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Breakdown Lane

Robert Phillips

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Breakdown Lane

ROBERT PHILLIPS

I thought it was just a right-hand lane
where traffic that has to drive
slow would go,

or a lane where you can halt, curse,
trip on blinker lights,
wait for a tow.

Yet here I find myself limping along
in the breakdown lane.
No car, just me

in my sad little sneakers, painfully
gaining no more than three
miles an hour,

an out-of-shape marathon man to whom
no spectator passes Gatorade.
Wheezing like a Hoover,

I take in landscapes on each side,
the mathematical precision
of August cornrows,

the clean lines of suburban houses
armored in aluminum siding.
Motorists that flow

past on the left are totally in control.
I saw my successful brother
streak by in a Lexus,

my ex-wife drift by on a float. Evening-
gowned, she's Miss Congeniality.
Father steamrolled by,

flattening all wildlife. My office rival
gave me the finger from his Porsche.
But what hurt most

was when my younger self hot-rodded by
and never acknowledged me.
No one stops,

I don't want them to—it's my breakdown,
I earned it. I'll simply stagger on
toward the horizon,

not knowing what's ahead, whether there is
a finish line, or why I am crying
on the shoulder.