

Heath Bowen

Dakota

I was broke down holding a bottle of burgundy
sitting atop some rusted old
Pontiac in the South Dakota plains
when I first heard the song "Loretta."
Some west Texas drawl sounding
through worn-out speakers on some
static AM radio station echoing
the rattling hum of a beat up guitar.

The magnetic movement
of melody and words
had me whispering
to the winds of a Midwestern sun
that I'd soon be,
"coming home."

That was almost fifteen years ago.
The song always serves
as a reminder to stay within the boundaries
of my own individuality
or else I might end right back on
some dust covered road holding
a bottle of daydreams
chasing sunshine silhouettes.

It was the first song
my daughter heard
as it played in the car
the day we took her
home from the hospital.

It will be the first song
I play
as a husband
at my wedding reception.

I have no need for lyrical
sentimentalities, but Loretta
really has "been on my mind a while."
I never hope to return
to those Dakota plains
and the prairie sun, if I do
find myself rubbing dust

from my eyes and shaking
dirt off my feet, however,
then I will always remember Loretta
as the first of three names
that keep me wanting
to come back home.

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