

A Darkened Sky

(after Jewel)

E. Kristin Anderson

I never learned to drive. I tried and tried and twenty years later my head spins just sitting in the back of a car, sweating, explaining to the driver that I can't chat because I'm having a panic attack. So every set of tail lights appearing outside my window red and shining past my blinds is a wonder. I prefer to walk, even as my knees buckle, my vision blurring in the evening heat. Was that you, taking me to a dead end or the devil at the end of this road? My heart is still fluttering when I turn on the news and I take to bed with me another perfect storm—how many Americas will pass me by while the fight in me is stripped from my body? And tonight, friend, you delivered another slice of truth and I'm carrying it into the witching hour—here I am, lying awake, medicated and queasy. Bring me headlights floating over the hill, shining past my window, past my pills like sirens—all night the dark holds out her hand to me—if I take it she'll call me all day tomorrow. I want to throw away every dish in my sink so I might forgive my kitchen. I want to throw away my bones so I might forgive my body. I lean against the tiles while the shower runs hot as if tiles can hold me up. I survived strangerhood in my hometown but even in the solace of Texas I know I'm drowning. I reach into the inky sky and write my ache onto this brick building. Was that you in every dream where the house is flooding, where twilight slices through, moonless? Every day I collect memories on my tongue like ash, forget to eat, ask my country to break me down again because I can't stand still for another minute and you, America, always deliver on this request. Tomorrow another man will tell me that art is the silver lining of suffering and I will curse him from the corner of my eye, biting my tongue. Every hot summer night ends the same, scenes like this so familiar flying by. I can't drive away from the television delivering you into my home and I hold back my sorrow like feathers in my throat, sweet and soft. This is how we lose ourselves. And I wish I knew how you sing sweet but sour my stomach and even as the brush burns I bear this weight for you. Tonight I open a window for the dark, as if it might provide a chill while we drive through the flame. As if you might need me, too.



Jewel
"Standing Still"

This Way
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Atlantic