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Heartland

Matthew Bailey
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Heartland

Matthew Bailey

There's an old road that traces
what's left of 66 and crosses the Red Sea
of the plains, lost to the ever moving
traffic of the great interstate veins
crisscrossing America's breasts.
Kicking up rusty plumes in my wake,
I once left the well-trodden lines of the contemporary
map and drifted to this all but forgotten place lost
amongst the relics of yesteryear, tucked away
with worn technicolor postcards
and the American dream.

Remnants of the Roman roads, the desolate
ruins of asphalt stretched to the horizon
and led the way to an ancient place
housed at the center of bygone years.
A loan winking stoplight illuminated my path and
the skeletal remains of something I couldn't quite place
my finger on, lingering in the brick and mortar of
abandoned storefronts and just beneath the worn lines that
guided the way.

As dusk settled, I couldn't help
but feel the closing of the eye, the dying
of a town whose looming buildings
have been abandoned by everyone
save a handful of hermits cleaving to
an all-consuming ideology
faltering in the hands of Modernity.

Hesitating at the light, I saw a figure
moving in the stillness of the lonely
intersection, breathing life
into the lifeless for a transitory moment so brief
I would have missed it had I blinked.

In the shadows cast by the rural dangle lighthouse,
I slowly made out an elderly gentleman
clad in a plaid shirt tucked into
a tattered pair of Wranglers spilling
over worn brown boots resting on the soles of
feet that had been everywhere.

In that darkened, dilapidated expanse, we
caught each other's eye and I traced
the sunbaked wrinkles carved into
his neon face
glowing orange in the intermittent
flashing at a nexus between nostalgia and death.

In the midst of that moment,
shared between travelers from different worlds,
the man raised his arm in a gesturing wave,
his limb remaining outstretched, gingerly prodding
the fragile amber atmosphere,
beckoning for a reply.

I returned the motion, but the mirror image rang hollow
and I could see a soft frown form on the visage
of the keeper of this town.

Reflecting on that instant, strange and shared, I am left
with the image of a man who seemed to be
offering less of a greeting
than an unspoken question.

But the world forgets and the engine starts,
taking us far away from the forgotten,
slowly erasing their lines
for the cityscapes of anonymity.