

## Phoenix

Disconnected phone numbers, information booths that have no information, white pager phones that echo in the din my own name back at me, but no sense of other than mockery identity, shadow purpose, lightness, carrying on. What should have been is not. Some faces, friendly, some desperate; all strangers, as we move along the moving walkway, the dizzying crush from sleeplessness, like angels on a screen. But the burden of baggage seems real enough and cannot be ignored, so it is lugged from phone to curbside and back again to phone. I hesitate in front of an illuminated board. A man approaches, asks me where I'm going. When I cannot answer, he turns on his heel and leaves. So, I sit in a chair next to a pregnant woman and her young daughter, who also wait for no one in particular. The girl plays patty-cake, sings a familiar song, with strange new words—"Mommy's little baby has HIV"—which makes the mother laugh. And I imagine we are on this journey together, to the bean field to pick beans, and we are waiting for the bus to take us down that dusty road...

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This young Charon pedals his cab slowly, speaks soothingly of this desert place, while outside, spiny cacti push up through

sand and dirt. A gouged-out riverbed inches its way through town, tingle of automotive life, a sense that someone knows

where they are going if not me. So, I sit in the diner, at the counter, on a stool—a rattle of plates and voices, the waitress carrying on—

just sit there, before a picture, in a diner, of James Dean. “Oh, I didn’t see you,” the waitress exclaims at last. And, after a night

at the Days Inn, I pick up this notebook: it’s last year’s words, reporting last year’s language, and the poem is gone, the one

that was going to save me. So much for sacred journeys and relying on the self. I remember the face of that woman

lost on the train to York, desperate to reach a station not on any map. The lit windows of the cars as the engine

pulls out for the yard, the panic-stricken figure pressing fingers against the glass. Swiftly, an amnesia in which

the pieces fall apart, then are reassembled, except that you are factored out—your needs, your expectations, your senses,

your very self. I call my sister up at midnight to ask if she’s all right. “Sure,” she says, “are you?”