

## Influences

We waited in the car  
outside the bar  
my sisters and I  
“for just a couple drinks”  
as we had heard it  
so many times before  
as Ramona said  
like all Indian kids  
have heard  
before

from their parents, disappeared into the smoke and laughter of a reservation tavern, emerging every half-hour with Pepsi, potato chips, and more promises. And, like all Indians have learned, we never did trust those promises. We knew to believe something when it happened, learned to trust the source of a river and never its mouth. But this is not about sadness. This is about the stories

imagined  
beneath the sleeping bags  
between starts  
to warm up the car  
because my parents trusted me  
with the keys.  
This is about the stories  
I told my sisters

to fill those long hours, waiting outside the bar, waiting for my mother, my father to knock on the window, asking *Are you warm enough? Are you doing all right? We'll be out soon, okay?* Sometimes, we refused to open the locked doors for our parents, left them to gesture wildly and make all of us laugh because there was nothing else left to do. But this is not about sadness. This is about the stories

I created  
how I built  
landscapes and imaginary saviors.  
Once, I dreamed a redheaded woman,  
gave her name and weight  
and told my sisters  
she would rescue us  
from our own love

for this mother and father who staggered from the bar always five minutes before closing, so they could tell us later *At least we left before last call*. But we did love them, held tightly to their alcoholic necks and arms as we drove back home, stole the six-pack they bought *for the road* and threw it out the window, counted mile markers and coyotes standing on the edge of the road. But this is not about sadness. This is about the stories, those rough drafts

that thundered the walls  
of the HUD house  
as my sisters and I lay awake  
after we finally arrived home  
and listened  
to my mother and father dream  
breathe deep  
in their sleep, snore  
like what you might want me to call drums  
but in the reservation dark  
it meant we were all alive  
and that was enough.