

# Backwards

*by* Michael Kroetch

She was learning how to walk backwards against the wind. She had photographs up all around her house. Her own and those of people she admired. She told people she lived in the heartland of amnesia, and that by walking backwards she could be a better photographer. She said this because for her photos were always about looking backward. At what had been. She did not live in the country of smiles, nor seek refuge there. Her photographs had no people. They were temples of lost memory. One of her favorites was of an old axe asleep on a desert floor. She told people the axe had the western lips of September. That it held the song of the ocean and the dreams of a scarecrow. Some thought she was mad to talk in such a way. Others believed her a saint. She didn't care much for either camp. She preferred looking at photos of nowhere places and dead cigarettes. She didn't choose to be the way she was or, lately, even where she was at any given time. Lately she lived much more by random than by rote. No day resembled the one before. Her sleep pattern was about as erratic as her driving. That she hadn't killed anyone on the road yet seemed a miracle, but she knew better than to rest too well assured about the future. She didn't blame herself for her bad driving. Her mind saw things abstracted inside a frame—always focusing on what needed next to be photographed. Everywhere around her she saw a kind of crucified beauty. It was sometimes more than she could take, being that exposed to the broken things of the world and their divine mystery. Many men were drawn to her because of how she saw the world. More than just wanting to get into bed with her, it was as if they wanted to climb inside her mind and see out through her eyes. She took such lovers in stride, never giving herself over to them fully. Part of this was out of fear of losing herself in the process and another was her apprehension that none of these men were quite right for her. Besides, her real passion was never there in the bed. Always it was when she was behind the lens framing the inanimate that she was most animated. She found it

humorous men would want her because of how she saw the already dead past. She thought most men were slightly ridiculous and really only wanted assurance about themselves and their place in life. Maybe this is some of what they got from her photos and what they sought from her as well. But she couldn't give it to them. Not really. Not the way they seemed to want. It was why she was so often alone. She had her camera, what more did she really need? It was a more responsive lover than any she had ever known and always was giving her fresh surprises and reasons to walk backwards. She couldn't really say that about any of the men she'd been with, but maybe that was her own fault? She wasn't sure. She did know it was time now to get another photo. The clock was ticking.

