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## Heartland

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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.