

will

Ian Burnette

My father wants to be
 cremated at Green Street Mortuary

in the city where he lives,
 a full processional through

North Beach with french horns
 and everything, past the Zoetrope

where Coppola spent 1971
 holed up mixing sounds

and down Broadway
 where the clubs line up outside

themselves like velvet versions
 of death. In college, my father's favorite

album was The Kingston Trio
 "Live at the Hungry I." When I was a kid

he told me about how he fell asleep
 in his eastern Kentucky dorm room

every night dreaming of the west,
 carnival bulbs flashing pictures

of paradise on the facade of
 the Hungry I and the lighthouse at the

strange heart of San Francisco bay
 churning the hills of Marin behind it,

a holy land of the pacific
 he thought he'd never live to see.

babel

Ian Burnette

By lunch, everyone
speaks

the language of hunger—
at the cantina

where I work
we fill the mouths of

doctors and carpenters,
the street man

who arranges his
quarters to form

the constellation of
another beer and

slurs a wave to his family
way out in space.

In a way, I guess
the language of hunger

is the language of
brotherhood—how at

four o'clock
the women working

leave like scattering
tomatoes, leaving our

shift of men to switch on
the machines, monster

food processors like
calculators—six heads

cilantro, one
jalapeño, six pounds

tomatoes. How, like us and
the vagrant sky weaver,

they must destroy
the things they count.

swerve

Ian Burnette

There's a place out in
Monetta

where my friend and I
like to drive.

Some nights, the road
is nothing more

than a shadow, some
nights, Susannah lake

swallows teenagers
in their metal boxes

whole. Last summer
a boy on varsity

soccer ran off the road
on his bike

and woke up
two days later to find

fire ants had taken
his leg. I'm not sure

why we risk our lives
to drive the devil's

road, but maybe its
in some way because

fear is a hard habit
to break, because we

want the chance to
find ourselves

in a game of backwater
roulette on the road

that took those
before us, maybe we

want a downpour
to beat, rain pulling down

the windows
to wet it's appetite, or a doe

crossing onto the tar
carving-board of the forest

as our car
ribbons around the corner,

the moment where
we can't know

if it's our deaths or hers.