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Our Place

John Graves Morris

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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.

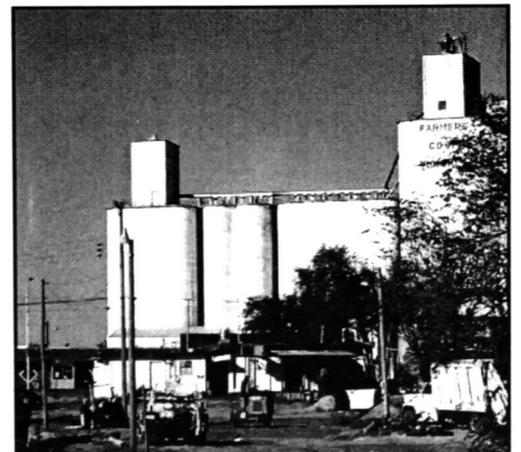


Photo (detail) by C. Michael McKinney



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.

