Angels

By B. H. Fairchild

Elliot Ray Neiderland, home from college one winter, hauling a load of Herefords from Hogtown to Guymon with a pint of Ezra Brooks and a copy of Rilke’s Duineser Elegien on the seat beside him, saw the ass-end of his semi gliding around in the side mirror as he hit ice and knew he would never live to see graduation or the castle at Duino.

In the hospital, head wrapped like a gift (the nurses had stuck a bow on top), he said four flaming angels crouched on the hood, wings spread so wide he couldn’t see, and then the world collapsed. We smiled and passed a flask around. Little Bill and I sang Your Cheatin’ Heart and laughed, and then a sudden quiet put a hard edge on the morning and we left.

Siehe, ich lebe, Look, I’m alive, he said, leaping down the hospital steps. The nurses waved, white dresses puffed out like pigeons in the morning breeze. We roared off in my Dodge, Behold, I come like a thief! he shouted to the town and gave his life to poetry. He lives, now, in the south of France. His poems arrive by mail, and we read them and do not understand.
