

# Beyond Bakersfield

*Jeffrey Alfier*

He has signed for the keys to a small house  
he now owns a block from Armand's  
Diesel Road Service, which tows lame  
engines and overheated truckers  
off interstates that map the valley.

Scanning the beggared Eden of a backyard,  
he takes in the itinerant rage of crows  
in the sole camphor tree, the quiet  
scent of cottonwoods, and the whisper  
of windfall apples decaying into the earth.

Inhaling the pungency of wrought iron  
and failed gardens, he turns to gaze across  
the street; young daughters of a migrant  
farmer pull fistfuls of gold poppies, just  
to clutch their brilliance, as their mother

sings a ballad that ascends the midday  
heat. Her tune will stay with him like the din  
from pry bars and wrenches of Armand's  
workers, like the silence of all the women  
who said they'd never leave without him.