

Sulphur Springs

First, the improbable neon
of the empty sky on the
first chilly day in October. Prickly weed,
clay mud on the pond's border
cracked and cratered in summer
drought. Deja vu, dogwood blossoms,
their unlikely stench.

Eggo waffles dripping in Karo
syrup. Crunch of gravel in the
perfect stillness of early dawn while
you walk empty, half-lit halls of school
hours before anybody else shows up,
drinking in the silence. Whole books
devoured in lieu of a square meal.
Blind rage at the arrival of a sister and
those endless little cruelties between
siblings, including but not limited to
your steadfast attempts to teach her to read.

Endless car rides at sunset. Cicadas and bullfrogs
and crickets teeming in the
thick summer air. Sunflower seeds, gas station biscuits,

Crystal healing books with
a crumpled receipt tucked in it that has
hospital room numbers scribbled on the back.
Papa's family before us, rarely mentioned,
his homemade sourdough with honey and
butter, his pointer finger cinched off and scarred
an inch below where a nailbed
should have been. Gramma's "hobo soup," Angie's old piano,
teeth yellowed and taped together, that sings like tin.

The whiskey in the washroom you pretend
you do not see. The touches in the first house after
you pretend you do not mind. Goddamned endless
cow pasture, rusted barbed wire fencing,
evenings filled with so much warm sky and
sweating glasses of tea and
magnolia velvet and
decayed stretches of country road that
it doesn't even matter all that much that
you are miserable and
you are dying because
you are already in God's country
and though it just might kill you it's where
you will go when you die, anyway.

Mist clinging to the tall grass at dawn,

gasps of color as the light shines through it
deep blush in the horizon
expanse of still
failed production plant
the old secret buried in the rich earth. All of it
a promise of absolutely nothing of any lasting value.
Your arm out the window
cupping it in your palm
trying in vain to bring it all with you the last time you leave.