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Sivka-Burka, A Is for Air, Interstate, Notes from a Northern State

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Sivka-Burka, and: A Is for Air, and: Interstate, and: Notes from a Northern State

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Sivka-Burka

Sleep's smashed
to shards. Lap-
tops glow in bed after bed.

Strangers pull strangers
into their heads. And yet,
as starlings scatter,
unwired Russian grandmothers
strip to drink

what's left of the sun
after the death of Stalin,
and the collapse
of the Soviet Union.
No one pays attention
to these women but themselves,

as they harvest
vitamin D directly,

laying out a foil sheet
and broasting.
Slowly, they turn
tree-bark brown,
not to please their husbands,
but just to absorb
something profound
without reading.

A Is for Air

I

Dismantle the desks.
Melt the monkey bars.
Rip the clock off the wall.
Augment the drinking fountain with fake
marble cupids and replace

childhood with something easier,
say, lilacs afloat in their own scent,

and then,
then I can go back to Fernwood School
with my daughter and explain
that school is impossible
but worth the pain
because you learn an alphabet that settles

into marvels, into fearless Jane
Eyre whose childhood was miserable,
and whose face was plain.

II

Except my daughter is beautiful,
and she hates long novels,
and she's adopted from a country
with so many intimate gods
that when I watch her I wonder
whose supernatural hands
are guiding her—
but of course it's just me,
bringing her a lilac
in a Coke-bottle vase,
which she accepts,

because she wants to be polite,
as she steps gracefully over her Ps and Qs
into her lace-up flying leather

miraculous

cheerleading shoes.

Interstate

Is it because I am finally old
that my young body passes by?

I catch it in the corner of my eye.
It has no clear gender.

Its shoes are in its hand.
It is condemned to wander

the lots where truckers park
their big rigs. Wheels are taller

here. Drivers log fake
numbers in their books

to make long hauls last longer.

And on the dark shoulder,
a stranger: that body. Its skin

fits too tightly. Its face
is drawn,
 more notion than person,

like a pencil sketch of nightfall
fallen. Don't look back,

wheezes Bob Dylan,
on the radio between stations—

that body's heart is not your heart,
and all its cells are dead.

*But Officer, I'm wide awake, I swear.
Go ahead. Slap my face. Pull my hair.*

Notes from a Northern State

We moved for jobs
to the land of dead
deer strapped to cars.
Deer country sure
ain't horse country—
no one rides anyone's back.

It's all fleeting sightings:
a flash of fur, a horn, a single
eye among the branches.
Tiny ice-fishing houses
dot the lake, and in each house,
a man, a thermos,

and a phone with no reception.
Can't call the men.
Can't ask them how to gut
fish, or smoke venison.
Our mantle's antler rack
is ironic, from an L.A. thrift

store, hung with bits
of broken chandelier,
but it's grown grave
in Wisconsin, a state
that's neither boot-
nor mitten-shaped,

but larger and harder
to picture: rivers pour
themselves into stillness.
Jesus preached "Have faith"
at Galilee, but here every lake
is walkable in winter.

O Lord, we will always be strangers.