

## 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.



It's all the magic horn, mama, that golden fetish,  
possessed and possessing, that haloed concubine,  
caressed and polished, surrounded with plush.  
And you-- chapped, smacked,  
earning your master's degree in martyrdom,  
sewing clothes out of mill ends,  
that eternal alloy suspended between you  
even in bed, that icon he hocked once  
to buy you an emergency doctor in Dayton.  
And you sold your mother's ring to get it back.

And the man, mama, with the hard mouth,  
dead weight in the bus seat, little slivers  
of life telescoped in battered cases  
under collapsible stands. Trumpet man.  
Pitched all shades and angles like shadows,  
worse for women than drifters. Gone too high  
too often, a pile of singed feathers  
dripping wax on the downers, always patching  
to fly one more set too near the sun.

Was there a man at all?  
Or just a flared gold phallus that seduced you  
and crammed you in the gears of a music box  
on wheels, hurled you across the bad-weather map  
into broken-john motels with lint bedspreads  
and the boozy corners of never-quite-level halls  
full of lurching bodies and bad acoustics?

Tears emptied, he mounts the god syndrome  
like mercury, surpassing sound, no longer  
protoplasm and metal but some new alchemy  
entering the last panging tunnel you sealed  
and secured. Driving deeper, blowing down  
your barricades like Joshua,  
peeling off new notes like bright blisters,  
exorcising the orchestra, resolving  
each chord with light. Nebulizing fire.

White consumes you, turns you immaculate,  
unhurting anymore. The trumpet  
fluoresces like his phosphorous eyes,  
confetti light orbits his head.  
His image blazes beyond seeing.

You open your eyes as the waiter pours champagne,  
hear something shut like a latch, focus absently  
on an alabaster herald you hadn't noticed before.