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True Love

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JOE PLICKA

true love

Somewhere in northern Nevada,
maybe eastern Oregon, where
nothing has a name—travelers
make up their own and the few that stay on
would rather forget—where the sky ends,
prairie dogs dance with truck tires and
the scrubland rolls away like an ocean swell,
that's where I figured it out—

We were pointed toward Winnemucca when
that new daughter of ours pooped up her back.
I came out of the greasy roadhouse with a giant
Coke.
She was lying on the trunk, naked, crooked
limbs
scratching the air like an upturned beetle
while you cleaned and dressed her.
She was your daughter then, and I remembered
the time, cradled in blood water,
piecing her together like a ball of tin foil.
And I was your son, knowing you
only from the outside,
and from books.
I saw you striding across paintings
and through silver screens. Mother.
Goddess. Grant me

my only sin: to have wanted you for myself.

I knew then that I am an empty man,
my body a cage,
organs hanging from strings like a lurid mobile.
When I saw you that day, somewhere,
a string broke; things started to sway
dangerously until they were all tangled up.

A marionette
left in a box and shaken up. Here a liver
wrapped around a spleen, hanging under a lung
beating against a kidney—and
I couldn't do anything but
drive on, just holding myself
together, breathing like a man in a body cast
with you
swirling around me and in me, teasing me with
utter annihilation.