

## A REASON IN THE WORLD

Once Mama goes  
I'll use up the chicory and sorghum, swap  
the Mason jar of Kennedy half dollars  
for green rectangles, get in the pickup  
and just drive. I'll swap steep gravel roads  
for fast interstates. Joe-pye weed  
for squared lawns and scalloped bushes.  
Coon dogs belling in the gap for traffic pulse  
and streamers of light like music I can sing.  
I'll drive until I find a reason  
to stop or a reason to turn around and come back.

Wet tires sizzle, heatless. My rhythm sometimes  
fades like the station the radio loses  
on the way. The next state's too-early frost  
is a ditto of ours, limp crops leaning  
like lines of ragbag refugees from some new war.  
Old stores with gritty sharecroppers leaning  
over Pepsis and Moon Pies. Me,  
separate as the lone gas pump out front,  
not wanting to explain my hurry, not knowing  
the lyrics to "Where you headed, stranger?"

Away from you, I might shout. Away  
from what I know and don't know. Away from  
familiar nothing to maybe only different nothing  
that just replays in another key.  
I'm after live songs, trumpets, guitars enough  
to fuel my tank to Chicago. I'll sleep  
under sheet music, inhale hot jazz for lunch  
and wind me in a gospel-slapping choir robe.

Practice runs I call these Sunday goings  
and right backs. Short rolls on the treble staff,  
quick upwardly mobile riffs on a limited scale  
and down again. Mama's not gone yet.

But I've taken the whole trip  
on so many midnight turntables, her words  
on my back like a hand-me-down coat  
that weighs too much and warms too little.

Today I found a forty-year-old road map  
in Mama's Bible, the highways traced and dated  
with quarter note rests all the way to New York  
in red. And by a different, dimmer route,  
all the way back in blue. She never told me that.

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