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A Sun Dance Story

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shimmer of being in
time growing small,
blue point in darkness dropping
on a dark cry into
unself where they move,
on starry rapids riding down
deep swells like dolphins through
white foam and all
of time a graceful curving as
of dolphins in the deep
surges of dancing gently upon
the pointless point of
their heavenly joy.

A SUN DANCE STORY

For Indians, Water Boy's
a good and honored job, being chosen
to serve the singers and the dancers
at any powwow means this person
is someone learning, being taught
by bringing water how we are—mostly
it's younger people who do this, that's
why Cousin Buck's story means
even more to us, the man
who gave him water wasn't young.
He was hitchhiking there in Kansas—going up
from Oklahoma to South Dakota,
his car broke down, less
than halfway from White Eagle
to the Sun Dance at Crow Dog's Paradise he
was out there in a parched July day on
a Kansas back road where
the meadowlarks were panting more
than singing where they perched
on the humming

telephone wires—he'd walked a mile
to a crossroads hoping there'd be more cars,
but the farmers passed him by, looked back
at this tall Indian guy trying to thumb,
probably out of prison, was what
they told their wives and kids—but then
this really battered pickup came along
with two guys in it and it stopped and he
ran up there as the door swung open.
A white guy driving but an Indian man
opened the door,
“I thought he was an older man
but I don't know why,”
is what Buck said—“he didn't look old,
but still I thought he was. So I got in,
I had no hat and my forehead
was almost blistered, I'd been standing there
or walking a little over three hours,
I said I sure was glad they'd stopped,
and the Indian guy reached round
and came up with a bottle
and offered me a drink
and it was the coolest water
I ever drank, and then he said
looked like my forehead was about to blister,
might wipe it off a little
so I poured a little
into my palm
and splashed it on my head and man,
that cooled me off almost
like a block of ice, and I said thanks and then
I saw we were coming to another crossroads there
and the Indian guy
said they were turning off up here,
they'd let me off, there should be lots of cars,
so they pulled over there and I got out,
I felt so good, like I had just been swimming

or taken a cold shower—
I thanked them all I could,
and they turned right and headed on
and I heard a car coming and looked back
and it was a big green van pulled over to me then,
turned out he was going all the way
up to Pierre,
so I'd get to Crow Dog's on time,
I sure was glad, I needed this
Sun Dance, you know
this time our family would be dancing
especially for Kelly and I was afraid
I wouldn't make it there.
So as I started
to climb into that van
I turned again to wave
goodbye to those guys in the pickup
who'd given me that water
and there was no pickup there,
I don't know how
it got away so fast
and I said
to the guy in the van, 'Gee, that pickup
must have really made time when it
turned off at that crossroads there.'
He looked at me real funny
and after a little pause he said,
'I didn't see any pickup,'
and that was when
it hit me. So I realized
this guy would think
he'd let a crazy Indian high on drugs into his van,
and I just said,
'I guess I stood there longer waiting
after they let me off at that crossroads
than I'd realized,'
so then he kind of paused again and said,

'There wasn't any crossroads there,'
and this time it was me
that paused before I said,
'Jesus, that Kansas sun
is just too hard on this old Okie's eyes,'
and he laughed an uneasy laugh
and all the way up to Rosebud
we talked the littlest things, I mean
like Presidential elections, football, all the kind
of easy stuff you talk when you don't really
know each other at all.