

In the Pines

Before the country died. Before
The deer
Bleeding out in snow.

You drove us down the road
To Montana—the specificity of it.
Early leaves on the floorboard,

Lead Belly on my mind.
A song that chills me
Driving in the pines.
Tell me where did you sleep

A man I loved once
Sleeps on the streets in Seattle.

Night
Can be deadly in tents.
A man I loved once

Asks strangers for things. He's
Holding his sign.

I'm losing my speech—
Diction
Belabored and slow.

Name it
Pause before distorted sound.
Words break

And become larger rooms. More space
For me to set the terror down.

You listen to me
Carefully. You drive me
In the pines. We

Sleep in a tent.
I've never seen
A place so wide.

I think my voice
Is being ripped from me.
How I've conflated

Voice and identity.
I do not mean it hurts—I mean
I hear the rending.

I ask you. You
Drive me in the pines.

Somehow, traveling
Lets me put
Some terror down. Lets me

Strew it through a wider space.
Here's the land—
It will receive us.

I knew a woman once
Whose friend was killed
And his head was never found.

I've lost track of her now.
I remember her voice
But not her name.

I remember
How a body being strewn
Affected everyone around.

More surface
For the terror
to spread.

Snow in the mountains
While the sun
Burns the valley grass brown.

The deer
Not yet bleeding in the snow.

You drove me
To a place I'd never been.
Even the name—

Going to the Sun Road.
Even with fog
obscuring the view,

It's glory going down.
When we slept in the pines,
I was afraid. But more so

Of degenerating slowly—
Being hacked and strewn
Didn't carry its usual
Theoretical terror.

Before the summer turned
And the country died and I
Became more people than I know.

Before the deer
Bleeding in the snow. Before
The killing cold.

The growing mass of me,
If I keep looking and I'm
A part of all I see. Oh,
Our aching surface area.

I ask you if ghosts
Congregate
In a beautiful place.

If ghosts
Can stand as tall as pines.
I'm also
Moving closer to the cold.

And the dead
Are continually arriving.
A man I loved once

Sleeps in the cold.
Once, he drove me in the dark
By a mountain's root.

He stopped at a sign
In the night
In the nowhere dark

And a stranger
Stood strange by my window.
Man or a ghost or

A ghoul from the pines.
He asked for nothing.