

MATTHEW SMITH

## *For the Highway Medians*

I've known you only on the way to somewhere else.  
Town of a girlfriend's parents. Airport. Mountain lake.  
Often I picture my arrival, pleasing, false  
as any plan, while I am driving on, and look  
briefly across your scrub and scattered, threadbare trees,  
deserted island in a narrow, man-made breeze.

Nobody's destination, you're inhabited  
from time to time as something other than yourself:  
a blind for idling state police, a watershed  
for those who've turned back after getting only half-  
way home, the windswept promise of an hourly wage  
someday for orange-suited cons, a softer cage.

Human, these passing needs are never truly you,  
you whom we cannot help but pass eventually  
and in our passing make you what you are—a few  
moments of peace. The brush, the field, the bright debris  
of wildflowers strewn by wind and honeybee from aisle  
to grassy aisle. You are the spell, the little while.

Tender and clear, you dart across my memories  
of family trips in childhood. Droning hours went by  
no sooner when I marked each branch than otherwise;  
still I'd watch every leaf-tip skirt the reeling sky.  
The nearest slipped away as quick as all my clever  
dreams while the farthest simply did not pass. Not ever.

## *On Being Naked*

The cemetery near the art school slept  
a mossy, dreamless sleep, haunted by gnats;  
blunt headstones listed down the hill and crept  
further each moment from the world's regrets.  
Not so for us, as friends and lovers of  
the art school's rising stars. Long chilly nights  
inside their studio, we stood for love,  
or sat, or sprawled, beneath fluorescent lights.  
Stripped of our pride, our reason, and our clothes  
we giggled at ourselves and one another,  
reduced to what we'd always been, but chose  
to hide—frail sister, soft and pallid brother.  
At dawn, we'd share last cigarettes and sigh  
to watch the trees undress the blushing sky.

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Matthew Smith was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. He studied drama at the University of Georgia and poetry at the Johns Hopkins University. His poems have appeared (or will soon appear) in *Measure*, *The Deronda Review*, *The Loch Raven Review*, *The Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Skein*, and *Churchyard*. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland, where he's putting on a new play.