Four Letters from the End of Summer

Matthew Hansen
FOUR LETTERS FROM THE END OF SUMMER

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.

4.
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.