

Riding Woodward Avenue  
1981

Holly squinting, reapplying red lipstick in the rearview.  
Me puckering, reapplying red lipstick  
by touch  
in my grandfather's spew-green Impala  
rattle-trapping south toward Detroit—emptying icon  
on the map—riding Woodward Avenue  
like a dime-store pony  
ten below the limit, never mind the cruisers  
the hipsters and joy-riders inching at our tail,  
concerto of engines revving into the red.  
Because it's Saturday night on Woodward, this once  
Indian trail named not  
for forests but Augustus B. Woodward—*wild theorist  
fit only to extract sunbeams from cucumbers*—and  
both of us high school kids, stoned  
just enough to wonder if we're stoned,  
clattering past 11 Mile, 10, 9, asphalt  
lustrous with oil beneath staggering street lights  
while Holly pushes the bottle sloshing  
into my lap, I swig give it back, chanting along  
with Siouxsie on the radio, or maybe its OMD  
its synthesizer sameness portending  
a plastic, pastel future  
and we're dithering

into Motown past 8 Mile without a whimper  
past 7 toward 6—*world's first stretch  
of paved highway*—while hookers unimpressed  
on either side point in our direction  
and laugh, laugh their asses off.  
Square shouldered, we drive against  
the current, Woodward Avenue a river now  
approaching the downtown that jolted our parents  
to the suburbs and we're retracing the '67 path  
of National Guard troops, reversing my first escape—  
me a bundle unbuckled  
in the passenger seat, my mother disappeared to white  
fingers on the wheel. This is what passes  
for family folklore: a father I don't know  
on the roof of a house no longer standing  
watching tanks roll down Woodward, looters  
bent double and rioters with empty hands  
burning our city to embers, my  
mother stopped by soldier boys

along Woodward at Davison, the shiny  
new checkpoint, everybody hooting  
into walkie-talkies. Quick flirt and wink, pinch  
on my baby cheek and *get out quick, Ma'am*

and fourteen years later, best friends worst  
friends Holly and me—suburban savages without  
history or culture, only just abandoned  
designer jeans too tight, combs peeking  
from back pockets. We've quit shy, we're teased  
and shredded just so, eyes painted to perfect hollow  
stares, riding Woodward like an arrow  
toward our mothers' imploded *Paris*  
*of the Midwest*, toward some boys  
in identical t-shirts in some bar, some  
band playing so loud we'll feel the thrum deep  
in our bellies between our thighs and our  
ears will ring for days. We're so close  
our eyes water. In the rearview Woodward  
shimmies like a swami's rope, like a hooded cobra  
but it's us hypnotized  
by movement—the jittery, neon palm trees  
of the Shangri-la Motor Lodge on our left—the wink  
wink, winking *Vacancy. Vacancy. Vacancy.*