Despairing Landscapes

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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 me 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?