CHLOE MARTINEZ

Comet

We think it’s going to be like fire streaking briefly overhead, sparkling, hot, tailed.

We think we heard it was passing fifty million miles away. We imagine it: the horizon in our minds glowing slightly, the sun just recently gone, and that thing in the sky. Our idea of it taken from pictures taken by professionals.

We tell the kids it’s coming just after sunset, then, actually, a while after that, then finally it’s time. We rush around the house looking through the sedimentary layers of mess for some small perhaps vaguely helpful binoculars. We find one pair, not the other.

We go out, noticing, for the first time, how offensively bright it all is—streetlight on the corner, windows with their huge blue TV screens, the neighbor’s year-round sparkle lights on a tree (we like them, usually)—we block it all out, we put our hands over it and look up until we can see a few insistent stars.

We are trying so hard. We are squinting and focusing and saying look that way, no, look up, no, not that high, it should be there, to the northwest—we check if that’s where the northwest actually is, and yes, pretty much—we are looking for something spectacular, a flame in a glittering sky.

Instead, we find it sandwiched awkwardly between two power lines, and it looks like a faint derivative star, blurry, and there’s a tail, but it’s an even fainter blur, and two much brighter lights hang below it in the sky, ordinary stars, for which we’re thankful: they help us find it.
We take turns looking
and the smallest of us can’t see,
sits tragic on the stoop with her little
fists punched up against her cheeks,
while we plead with her to
try again.

We thought that every
single thing would be different
from how it is now. We thought
it would be like a ball of fire, moving,
but it looks still and small,

a temporary
installation hung on a too-large wall
in a gallery that’s quiet, so quiet:
the lone visitor’s footsteps echoing
in the empty space and a young woman
in an elegant dress standing at attention
beside an immaculate stack of pamphlets.