

What We Long for in Desert Towns

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From your father you learned a peasant's
faith in work, that merciful decades
with a forgiving wife means time is a plea
bargain between beggars and angels,
that auto shops and stray dogs attend
them all in this town with two truck stops
to blunt what fails on main street, a new
gypsum plant men hope displaces shuttered
cotton gins that laden haulers could reach
from four exits off an interstate that signals
how empty your town really is, how cattle
guards are here for nothing but ghost herds.

Respite from it all comes with county
fairs – corridors of colored lights to dazzle
the dust, amusement rides to spin townies
into gritty air, barkers daring passersby
to pitch balls or rings into thin spaces;
candy apples, funnel cakes, anything
deep-fried and impaled on sticks you're led
to believe can be had nowhere else,
and always the bright signs in gothic letters
for sights 'never seen outside tent flaps'
– 'Bizarre and Exotic Creatures,'
all the caged freaks you could ever imagine.