in my midget car am the circle’s moving center, the whole horizon slides west with me as the highway slides under, soil off a moldboard. Bicycle pince-nez glinting, one aluminum camper after another swings around me, outrageously exceeding the dream-slow fuel-poor downward-adjusted speed limit. My car, blue dot humming through the trackless mirage-slow sea of grass’s memory, steadily exceeds the speed limit by so little no cop could possibly care, and passes only the fixed things I-80 ruts and gouges itself among: wheatfields; beetfields;

old homesteads the first sodbusters built soon as they could pay for lumber hauled overland from the Missouri, each house, barn, outbuilding in its cottonwood windbreak rooted against the right hunch of landlord calm decades before the Federal plowboy leaned to his task. Their fitness here seems absolute, but the contoured concrete furrow curves at the doorstep now. I know, I always know, that when I kill my pounding engine at every halt for tea, the perpetual
wind, blind and baffled, too ancient
to change her ways, still will be ruffling
the highway's beautiful shoulder-length
thatch of blond weeds.

Magic / Brian Swann

His relatives visited him once. That time, he had entertained them by holding an old coin between thumb and middle finger. When he snapped thumb and finger the coin disappeared. He did this with three coins until his relatives got bored. It's just a matter of terminology, said his father, not even looking at him. The structure of the unconscious is revealed in such tricks, and that's all. Time and space consist of nothing. They are hypostatized concepts born of the discriminating activity of the conscious mind. This trick is therefore essentially psychic in origin, and as such should not startle or even interest us. But, said the son, all the mathematical odds are against such an explanation. I don't know how I do it myself. If I'd done it once, then maybe. But three times—and I can do it more—is objective and palpable. Nonsense boy, said his father. A secret mutual connivance exists between those coins and your psychic state. Let us say no more on the matter. But, said his son, watch. I can make coins appear in the same way. And that's no trick. That's real. They're real coins. They're gold. Come as close as you want. There's no chicanery, psychic or otherwise. But the family had already moved off down the gravel driveway and out of the gates, which swung to behind them.

That evening, he finished dinner early and left the dininghall. On the way out to the exercise yard he overheard the Chief Warden talking to an older man. He stopped and listened to her, and recognized the name of the judge who had sentenced him to thirty days for a minor traffic offense. The warden was releasing the man at the recommendation of the judge for clemency. He went over and stated his own case to the Chief Warden. He too asked for mercy on the basis of familiarity with the same judge. The Chief Warden sat down at her typewriter and began to type on official notepaper. Then she looked up and said he was to be at the Barracks by five that afternoon. Outside, he told all this to a couple of women who had waited for him, and he explained that he didn't know where the Barracks were. They volunteered to help him and take him there just before five. All at once, however, he realized that during the short time he'd been there he'd grown closer to more