

ONLY THE ROAD REMEMBERS

The road is life.
—Jack Kerouac

I've done this drive a hundred times—
maybe more.
North to South, South to North,
tracing the spine of Michigan
like I was born with a compass in my ribs.

Cherry blossoms in May.
Sand-dusted flip flops in July.
A black coat in November
when the call came:
He's gone.

I've driven it for weddings,
for funerals,
for no damn reason at all
but the need to move.

M-37, US-131,
me and the same playlist
from a decade ago—
a little louder now
to drown the ache.

I know the curve where my mother swerved.
The ditch we got pulled out of.
The ice cream shop in Baldwin.
The exit where the gas station used to be,
before they paved over nostalgia.

Sunset drives with the lake lit gold.
Snowstorms that swallowed the lines.
Rain so hard I pulled over,
just to breathe.

Once I made it in silence.
Three hours. No radio.
Just grief in the passenger seat
and a funeral dress sliding off its hanger.

I've left,
come back,
left again.

But the road—
the road holds it all:
the laughter,
the ashes,
the years I don't talk about.

Only the road remembers.
And it never tells.

—Renee Dionne Mies