

## *Diner*

Smack-dab in the middle  
of the beige and turquoise tentacles  
of the latest suburb,  
a cornfield only a year ago,  
its sparkling chrome a harbinger  
of honest breakfast food  
fluffy eggs scrambled in real butter,  
not some chemist's nightmare,  
thick bacon sizzling in its own fat  
until it's the color  
of my grandmother's mahogany bureau.  
No low-cholesterol bran muffins  
or cinnamon-blueberry croissants  
I'll bet, or banana-hazelnut-coffee-flavored  
instant warm denatured beverage.

It's already ten-thirty, and I've driven  
two hundred miles with a hundred to go.  
The motel's "continental" breakfast  
served in toxic foam  
won't hold me until I reach my own kitchen  
with its two stoves and working cats.  
I pull in and sit in a lumpy old booth.  
Jesse asks if I'd like a menu  
and I say yes even though I know what I'll order  
just to make sure I haven't overlooked anything--  
real scrapple, maybe, or sage-laden pork sausage  
made in the next county from pampered pigs  
who were treated like pets.

Dolly, the only other woman  
in the place, white-haired, pretty  
and young of face,  
hovers maternally behind the counter.  
She pats a customer's hand

as she serves his coffee and juice.  
*I hear Frank's doing better.*

*Says it's cancer, but they got it in time.  
Blood pressure's up, though.  
Got to watch his diet.  
Hear they're threatenin' to strike  
over to the gas station  
because they won't negotiate.  
You hear that, Mike?*

*Yeah and it'd serve 'em right.  
Hey, how come you're havin' breakfast  
now? It's almost eleven.*

*Been up since five.  
This is lunch.*

*Why did you get up at five?*

*Always get up at five.  
Been gettin' up at five all my life.*

*Why?*

*Don't know.*

Mike tells a joke. I laugh  
and ask for the check.  
Jesse walks to the cash register.  
I hand her a five and she gives me change.

*No charge for the entertainment*

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