

Rust Belts

HALEE KIRKWOOD

A friend once told me the further north
you go, the more south you are, and when
I come home, I could be convinced

I'm in the idea of at least Kansas—where
I drive too quickly past the pretty part,
highways shack-pocked and slouching

into their mottled bones, or was it Kansas
reminding me of home? What I know—gas
station fried chicken, jojo's and frybread

in parking lots, ice chests stewed
with deer, steam lifting off taconite mountains
after November rains perfuming the harbors

with roses built of coal.
How does the rust of a person grow,
inside out or outside in?

I've known country folks
to brew moonshine in blizzards, known
next-door meth busts on Christmas Eve.

Kansas, you middle child, lost in locks
of land and wasted wheat, to what magic
do your sunflower roads lead?

I know how it is to be ugly
until you learn to see the sea beneath
swaths of rust, and I've only known you

from the track-marked highway—silo,
junk yard, cattle lot, silo, junk yard,
cattle lot then bloom of feces in the air,

a hen's scream I can only hear
when everyone else is sleeping.
If you turn your nose up

to the sky tonight, you might
smell the wet and dripping
taconite shipping between us,

tearing through the long grass, the horse gut,
the miles of shaking hands. Of working hands.

