

# State Highway 36

Ellie Shively

Tucked behind the rumble  
of the road and the radio  
are the soft sounds  
of a wooden sole shifting slightly on the pedal,  
a dog and a woman snoring,  
a pant-leg lifting.

Then, to add to it  
I walk backwards down the tongue  
into the throat,  
purring Childers deep and low,  
vowels scraped and bitter,  
h's appearing before the w's  
and after the i's.

I do not pretend to be quiet:  
sleep holds you too heavily,  
your hand warm in my hand.

On this road is where I am most  
my brother's sister,  
where the South Fork of the Republican  
is traced in the dry dirt  
by lines of white-barked cottonwood trees.

I have to remind myself here  
my blood is not my father's blood,  
my blood is not my brother's blood.  
I remind myself this all the way to Denver:  
my blood is pumping right here in my hands  
my father's blood is somewhere near my mother's  
my brother's blood is swimming softly in the ocean

I can almost hear the sanguine in my voice  
as I watch the rock pigeons dive,  
bank swallows dive,  
barn swallows dive.  
The red-tailed hawk up there means good luck.  
That pheasant is unlucky  
and will be eaten for dinner.

On the dog's back  
your pinky finger twitches gently.  
I smooth her pelt  
smooth your skin  
turn down the radio.  
I study your face,  
turn back to the rosy clouds  
sinking over the stones.

By the time the dog harumphs,  
waltzes back towards my lap,  
we are deep within  
our potholed city.  
Your eyes flutter and open.  
You look up at me.  
We pass a donut shop  
with a battered sign  
that proudly proclaims:  
"one dozen is fourteen"