

No (or Careful or Slow)

When a girl likes a boy in Bangor, Pennsylvania, she doesn't
say, *Call me tomorrow*.

Instead, our girl says, *Take me far a ride*, because she knows
the back roads will be black
on this new moon night and our girl'll be away from her
parents' warnings
of the dirty things boys do.

The girl and the boy pass the Oak and Maple with its scarred
bar and frosted mugs of
Yuenglings that her father drinks as if he breathes
through the longnecks. She
remembers visits there as a child, maybe six—the smell
of desperation,
though then she called it something else.

The boy's hand rests on her inner thigh, clutching and
grabbing to the acceleration
of his rusted Ford wagon. The girl thinks he ought to keep
his hands to the wheel—at nine and three—
get them safely around the corner near
her grandfather's grave in Stone Church.

The girl wants to say, *No (or Careful or Slow)* but says
nothing—not of rainy funerals or

speeding or the boy's hand in a warm place. Instead, our girl
hems herself tight
To the boy's side and slides her tongue in his ear because
what if he's really the one....
And if not, she needs the practice.