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the trickle

Noah Mazer
SUNY Geneseo

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the trickle

two clouds, drying out, are our only shade on the interstate north.
there were rivers. between sky and matching fog before i fell asleep
there were dogwoods, and a black band of mountains held

the only thing flowing on the plain where i wake up is sour discharge
from beneath a gas station, counter manned by a crookteeth leer
who stares as he rings up food for the road. i say thanks and he grunts

wafts a warm, impotent-smelling breeze through his nose hairs.
in the car dad's still tuned to a program about the flooding, what might yet be saved
i tell him it's still too sad to listen to. he says philosophy is hard.

we pass a pair of bait shops that face each other
across the road. at home it was a rainy summer but the scanty patches of grass
in their empty parking lots are cracked and dusted

by pale dirt that the wind drags in swirls over the gravel.
i begrudge the southbound streaks in the sky and the way the gliders
fall home overhead. radio talks salvage as we drive west

past murky townships where a truck company bossman's nights leave him
nothing but to be an amateur matador,
creep through empty pastures in a secondhand traje de luces

looking for a fight. he tears a rhinestoned knee straining to pull himself over barnyard fence
dip in his mouth like always and when he spits he uncts his slippers with the black spray.
further west the smell remains. dad's drained the bottle of water i brought

from the city. my throat stays dry. where will i swim?
the rivers here are worms. turn around. i can say these things now but leave me out here
& i am afraid
eventually the barn door will creak open and the calves will low

and it will be me standing there with the lance in hand.
i've learned my lesson—we can go back now. there's no traffic coming.
pull over and turn back. i will never live so far from the sea again.