Winter 2008

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

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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.