

Border Patrol

In the Gulf we learned how blood will sit on sand
before it sinks, we learned to look for signs:
kick marks, prints, disturbed vegetation.
Now I work the stretch West from Sarita,
Lynrd Skynrd on the stereo, air-con
cranked up high. New place, different enemy.

They come in search of something better,
they wait in pick-ups behind the church
for work nobody wants. Old men, mothers,
kids who should be in school. For a few bucks
they'll cut lawns, clear the houses of the dead.
Sometimes we catch them kissing through the fence.

An hour can feel like a week out here.
Scrubbed out, hard-scrabble land where coyotes
yip the night away, and water's rumour.
Ocotillo, ironwood, skunk and shrike,
two-thousand-year old mummies, tongues still pink,
sidewinders, vultures hungry for an eye.

They think they'll make it. A pair of flip flops
and a can of coke, forty miles and no map.
Sometimes bones is all we find, and sometimes
gold, the shocked shine of it, a crucifix
nestled in a ladder of ribs, a ring
engraved with the words for I love you.