

Joseph Kidney

## In Which Alberta Plays the Old West (Not So Much in the Way That Angela Hewitt Plays Bach as in the Way That a Dog Plays Dead)

I pulled into a one horse town that was one horse shy  
and the song on the radio went *oh baby obey me*.  
Someone giving directions said *if you see the church*  
*you've gone too far*. An acre of hoods in the car lot  
caught the light and shimmered like the Adriatic sea.  
Day-drinkers at the bar kept asking *what's the damage?*  
A child in the corner said *the night is always darkest*.  
I had a lover and she cut right through me like a saw;  
to be dead and standing is a variant of majesty.  
A red fox flickered through the wild rose and chaparral.  
In a field of panicgrass a gutted Ford was browning  
like an old banana. Maybe the soul is not so different  
from a common grackle, hopping about and foraging  
for smithereens from an economy of sacrifice  
beyond its comprehension. *We should be so lucky*  
my mother used to say as if willing it in the same breath  
as mourning it. I had a lover and she cut right through  
me like a song. Not unlike the wind that the falcon scythes  
and vaults and is not entirely separate from but rather  
a manifestation of that hunger which may not be felt  
but can still characterize an element that consists  
of what looks like emptiness to the sparrow that breaks  
apart in the talons like friable clay. A horsehair bow  
made music on a blade. The skies above were spangled  
like an appaloosa mare. In the foothills a mountain goat  
clambered up the shattered mosaic of slate and shale  
with the sound of a coinpurse being plunked on the floor  
once and over again. All my sorrows cauterized  
into desire. Back at the bar the men exchanged words  
like hostages. Somewhere beneath us the sputum-like  
oil of bitumen lay dreaming of ignition, of the fires  
that will wrap around the earth like foil. In the cemetery  
you can walk along the ironwood stelae, reading  
about the people who had been *translated from this world*.