

DON WRIGHT

*WAY DOWN LOW*



VOLUME 9. RHYTHM IN THE WORD

*HOME RECORDINGS, 2020*

# WAY DOWN LOW

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*Lyrics and music for all songs by DON WRIGHT*

*Vocals, guitars, harmonica, keyboards & mandolin – DON WRIGHT*

*Background vocals, tambourine & shakers – Carmelita Madrid Wright*

*All recording and sound mixing done in the closet studio – Los Osos, California*

## Note:

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*These fourteen songs found me in many different ways – some came from plunking around on a guitar, some from the remnants of a dream in early wake-up morning, some from an overheard word or phrase. They all came through me and I shaped them as best I could. Only one came from the intentional desire to say something about something. That's the one about my encountering Crazy Horse, the great man of the Oglala Lakota. Thanks to Mari Sandoz and her beautiful writing about him, which served as the inspiration and foundation of understanding for the song. D.W.*



*Ta'Shunka Witco*

*On June 25-26, 1876, the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, under the leadership of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull defeated the invading United States 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, led by General George Armstrong Custer, in the battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn). It has been well-documented. But not well-presented. Calling it "Custer's Last Stand" or a "massacre" belies the fact that the U.S. government had broken a treaty (as with all treaties before and since), the tribes left the confinement of the reservations and banded together. And the army crossed into Indian territory, severely underestimating the strength of the encampment – a few thousand strong. Most all of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were killed, including Custer. The good guys (the real Americans) won that battle. About a year later, Crazy Horse was murdered, while imprisoned by the U.S. army. He was 37 years old.*



*"A man should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, sail a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects."*

*Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long  
From Robert Heinlein's "Time Enough for Love"*



# *WAY DOWN LOW*

*DON WRIGHT*



## *Track*

- 1 Closer to the Fire (5:41)*
- 2 Run Run Run (4:21)*
- 3 Do You Ever Think of Me (4:31)*
- 4 Somewhere Down the Road (4:38)*
- 5 Just Move Along (4:33)*
- 6 Way Down Low (4:02)*
- 7 Turn the World Away (4:00)*

## *Track*

- 8 La Purisima (6:09)*
- 9 Jealousy (5:11)*
- 10 Don't Speak of Me (4:27)*
- 11 You Called Me Brother (4:52)*
- 12 Lost My Soul (6:06)*
- 13 Silently (6:05)*
- 14 A Run-In With Crazy Horse (8:30)*

..."It beckons and whispers, lures you in with a word"

*There was a time you could see the smoke billowing up, seemingly very close, it made you want to back away, out of danger. But the fire was still very far off and, if you drove in that direction, you could drive for miles and never see the flames. That was then.*

## CLOSER TO THE FIRE

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There'll come a time when you won't know anything  
You'll give it all back and the letting go will bring you  
Closer to the fire than you ever thought you could be

Even though you think you're livin' right  
There's a hole inside you  
And the thing you never look directly in the eye  
Is gonna bring you closer to the fire  
In a way you've only felt in dreams  
You put your life in the hands of a God you cannot see

Your legs grow weary  
You walk these streets until you're numb  
With each drop of blood  
Each tear that falls we seem to come  
A little closer to the fire every passing day

The lies that we believe and the truth that we deny  
Fade into the mirror as we surely slide  
Ever closer to the fire calling out your name  
Oh when you hear a voice from down the river  
Where the lamb has strayed

You feel you'll never find your way home  
Or even know where that might be  
There's something rolling down this mountain  
You better get behind a tree

And don't be fooled by the silence  
'Cause if the first one don't get you  
Then the next one will  
Run to the river then keep running still  
Hold out your hand, feel the heat rising up  
Turn from the darkness  
And when you think you're far enough  
Well you're just closer to the fire, burning so bright  
Rising and rising and rising, higher and higher

Trouble may find you around any turn  
It beckons and whispers, lures you in with a word  
"Come closer to the fire, everything's gonna be alright"  
Prophecy as clear as day, promise black as night

..." Roll down that window, get your hair undone"

*A clear day. A dry stretch of road. I won't say that's all I've ever wanted but when I have that and I'm behind the wheel, it's all I need. You learn to drive. Then you learn to cruise. You listen to the music on the radio and you've got someone beside you... it ain't deep. But then, going somewhere is oftentimes better than getting somewhere, so sometimes you might just as well not go anywhere in particular.*

*And that's cruising - eventually you end up back where you started. Like life.*

## RUN RUN RUN

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Let's get together tonight  
When that sun starts settling down  
Yeah let's drive out to the water  
And just lay a blanket out on the ground

Tell your family and your friends in town  
Let's do it right  
Everybody's gotta know  
That we're gonna be rollin'  
'Till the morning light

Run, run, run as far as you can  
Run, run, run, oh to the Promised Land

Although the valley is deep  
And the mountain is high  
We're just going straight down this road  
Untill we get to the other side

Listen to the sound of the radio station  
It's playing your song  
The words run out and the story ends  
But the beat goes on and on

Run, run, run as far as you can  
Run, run, run, on to the Promised Land

I know you got the fever, well I got it too  
We better hold each other near  
Roll down that window  
Get your hair undone  
And slide on over here



There ain't no moon  
And these stars are so bright  
Once you get away from it all  
Just the earth and the sky, you and I  
And everybody we love

So run, run, run as far as you can  
Run, run, run  
All the way to the Promised Land



..." When the train pulls out of the station  
There ain't no way to turn it around"

*Love given and love gone. No matter the time that has passed, something remains. An overheard conversation, a glance from a stranger, a moment recalled that may have been in last night's dream – something brings it back. It might disappear just as fast. Or you might let yourself stay there awhile, in that memory, relive it as best you can.*

*And, like I say, I just can't help but wonder... if she ever does that too.*

## DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME

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Do you ever think of me  
When the leaves begin to falling  
Or when the shadows are long and lean  
The last sunlight dancing on your wall  
As I look out across this country  
From these hills down to that sea  
Well I just wonder how you're doing  
If you're happy or if you're blue  
Or if you ever think of me

In other times and other places  
However far that we have roamed  
When the train pulls out of the station  
There ain't no way to turn it around  
But every now and then it happens  
You wander through my memory  
And I can't help but ask the question  
One that stands out from the rest  
Do you ever think of me

Down every road you have not followed  
And from each misfortune you did flee  
I was somewhere 'round the corner  
Now I can only imagine darlin', did you ever think of me

Do you ever think of me  
When flowers bloom and the grass is growing  
Do you ever think of me  
And the endless days of long ago  
I know we both have made our choices  
And I know that what will be will be  
I only thought of you this morning  
Can't recall what brought it on  
Or even anything it means

Do you ever stand and stare  
At something that just isn't there  
Do you ever think of me



..."Don't think you're the only one who's ever fallen  
Into the hole that he dug on his own"

*Advice. I offer none. But I will say this - I have found that the troubles you decide to run away from never get resolved. How could they? They belong to you. They're either always there with you or waiting to return. Maybe "time heals all wounds" but it damn sure doesn't solve any problems. And there isn't a road long enough to escape them.*

*Ultimately, only the truth will set you free.*

## SOMEWHERE DOWN THE ROAD

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All those hours we lived  
Telling lies under our breath  
About who we are  
And so many things unsaid  
All those memories time takes away  
And the ones that just won't go  
Well they're always gonna find you  
Somewhere down the road

Yes it all comes back  
One way or another I believe  
With the rising of each morning sun  
Or in the realm of dreams  
We can hide or we can run away  
Ten thousand miles or more  
Still our destiny is waiting  
Somewhere down the road

Just when you think  
You might have outrun that ghost  
And left it all behind  
Look in your back pocket  
Somewhere down the road tonight

Only the truth itself  
Can bear the light of day  
Whether you roll the dice  
Or getting on that midnight train  
Don't think you're the only one  
Who's ever fallen into  
The hole that he dug on his own  
No you're gonna have a lot of company, baby  
Somewhere down the road



..."I used to belong to someone"

*Those long months and years of youth, stretching out in a low arc of unimaginable distance, falling out of sight over the horizon and full of promise, even certainty, more often than not will lead to something quite different than what one might have assumed. Things can go from bad to worse for any one of us. And for some, there really is a point of no return. Time gets away from us all, it's just the nature of it – wasn't intended to be held onto.*

## JUST MOVE ALONG

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My name doesn't matter, not sure I remember  
Sometimes it escapes me  
Even though I know who I am

I live down the river, sometimes by the highway  
Or under a railroad bridge, I hole up where I can

I used to have a house. It used to be a home  
And I used to belong to someone, that I do know

I'm getting too old for this street to street life  
But I can't do nothing 'bout that now  
Just pass me by, just move along

Now don't look too long  
I don't think you have that kind of time  
For the story behind this here  
Is more than you want to see

Thirty turned to forty, forty turned to fifty  
Sixty's in the rear-view mirror  
What I was once is only a tale  
Of what I thought I could be

Last year was a pretty bad year  
This year doesn't look too good  
I thought I could weather the storm  
I might have been wrong

And I'm getting too old for this life that I'm livin'  
But I can't do nothing 'bout that now  
Just pass me by, just keep moving along

Once there was hope, once I believed  
That was a long time ago in a world long since gone

I'm getting too old for this vagabond life  
But I can't do nothing 'bout it now  
Just pass me by and I'll keep moving along  
Walk on by, I'll be moving on  
..."Hanging on to a slippery line, untethered and spent"

*Between la tarde and la madrugada, comes the night. Sometimes when you're not paying attention, unexplainable things happen then. You may have the best intentions. Or no intention at all. But a moment comes and you find yourself between "the devil and the deep blue sea" or "between a rock and a hard place" or, between yourself and your worst fears. It can be a difficult choice.*

## WAY DOWN LOW

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Silhouettes in the alley calling out to me  
Bodies without faces, oh what is it I see  
Way down an alley  
How much farther should I go  
I'm sinkin' like a stone and fallin'  
Way down low

I'm standin' in the water  
Rising higher by the minute  
Looks like a sea of pestilence  
With some poison in it  
Wolves howlin' in a hurricane  
Buzzards dancing with crows  
All headed in the same direction  
Way down low

As night comes fallin'  
And the cage closes in  
There's no way left to know  
Where it starts or where it ends  
Slow trains running  
Right down the middle of the road  
You know you're gonna find me  
In the jailhouse / Way down low

Now I hear the choir  
And I see a prophet in chains  
If I didn't know better  
I'd think I might be insane  
Comes a man with a scornful grin  
Tells me I'm on a roll  
Straight off the top of the mountain  
Way down low

Please wait for me, my darling one  
I'm fighting to the end  
Hanging on to a slippery line  
Untethered and spent  
Out here in the wilderness, so far from my home  
Looking for some kinda redemption  
Way down low  
..."To stay right here, in the shelter of this flame"

*Home. It's always been my favorite place to be. Well, as long as I've had someone to share it that I was comfortable with - even if, at times, that was only me. I guess you either have to accept the world as it is or have a way to shut it out. I find I'm most at peace when I am home with you. And the door is closed.*

## TURN THE WORLD AWAY

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They always told me I would know  
When the right one came along  
I've been across the world and back again  
To the heavens and beyond



Out among the crowds and faces  
Falling deep within each dream that did appear  
I don't regret one mile I travelled down this road  
To be right here

Lay your head on my shoulder  
Let me be your strength  
As you fill every part of me  
And night gives in to day  
We turn this world away

Takes every drop of rain  
To make that river run  
Out into the sea  
All I need is you  
To stay right here  
In the shelter of this flame  
And turn the world away

Common dreams of the many  
Precious thoughts of the few  
All alone though we may be  
Don't be blue

Far out beyond a great big rainbow  
A wonder to behold  
I couldn't care less if I wanted to  
I'd sooner close the door  
Turning from this world

Lay your head on my shoulder  
Let me be your strength  
As you fill every part of me  
And night gives in to day  
Turn this world away

..."The wind speaks her name / And answers her call"

*I don't know who she is. But I know what she has done. And I know that she endures. The vision that has been worshipped, lied about, exploited and revered, is remarkable in that it was born of such a mundane and undeserving world. She glorifies us by her presence. We remain ordinary as ever.*

## LA PURÍSIMA

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Under the streetlight, under the rain  
Stands the woman who turns the night into day  
All alone, only darkness above  
La señora, la purísima  
The wind speaks her name  
And answers her call  
She alone reads the writing on the wall

From unknown places and worlds unseen  
Once buried with every hope that has been  
Comes the wonder, comes the love  
Of la señora, la purísima  
Feel it wash over you  
Like never before  
Hear the sound of the truth and nothing more

The wind speaks her name  
And answers her call  
She alone reads the writing on the wall

What is this road we're on, where does it lead?  
I got a feeling there'll come a day that will be  
Atonement for all transgressions done  
To la señora, la purísima  
In the shadows we live and die  
While the light of the world  
Burns relentlessly just beyond the door

From the foot of the mountain  
To the crown of the sun  
Está la señora, la purísima  
The wind speaks her name  
And answers her call  
She alone has abided through it all

La señora, la purísima



...”Lying still beneath a veil of dignity”

*When the seas rise up (and they will), the high ground will get crowded. After some time, we’ll run out of ways to adapt to an ever-shrinking world. We’ll eat each other.*

*Well that’s one theory. Actually, the Bible says, “The meek shall inherit the earth.” It may not be what Jesus meant, but it may end up being the smallest among us, the invisible horde, that will finally do just that... the germs.*

## JEALOUSY

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When everything looks darkest  
And all around you closes in  
You can bet you better hold on tight  
And be assured of what I say  
We will never come this way again

Now when you roll out on that highway  
You gotta know there’s something you will learn  
Raining fire it falls from the sky  
And covers all below  
Even rock and steel will burn

Slowly turning over, quiet as can be  
Lying still beneath a veil of dignity  
Full of rage and jealousy

Soft is the wind across the water  
Hard is the road that leads the way  
Sometimes you got to lay down  
In the bottom where the river was born  
And give in to your faith

There’s gonna be a time for revelation  
And there will be a time to fall  
Some will say that they’ve given too much  
Some will take it all

Out beyond these city walls  
Far as the eye can see  
Nations clothed in betrayal and distrust  
And hopelessly awash in jealousy

Comes one after the other  
Yearning to be free  
Bound in chains of earthly longing  
Holding on to a dream  
Fueled by jealousy  
Nothing but jealousy  
Oh jealousy  
...”Once I inhabited this world of yours”

*There was a time when I didn’t exist (quite a long time) and there will come a time that I will exist no longer (also of substantial length, I expect). This is a difficult thing for me to accept or to even contemplate. The sum total of one’s life is but a speck, when measured within the vault of eternity. We come to realize that the world is not ours. And that that which we possess (including our life) neither belongs to us or to the memory of us.*



*Yet I am comforted by the knowledge that we all have made, and will all be making, the same crossing.*

DON'T SPEAK OF ME (When I'm Gone)

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Don't speak of me when I'm gone  
Or recount the things that I've done  
If you were left wanting or were satisfied  
Either way leave it alone

Dust off a bottle of wine  
Help yourself to whatever's left behind  
All that you see here was mine I know  
Now it belongs to an endless night

Don't speak of me anymore  
I will not darken your door  
Once I inhabited this world of yours  
Now I return as before

There's something waiting down this road  
Yeah this old highway that I've come to know  
I've been a thousand times around the bend  
This time I ain't coming back again

A sunny day and a cloudy night  
When the morning comes we'll make things right  
All our trials and our triumphs too  
Washed away and set aside

Don't speak for me when they ring the bell  
We can only answer for ourselves  
Like the poet said "Goodbye's too good a word  
So I'll just say fare thee well"



..."Now I've grown old, you still look the same"

*We walked through a mescaline-fueled sunset in the artichoke fields of California. Laid on a mountainside in Arizona, on the naked ground, through the night until the sun rose and both realized we knew who Jesus really was. Hitchhiked to New Mexico, in search of something we understood but couldn't describe in words. On the streets of Denver, 1969, we passed a very cheap bottle of wine around with some guys we had just met. We parted ways with them after Bob talked four rough drunks with, by all appearances, nothing much to lose, out of beating the crap out of me. That's how he was - able to imagine doing the impossible and willing his way to the final outcome. That's how we were together - knowing we could get through any situation.*

*And that's why I thought he would always be around. But he drowned in a river in Oregon when he was 23 years old. I remember the gleam in his eyes. And the clear presence of his spirit. It's been an awful long time. It was nice to see him again the other night.*

## YOU CALLED ME BROTHER

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Well look who's comin' in my door tonight  
I ain't seen you in such a long time  
Can't be sure if you're a ghost or a memory  
Come here closer and let me see

There was a time when we loved one another  
I called you friend and you called me brother  
Pull up a chair and we'll have us another round  
Where has the time gone man?  
It just goes 'round and around

Out on the road or layin' up in a strange room  
Fallin' down drunk or in an introspective mood  
There's a reason for it all, what's that you say?  
I always thought we'd live to fight another day

Now I've grown old, you still look the same  
For me there's no goin' back and you can't stay  
How I long for the hours once spent together  
And for those days when you called me brother

Oh yes you called me brother  
And I remember the ground we covered  
Down from the mountain and out on the shiny sea  
Up the river wherever it leads

We got what we needed but we never took too much  
All that we wanted was just enough  
Oh those were the days we had the power  
Those were the days when you called me brother

Well look who's comin' in my door tonight  
I ain't seen you in such a long time  
Can't be sure if you're a ghost or a memory  
Come here closer and let me see

Come here closer and sit right down  
Tell me straight just what you're thinkin' now  
The way you were you'll stay forever  
And you will always call me brother



*Bob DeWeese and me in the fall of 1969, Santa Rosa California. Two years later, he was gone.*

## STILL

I didn't go to the funeral  
I couldn't acknowledge the death  
I couldn't pay respect to a loss such as this  
My pain consumed me, my anger needed to be fed  
The truth is, I had nothing to say to no one and my presence  
Seemed to me to be pointless. I now regret not taking the opportunity  
To say goodbye. To see him once again, even though it was no longer really him  
I've never been much on visiting gravesites but I will need to throw a bag in the trunk soon,  
Take the highway north, find the Sixes river, see the spot where storm water cast him from the boat  
Find the place downriver where the body washed up, make my way to the gravesite if it exists. Come home.  
..." All alone on the riverbank / Feelin' like a ghost"

*Sometimes you can almost hear the dominoes falling, the pieces clicking into place when you choose this path or that.  
Sometimes you don't hear a thing. A decision made in the blink of an eye, when there is no time to weigh the choices or  
the consequences may seem inconsequential. But after all the broke-down times and the inevitable crises that you've had to*



*work your way through, maybe each time, something was lost. Or taken. Maybe you felt like something was missing. Thing is, we're shedding little pieces of ourselves with every breath.*

*You take your life (and your soul) in your hands every time you roll out of bed.*

## LOST MY SOUL

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When you see that sun goin' down  
And those rain clouds rollin' away  
I bet you're hoping you'll still be around  
To see the mornin' of another day  
I walked out in the moonlight  
Down a foggy road in the moonlight  
I just walked right out in the moonlight  
Was it then I lost my soul?

If you cross the river when the water is high  
You just might drown, don't you know it  
But if you make it to the other side  
You better just keep on goin'  
I walked on down to the riverbank  
To the water's edge on the riverbank  
I was all alone on the riverbank  
Feelin' like a ghost, like I lost my soul

I rode out on a southbound train  
In the dead of night  
Got down on my knees and I thanked the Lord  
For the life he give me  
Yeah I took that southbound train  
In the dead of the night  
But still not believin'  
By the time we pulled into Santa Fe  
Snow was fallin'  
Rollin' in to Santa Fe, oh now, now  
I stepped off in Santa Fe  
And right there to meet me  
The living proof, I lost my soul

You say I gotta keep holdin' on  
Long as I can  
Just another turn in the road before me  
All I gotta do is hold on tight  
Long as I can  
Just enjoy the journey  
I'm driving down the highway in my Cadillac  
Driving down this highway and I can't go back  
Straight down this nameless highway  
I see every dead-end street  
Where I lost my soul  
I lost my soul



“An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,”

W.B. Yeats - Sailing to Byzantium

...” Dreams rise up from their beds  
And come alive and dream us instead”

*There's an old saying - People don't change - I do believe that's true. I think we just learn more about someone as the years go along and they seem different than from who we first thought they were. So it may appear that they've changed. But, more likely, you've just gotten to know who they really are.*

*We are what we dream. We are who we love. We are who we say we are. We are what we won't admit - even to ourselves. We are all those things.*

## SILENTLY

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Outside your window, here at your door  
Fixed in the footsteps I've walked before  
You say it's over but I can't tell  
I am the same man that you knew so well  
And yet this rain keeps falling down on me  
And it burns silently

Sometimes late at night  
Or just before the dawn  
When the shadows fade all into one  
Dreams rise up from their beds  
And come alive and dream us instead  
Turn around and give in to a mystery  
Breaking through silently

On and on, on it goes  
Where it ends no one knows  
Each of us bound unto the other always  
Calling out silently

You will find the truth is not  
Just what you see or what you thought  
Never mind where the line is drawn  
You have a right to believe what you want  
But all the while  
The streets of heaven are unraveling  
Unnoticed, silently

On and on, on it goes  
Where it ends no one knows  
Each of us bound unto the other always  
Calling out silently





..." He put his ear down to the ground  
He could hear the hoofbeats pound"

*My grandfather on my mother's side was José Manuel De La Paz. He knew an old man from many years before, whose name I do not recall. He told my grandfather a story which was then passed on to me, of an encounter with a young Lakota warrior, somewhere between the Black Hills and the Little Big Horn river. The old man was a trader, knew many of the native people and spoke some of the language of the Oglala. The Indian, he remembered as unique, in that he had lighter skin and lighter hair than others and was very plain in appearance - no beads, no feathers, no adornments. He introduced himself with the name, "His Horse Looking" and the old man came to later believe that this was the man known simply as "Curly" in his childhood and, after the passing of his father, took that medicine man's name - "Tashunka Witco", Crazy Horse.*

## A RUN-IN WITH CRAZY HORSE (Curly)

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I once rode down an ancient road  
The one the white man came to know  
As the way to the land of gold  
And blood shed in rivers of disgrace  
Without honor or redemption

There were no lines  
There was no guile or indecision  
Of wrong or right  
The Black Hills of South Dakota  
Rising up in clear dominion  
Full of sacred things unknown

Came one day I met a man there  
Standing in the road before me  
Fair of skin and fair of hair  
Covered in the blanket of the Lakota

He put his ear down to the ground  
He could hear the hoofbeats pound  
Could hear the horses coming  
Could see all the people coming  
And that little stream  
Would grow into a great river

He was the one that they called Curly  
He was the son of a holy man

We came all this way  
To be standing here today  
With nowhere to run  
And the moment that you find  
You can neither trust or hide  
From the truth you've come to know  
There's still a deed to be done  
And he was the one that they called Curly  
He was the son of a holy man

In silence he led me up to the top of a hill  
And what I was shown  
I remember to this day still  
There below in a valley

As far as the eye could see  
All the freedom and dignity  
Of the Indian nation

There was no talk of forgiveness  
For the curse of the breath  
That had scattered diseases among them  
No just the evening light  
That spoke of sorrows to come  
As sure as the sun in the heavens  
Fell upon us

As I rode with the one, they called Curly  
Rode beside the son of a holy man

I was told what was given away  
For sugar and coffee and whiskey  
Everything that was lost  
And the shadows of dreams that remained  
Where once there was plenty  
Now there was only  
One chance left for honor  
One coup left to claim

I rode away down the river  
As the smoke from the fires  
Was rising and covered the moon  
Somewhere out on the grassy plains  
Still the wind does call his name  
“Tashunka Witco”

He was the one that they called Curly  
The son of the holy man

We came all this way  
To be standing here today  
With nowhere to run  
And the moment that you find  
You can neither trust or hide  
From the truth you’ve come to know  
There’s still a deed to be done

And he was the one that they called Curly  
He was the son of a holy man