

FEEDING HAND (ROUTE 15, TEN MILES TO VICTORVILLE)

TOMAS BAIZA

The hand that feeds me has dirty fingernails, broken cuticles,
and smells of unfiltered Camels.

That hand has worked smooth and shiny the steering wheel of a
1972 Ford Econoline van which knows better than any hitchhiker
or coyote the highways between Bakersfield and Yavapai County.

From that hand, I accept fried hash browns, palmed
from an aluminum tin, wedged between thighs which also prop up
a battered plastic Prestone container half-full with piss
that I'll have to empty at the next gas stop.

That hand is hard, calloused, and unskilled in gentleness or
caresses or anything resembling love. That hand can give you
the bird both ways—full extension or three-fingered fold.

Just north of Victorville, that hand gestures for the cigarette
lighter on the vibrating engine shroud.

I hold my breath against the smoke.

The hashbrowns are slippery between my fingers and I try to
look forward to what my own hand might one day feed.

Dark grease wicks into my jeans as a gray-brown coyote
darts across the road ahead.

Panting or grinning,

I can't tell.

