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Healing

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HEALING

The girl I love still sleeps with her mother
who is huge, bulky as a bear.
It is a small house in Guthrie
without a doorknob or a father.
He is silent on a hill. They forget
to leave flowers on Memorial Day.

We stay up late, kissing in the car,
windows open to the cricket buzz.
Inside, her mother barely sleeps.
Food goes bad in the fridge.
The worthless brother, guitar
plugged to the wall, wails.

The boom's gone bust.
Every other house
is empty in this neighborhood,
a democracy of failure.
Armadillos rustle in the brush.
We watch the neighbors tune their truck,
the breasts of a woman they saw
in a bar last night troubling
the pure mechanics of their talk.

All day the brother sleeps
in his leaking waterbed.
The father, a stern man
in uniform, watches me
from the bookshelf.

Her hair is perfectly black
and smells faintly of her permanent.
I walk to the drugstore with her
to buy artificial nails. They leave
red highways down my spine.

In the sink her dishes grow
green. The back yard rises
in a weedy funk, foaming
over bones of old cars.
The dog drowns in ticks.

An aunt comes by, ashen-faced.
This is a laying on of hands.
Her tumor's growing like a great idea,
a central concept. Jesus,
everyone says, their palms
burning through to the core. Heal.
A cousin wears Christ
on a t-shirt: this blood's for you.
Pepsi's in the fridge.

Soaps in the afternoon, couples
humping through the broadcast day.
In the glamor magazines
scattered on the floor
women tan and tone.
They come hard with famous men.
I suggest we go

for a doorknob at the hardware store.
Vetoed. Too hot.
A sister visits, baby
sucking at her chest.
She swears her milk
will shoot across the room.

At dusk we drive to the Sonic,
a neon bonfire near
the base's barbed perimeter.
B-52s tilt over with a black wake.
Evil, she says, munching okra,
her face so beautiful
in the red fire of sunset
my throat tightens, I could cry.
A song comes over the radio,
the very car shimmers, the bulbs
of the drive-in blooming
red and blue, deepening
in the failing light
and she moves into my arms,
smelling of soap and french fries.
All around us
men and women, boys and girls
are tuned to the same frequency,
moving together under the tinted glass,
beneath the whirlwind of moths
in the hot air, the Sonic
throbbing with light and love,
the life I left to come here
forgotten and the sun
sliding down a dome of gold.
She laughs. Mosquitoes
rise in the rural haze.
Her tongue is in my ear.