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# Wish

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**JOE WILKINS****Wish**

From the great meaty boils of wintering burrows  
rattlers stir, shudder, & unspool. Stunned blind  
they slip & essingly spill  
down yellow hills, forked tongues  
tasting the gravel road's good heat—  
& there, on blue quartz, on schist,  
on the cat's eyes of agates & the rocked remains  
of ancient, oceanic brethren, they coil  
into thick, rippling rings, wedge heads  
roosting on the ooze-furled thrones of snakebellies.  
A whole road of them. Curled here,  
curled there, waiting for the blood  
to hiss & rise, the body's whip to willingly  
unloop & lick a strike. They wait & praise  
the face of the sun, the white fact of it  
like some child's warm, enormous,  
still-good god. Oh, I'd drive like the devil,  
fast & swervy, popping snakes  
beneath my tires. I could feel each small thump  
thwunk up through my spine—  
in the rearview then a dusty ribbon  
of red-pocked road. It was as easy  
as a wish, a prayer. The way—  
hands on the black wheel, foot mashed  
to the rust-bitten floorboard—I prayed the sky  
might stumble, the rain fall, & the river fill  
to the goddamn brim. That my mother  
might love the living like she did the dead. Oh,  
all that was a long time ago. I have prayed  
those wishes down. Today, I hold  
my son close, as we kneel in lashings  
of rusty grass, watch a quick, dappled snake  
slip into this other river. ■