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Halloran Pass

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Halloran Pass

by Joanna Brooks

Eight p.m. in a high desert diner,
smacked up waitresses triple jump
to the call of coffee cups.

Now, for the hunger that a couple
cups of mud couldn't cure. We eat.
You—grits and biscuits, redmeat.
Me—nothing, I'm fine ma'am,
Just watching this quiet, kind-eyed man.

Him? He's good to still my hands.
Thought he was it. Hundreds of miles
into the desert now. I shake
holding the hot white cup. Give up?
I can't go back. I must want

Nothing. Keep my mouth shut this time.
Though I'm a fine trader, not trinkets enough—
human hearts, roadside silver, myrrh from Muslim men,
oranges from children perched predatory
on speedbumps in a hundred small towns across the Yucatan.

What do I want? More cream and sugar, please.
Another cup; we leave into a night
as tense as turquoise.

Back at eighty miles an hour,
sky turns to ash at its edges,
smudges the lines of the road.
The radio scratches old words
into the sky with a jag of glass:
I want you to want me.

Engine's too hot—we stop near Apex Caliente;
the semi-precious sky settles such weight
on the small brown mountains. Your chest,
the sand move same to my indiscriminate tastes.
We stay the night, holding each other to pass time
in the Valley of Fire.