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Back Roads

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SUSAN JOHNSON

BACK ROADS

You decide to take the back roads,
get off this jeezless highway, take
a look, different part of your brain,
part of your past, mother mixing

porcupine meatballs with her bare
hands, the world skinnier then, all
you had to do was open a can, all
you have to do is rake memories

into piles and cart them to the curb,
past a store with tar paper shingles
closed for good, no not for good
but because everyone moved on,

moved out, the ocean rushing through
them on its way to flood plains, past
a maple with an enormous burl,
grandpa had a similar swelling

behind his ear, endlessly fascinating,
until it wasn't, until it was just an empty
chair, a TV test screen, rooms full
of people, people full of rooms,

spiders with front row seats letting
the wind lift them into a tangled night.

Cars may not stop, the crosswalk
tells you, but you knew that, knew

the world was a hive of corridors
and closets, each with a secret passage,
a place to venture so your head won't
explode, but still your head explodes.