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Dating Fossils

Time was, a guy could mark time
by the evolution of tail fins.
Take the '57 Chevy, with those
sharp dorsals everybody loved—
they shrank, they consolidated,
they got round and chubby as limb buds in '58,
then, in '59, the Chevy grew wings—
organic steel, round and graceful.
It was shark to lungfish to Pterodactyl,
and you could set your clock by it,
follow the curve of time's feathered arrow.
Even in Kansas, the changes sliced
across the dappling wheat fields of June,
like it was the getting late Jurassic,
and pants were on fire in the Cretaceous.
They'd cruise smooth as mud flats—
gleaming winglets tracing a level line
just above the pale turning heads.
Wrapped in fire engine red or baby blue,
they were hard bodied and bejeweled
with Turtle-waxed scutes of chrome.
Beside him, his date in her jeans.
Behind him, a trace of carbon.
Not a thought about fossils.

Meanwhile, back in Detroit,
they built a powerful wind tunnel
to blow away the last resistance.
And the great tunnel gave just one answer:
jelly bean. Jelly beans pushed
on the straights and on the plains,
the terminal velocity kept rising and rising,
and the faster we went the more we looked
the same—differences imagined—
tinted, distracted, blurred.
It was the death of evolution,
the phoenix of assertion.

stanza break

Attention turned naturally to the infinite
where the big questions and big answers run as One:
One answer, One thought, One way.
Welling eyes rose from the endless blacktop,
blinked skyward into the white-hot blinding
and agreed to hold tight to this moment,
or better, the historical moment just
a moment or two before—
the one with the clean glass
and every tank topped-off—
the Kodak moment, massively enlarged,
shot by the woman who fixed time from behind
the cockpit and crucifix of a motor home
that sleeps six at seventy-five,
on an eight-lane urban bypass,
Suburban in tow,
an open liter of Diet Coke,
two pounds of green jelly beans,
a fat man who can't leave home
rolling full tilt for the La Brea motel,
their bumper branch on the family tree
bowed, dipping, dancing in the tar,
their many children
petrified.