POEMS

Laura Donohue

Car Sick in Oklahoma

We travel through dust that coats our teeth with that gritty feeling
and our mouths are so dry as we cross the Mississippi
that sips from the thermos evaporate on our tongues before we can
swallow.

Five days on the road in August, just to get to hell.

'Daddy, *please* stop now.'

We take up the usual, tuneless refrain:

'*S-t-a-r-t looking for a mo-TEL!*'

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He forgets to blow his cigarette smoke out the window

and we whine and plead at being choked;

but he doesn't stop, he doesn't answer;

and I am in the backseat with my head on Amy's lap,

puking into a plastic bag

because I can't get the image of Mrs Morton's

Chicken Pot Pies out of my head

even though we passed this horror on a billboard in Tennessee

as long ago as yesterday;

and Amy is whimpering, sick of my smell and my bony head;

and Kitty sits quietly suffering, trying to make up for our

unpleasantness;

and we all three have our young hawks' eyes on Mommy,

who sits pale and still with apprehension

because she, too, sees, without having to look,

his knuckles clenched white on the steering-wheel,

his wound-startled face staring straight ahead;

and she, too, registers, with pounding heart,

the sudden flickerings of hand to mouth and expulsions of breath

that fill the car with smoke

as his mind fights what will happen when we get there.

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