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Turnpike North

For J.W. – wherever you are...

sleeping downstairs in north jersey

after the early years were spent
sleeping in a room with a slanted ceiling
I had a brief stint in what is now
a room filled with expensive Italian furniture
and porcelain dolls

when my older, half-brother fled for independence
I moved into the room I'd coveted for years
in the downstairs level of the house

I would not have thought
that life on the other side of the ground level window
would be as loud as it was

passing trains would loudly announce their arrival
their horns became a comforting sound
as I would lay in bed, wrapped in my covers

car horns blared
friends and relatives walking towards the front door
were always heard first by me

in the spring and summer
I would slide the window open at night
to wake to morning air
the sounds of passing cardinals and finches
and the occasional mourning dove
and inevitably, an early morning freight train

now, in my suburban South Jersey home
there are no sounds quite as comforting

Bergen County Blue Laws

we made sure
that our shopping was done
Monday through Saturday
knowing that Bergen Mall
Paramus Park
Garden State Plaza
and Riverside Square
would be desolate and quiet each Sunday
and if we needed the comfort
of commerce on Sunday morning
we would make the 45 minute drive
to Willowbrook Mall
and all would be right with the world again
we could laugh
knowing that those of us who worked retail
would never work on a Sunday
as long as our precious Blue Laws
relics of a time we never lived in
and only exist in our county
stayed firmly intact

The Girl Who Almost Got Me Left Back

my sophomore year of high school
was spent chasing her through the halls
looking for a single moment
to steal with her

I can remember how oblivious I was
the poor grades earned that year
and how my focus
barely wavered from her strawberry blonde hair
the curve of her thighs
and the spattering of freckles on her face

these things made me entirely oblivious
to the nasal tone of her voice
that would now drive me to drink

but at fifteen
she was the center of my thoughts
as I planned a future with
an unwilling partner
my head was never focused

not much has changed

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Where The Music Lived

there were three record stores
that almost managed to survive
to the millennium
there was The Pyramid
where I bought many of my 45's
and now exists as a t-shirt store

further down Washington Avenue
I found The Record Mill to be cheaper
with a better selection
which is also where I met Caroline
who probably got in trouble
for talking to me for so long

I was at Soundtrack in Dumont
during the first week they were open
and would come there mostly
to talk music with Pat, the owner
who would order anything I wanted

this personal touch can't be found
at Best Buy or Circuit City
Tower is impersonal and a bit sterile
still, these are the choices left
for old school collectors like me
the little guys have been pushed out

The Record Mill is a karate studio

Soundtrack is a chocolate shop

she takes me through rockland county again

In a small
beaten down Pontiac Phoenix
we drove up Rt. 9 W.

we didn't have a specific destination
you were simply restless
and needed to be anywhere
but home

the drive took us past
what we'd always known as
the snobbish town of Alpine
where the homes are mansions
and the sight of my weathered car
would induce a call to the local authorities
so we avoided it entirely

the two laned highway grew darker
as we neared the New York border
the soaring trees obscured the sky
and your eyes wandered around the landscape

on the Palisades Parkway
we took a break from driving
turned off onto a rest area
and chased each other across the grass
and gravel
admired the view
and still
made no plans to stop the drive
as we went deeper into Rockland County

we never did find what we were looking for

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