In College I Wanted to Visit You

Sam Rice

so my mother taught me how
to drive long distances on back country roads. I take
my time. Gardens and churches are swallowed
by I-670 into wheat fields and rotten barns as I twist
through little towns with names like Margot
and Homer, as if they might know each other. If it’s night
I am to keep my brights on so that every yield
and stop sign lights up like televisions
behind windows as I walk my dog at night.
This way I spot any stray deer or barn cat
that crosses the road; this way every warning
or pothole glows as if meant to be found.

But I knew you might grow tired
of waiting—what my mother did not warn me of
were the hills that stretch along the outskirts of towns,
the ones that settlers and Natives camped
on when they didn’t want to drown in the open rain.
She did not tell me how quickly there could be nothing
and then a harsh flash of white light climbing
the hillcrest as cars drive past. She did not tell
me that in a space of road as bright as noon
I might swear it was you in the driver’s seat,
the weight of a decision on your pale brow.