

Deb Allbery

Outings

I remember asking *Why go
for a ride just for a ride? Why walk
through cemeteries reading the stones?*
I was five. We'd driven out past their old farm,
then left our cars along the main road—
my aunt, uncle, grandfather, cousins,
my parents. We chewed sassafras roots
Grandpa pulled up and peeled
as we shuffled the hot-chalk road.
Then two private patches of graves,
mowed, shaded. Our parents
nodded at some of the names
while we children noted how pretty
the marble, how long ago the years
as we edged between where the bodies were buried.

I found my own name and age, a girl
dead in the spring of 1860.
Read her marker aloud in my new-reader voice:
Debra, 5 years, She hath done what she could.

When I got older I'd stay
in the car on our visits to Greenlawn,
where an uncle and cousin had since been taken.
Winter. My sister would sit in my lap.
I remember her asking *Why
do we have to go to this place?*
I said *Because*, our breath frosting the windows.
And when we drove away she and I drew pictures
on the glass. With gloved fingers,
we wrote our autographs and watched
what was passing beyond the spaces
our names had cleared.