James Haug

At Thirty

I used to call it fox luck
when a fox lit across the path of my lights,
flickering red in the road then gone.
Sometimes, coming home from work, I saw two,
because then I needed twice the luck.
Those nights I'd drive around an extra hour,
on roads I hadn't seen before (for there
were many and I thought I had the time),
and stop for a beer. Under a hooded lamp
a few farmhands would be shooting pool.
I'd lean there and drink, as if I were
actually on the way somewhere, wanting only
to stretch my legs, to regain my bearings.
Make it a local joint called the Seven O's.
In the pauses between records I would hear
the cash drawer shut, the cars on 116
winding-out past the bar and the Dove's Nest,
past a large field of ripening corn,
and the house at field's edge, where the man
sinks into the habit of his chair and sleeps,
and the woman thinks she hears something stir
outside in the dark among the corn rows.
And the child will awaken many years later
to find most of it gone, his own face now
gone slack and usual facing himself, perhaps,
in the webbed glass of a barroom mirror.
He will think that place was once his home,
or even an idea of home, now squandered.
Let him slap down that quarter for eight-ball,
the same quarter he has tried for hours
on the black pay phone in the back, the phone

which won't bring him the call for the number
he keeps dialing, the number he knows beyond
reflex, though it's that too, the number
as deep in his memory as the farmhouse
which lies at the edge of a broad field, where
the man who looks like his father, like him,
will not answer. And the path that ran next to
that old house, the path which shines fatally
and vanishes behind the tall stalks of corn,
is empty now, but for the darting shadow
of a hungry fox called Luck, who stops,
looks over its shoulder, then keeps running.