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A Greater Distance

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A Greater Distance

I caught a train for Grand Island
Nebraska and arrived unholy
on an empty winter midnight.

Having leaned on dimestore brandy
for twelve, maybe sixteen hours,
I was drunk to kill regret, drunk

to make the endless gray cornfields
blur and disappear, then desperate
for coffee and a hot shower.

In my knapsack, two flannel shirts,
a pair of corduroys, and stacks
of notebooks bound with copper wire.

I used a Sallinger novel
to wipe a month of public grime
from one of the station benches—

ticket stubs, some wasted condoms,
and a sagging hunk of Spearmint.
As I searched for a cigarette,

a woman sat down beside me,
wearing last night's lipstick
and real pearls. She was elegant

in the absence of laughter. She
took out a book of love poems
written seventy years ago

by a dying dairy farmer
accustomed to tragedy. Soon
The Depression would be banging

at his doorstep. And this woman,
elegant now in the absence of tears,
read on without noticing me.

-Jeff Boon '95