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Before Dawn in Nebraska

by John Nizalowski

originally published in *The Last Matinée*, 2011

Like the ghosts
of all the tornadoes
that never were,
the siren sings
to the darkness.

A train engine
illuminates the prairie—
folded hills of brown
and black. No moon.
An old coyote sings,
clouds circle silently
above, lightning
pulses on the horizon,
the sparks of the dying
campfire respond.

“Holy is the night,”
the aged drifter says,
drinking whiskey straight
in the migrant camp.
Tomorrow he gets
paid off-time to head
to Abilene, before
the autumn wind
cuts him dry.