*David Kirby*

**MORE THAN THIS**

When you tell me that a woman is visiting the grave

of her college friend and she’s trying not to get irritated

at the man in the red truck who keeps walking back and forth

and dropping tools as he listens to a pro football

game on the truck radio, which is much too loud, I start

to feel as though I know where this story is going,

so I say *Stop, you’re going to make me cry.*

How sad the world is. When young men died in the mud

of Flanders, the headmaster called their brothers out

of the classroom one by one, but when the older brothers

began to die by the hundreds every day, they simply handed

the child a note as he did his lessons, and of course the boy

wouldn’t cry in front of the others, though at night

the halls were filled with the sound of schoolboys sobbing

for the dead, young men only slightly older than themselves.

Yet the world’s beauty breaks our hearts as well:

the old cowboy is riding along and looks down

at his dog and realizes she died a long time ago

and that his horse did as well, and this makes him

wonder if he is dead, too, and as he’s thinking this,

he comes to a big shiny gate that opens onto a golden

highway, and there’s a man in a robe and white wings,

and when the cowboy asks what this place is, the man tells

him it’s heaven and invites him in, though he says animals

aren’t allowed, so the cowboy keeps going till he comes

to an old rusty gate with a road full of weeds and potholes

on the other side and a guy on a tractor, and the guy

wipes his brow and says you three must be thirsty,

come in and get a drink, and the cowboy says okay,

but what is this place, and the guy says it’s heaven,

and the cowboy says then what’s that place down

the road with the shiny gate and the golden highway,

and when the guy says oh, that’s hell, the cowboy

says doesn’t it make you mad that they’re pretending

to be you, and the guy on the tractor says no,

we like it that they screen out the folks who’d desert

their friends. You tell me your friend can’t take it

any more, and she turns to confront the man

who’s making all the noise, to beg him to leave her alone

with her grief, and that’s when she sees that he’s been

putting up a Christmas tree on his son’s grave

and that he’s grieving, too, but in his own way,

one that is not better or worse than the woman’s,

just different, the kind of grief that says the world

is so beautiful, that it will give you no peace.