

# Kneeling

By M. Ali Lakhani

(Inspired by the Prairie paintings of William Kurelek)

What I am sure of is that I am not really alone anymore in the rest of my journey through this tragic, yet wonderful world. There is Someone with me. And He has asked me to get up because there is work to be done.

*William Kurelek*

Beyond the burn the riverbed  
Defines a natural barrier.  
Char still smoulders in the farm's sludge,  
Steams from the slough's crematoria.

We'd managed to evacuate  
The calves from their pens to the bank.  
Instinct had driven them to water,  
And one had drowned. Its carcass stank.

The young heifer had probably  
Lost its footing amid the stones,  
Its eyes, perhaps blinded by smoke,  
Bulged wildly, like hideous white bones.

Through the distant haze one could see  
The golden granaries, the spared  
Cornfields of a neighbor's harvest,  
Sheafs like psalms — God's mercy declared.

What was the sense, we asked, in nature's  
Indiscrimination? We'd ploughed lives  
Into that sinful soil, seeding  
Furrows till only good would rise —

Was this the stock of all our years?  
Was it but our own wounded earth  
We'd tilled? A truer yield we'd reap,  
Measured by a different worth:

They had come when they saw the blaze,  
Neighbors, strangers, well-wishers all,  
Beyond boundaries and plot lines,  
To shore us up, gather us tall,

Had come, this harvest of souls, proving  
That nature was not indifferent—  
What we belonged to, truly cared;  
Had come down to the waterfront,

Had towed the creature, buried it,  
With bowed heads, had said a prayer.  
Each gave comfort, a store of gifts,  
Anything to stave off despair.

We stood under that prairie sky,  
In the stillness which makes man small,  
Knowing there was something in us,  
Bigger, responding to its call.

We'd pull together and rebuild.  
The earth, like us, in time would heal.  
Nature, at its worst, might cow us,  
But only God could make us kneel.