

CHELSEA COUPAL
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The summer I am born, the soil splits
wide open: chapped as winter lips,
a faded mosaic, dirt quilt. Sun

sucks up dugouts, ditches, creeks.
Calves collapse and coyotes
tear flesh from the bodies.

There is neither rain nor money.
Mothers go back to work.
Lawyers drive down farm lanes

through a greasy heat you can see,
demanding land and signatures
from men with tanned, cracked faces.

The sun can be hungry, but you can't imagine
answering to anyone else. You know one day
she'll lead you out to a field so gold-soft,

you'll worry it's a mirage until you brush
your hands over braided heads
and remember wind mixed with wheat

sounds like whispering and rain. But that summer
of drought, the sun swells bright, a poisonous bloom
in a sky you wish you could tip to your lips and drink from.

THE NEAR-DEATH DRIVE

The truck's lodged near a dugout
at an unnerving angle, like a broken wrist.
We finally have a story to polish and hold
out to our friends, bright-ripe as an apple.
This will be a whole event. Someone
will have to save us. Someone will
have to tow out the truck. But our cells
don't have service, so we walk along
back roads, our mud-soaked shoes
heavy as hooves. The closest farmyard a pinprick
of white light. Pulses throbbing,
urging us forward: Go on, go on, go on.
Northern lights waver, a silent music
we can see. And once in a while
our own laughter bursts through
like roman candles, sharp and sparkling.