Despairing Landscapes

Jeron Jennings
“Imagine spending six hours every weekend in a car.”
you said, as if
that was the worst part of your parents’ divorce.
And I thought of you
every Friday night
as you headed north on that dreaded commute,
your gray eyes gazing out at
the desolation of barren,
ugly hills;
maybe wondering where the farmland ended
and the reservations began
and who would have fought to claim these places anyway?

I’d time my runs along 135
(you should know by now
what I was doing out there)
as if that asphalt network
connected me to you somehow,
and I’d light up your lonely screen
in hopes that I could it would make you
feel less alone.

You were only thirteen, then,
just a kid staring out at the vast emptiness of the northwest
on that hundred-mile drive.
Or something like that.
But it would take that
three years
to really know.

I had been eighteen
for just a few hours
An adult, by standards
That can only be defeated by timezones.
I was an adult but I was no more prepared than you for the stern, mocking faces of the hills spread out before solid murals of sky.

This must have been what you felt. Driving up to Kalispell to reunite the family when you know all you’ll find is evidence of its falling apart. We both lost a piece of ourselves to those despairing landscapes. I wanted to ask you how you hadn’t lost it all. But you left me in the cold last night after I’d begged you to stay.

You were never concerned with the preservation of me.

And maybe I wasn’t either, but I needed you to say it first before I would ever admit it to myself. I spent all this time wondering what kind of man am I? And what was wrong. We had scars and clashing sleeves to cover up—but to compare maybe we’d find they weren’t so different.

So why in the hell couldn’t you just say so? Why didn’t you stay? Why in the hell did you have to wait until right now to wonder aloud if it was the lightning or the side effects?