Spring 1981

Four Letters from the End of Summer

Matthew Hansen
1. That day I broke my camp under Crooked Mountain, started walking south up Birch Creek. Windy all night, still blowing over wolf willow on the clear morning of your birthday. August first and I wanted some other word for year, some long sound about the way quick leaves throw light, fade out with knapweed in the yellow dust. A moan for ice, old drum for snow, and whitewater yell of spring returning into blood.

2. I can see the Sweetgrass Hills from here, the glowing place where dawn has gathered cloud like a hand does cloth. Couldn’t sleep, hard ground told nothing but an endless hunger, a long tunnel of days and moons carved out beyond my lifetime. Red stems of aspen mourn the short season, the hard winter to come.

3. Our friend wanted to call jackspine a wisdom tree. He ought to know better. Clinging to rock against a steady wind won’t make you wise,
just grey and lonely
in a twisted shape.

The August moon sticks
behind Mount Jumbo. It rises late
and cold over the black hill.
You know I fumble my words.
I've tried letters, the telephone,
but it's no good. They won't carry
what I feel across Wyoming.
My verses used to be wild
about the moon and you.
Tonight, chainsaws cut past dark,
each car driving by
sounds like someone's lover
leaving for good.