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Blackfoot River: on watching the space station cross the sky as one light moving among many that do not

Keetje Kuipers

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KEETJE KUIPERS

Blackfoot River:

*On watching the space station cross the sky
as one light moving among many that do not*

Wading the river in near-darkness, the valley
still close from the smoky fires burning
twenty miles east, my brother turns to me
and says, *I'm telling you this for your own good.*
Later, I won't remember what it is he says
but only that we've crawled under a taut line
of barbed wire, that the black cows in the farmer's field
are just suggestions of themselves, that the smoke
gnaws the color from the sky.

I have a lover four hundred miles away and when
we try to speak there's only darkness, like two
dogs pointing into a stand of trees at where they've heard
the promise of sound, though what they hear is only
an outline—not actually what stands among the boughs.
Now the thin trestle of my brother's shoulders is all
I can see moving in front of me as we near the truck
and I wonder what I'll do when he disappears.

Soon we're drinking Millers as we drive past
the smokejumper camps, out on gravel roads where
we honk the horn to scatter deer, try to save something
that doesn't know us. When we pull up to the house—
buzzed and tired, smelling of fish—I can see my parents in there
lighting cigarettes in the dark. I think this means we must
want to die, despite everything we say. And what are we moving
towards in speech except more words that waste their motion?

The unspeakable spoken and spoken until it becomes
lost in the bright keening of the stars, those unknown
latitudes we measure every message against.

All the things I'm afraid to say, about the dog
no one's cleared from the side of the road, how I see
the young boys crossing under the wire fence each dusk—
where do they go? Words do not do the work. We're all
liars. Better to keep silent, wait to see the beast
we've heard in among the trees. But oh my god the owl,
crossing the dim orb of that stained moon. It must be criminal
the way I stand around and watch.