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## Our Place

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# Our Place

by John Graves Morris

for Larry Shanahan

Birds with a memory of ports south  
squawk as they sit on telephone lines;  
we pull into a small Oklahoma town

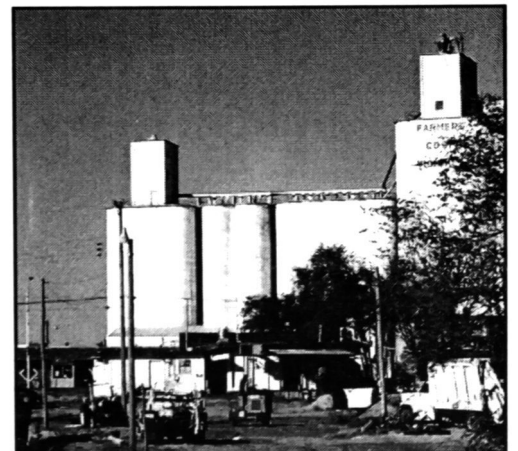
& joke that the downtown street  
will have a four-way blinking  
stoplight well past the millennium.

We are driving this afternoon  
between two larger cities,  
dreaming of a better life.

Something there is has gashed  
holes here in the sidewalks & curbs.  
In front of a string of faded shops,

fresh leaves on the trees  
someone planted in a civic fit  
shimmer in afternoon sunlight,

nearly throttled by the Christmas lights  
that are left up year-round,  
half of which are currently blinking.



*Photo (detail) by C. Michael McKinney*



We have had a long day of searching  
for better landscape, but have found  
this highlight reel of the mundane:

the postmaster turning the key  
just as the First Baptist churchbell  
tolls a stentorian five,

the plastic sign in front of Bill's  
advertizing the *third-pound burger*  
with two cars in front, one with a flat,

oversize pickups lolling at the Horseshoe Tavern,  
where the longneck beer is always cold  
& every hour is happy hour,

music leaking out the tavern door  
as a man in coveralls walks by, shaking  
his head at the young man staggering out.

This year rain enough has fallen  
for the farmer to imagine a bumper crop;  
he glares at the raucous birds

and, running his practiced eyes  
over the foreign make of our car,  
judiciously takes our measure.

We have driven past lush wheat fields  
on a depression-era road with no shoulders  
only to find our place among the stars.

