The Road Home

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She can remember
the riot of Queen Anne's Lace
along this gravel roadbed
being whipped by a hot July breeze,
and the columns of purple loosestrife
waving in the ditches; she never learned
to flow with the pain like that.

Time was she'd be skipping
here alongside her father,
sweaty hands clutching
a bouquet of wild mustard
and milkweed pods
for a mother who translated them
into roses and orchids
with her smile.

But no more.
She's grown up with a vengeance,
shedding illusions of a forever love
along with her too-small clothes,
discarding them as a snake
leaves behind its thin, translucent
membranes, dead reminders
of the transparent shell
which couldn't protect her
from a mother's death,
a lover's lies, a father's anger,
from loneliness, from life.

This son of hers
who skips beside her now
as a counterpoint
to her sluggish steps,
is he a blessing, a reason
to travel back down this road?
Will he become a bridge
spanning angry words and time,
or only another burden
in the empty years
stretching ahead of her
as lonely and endless as this
Midwest-straight road?