

Lost Transmission

by Emily Light

"If I knew the way I would take you home"
— *The Grateful Dead*

I'm so far north of where I grew up the horizon is within reach:

jagged tips of the New York City skyline.

Caught between the city's barbed wire and low rainclouds, the sun

struggles through two fingers of a hand smothering a face.

Dad, I can't seem to pick up the phone to ask if you want to go home

to a home long gone, sketched into memory's crude map.

Why return? It's too late for a fact check from a time passed.

Instead, we've compared notes of what we remember

about the town where you raised me: the road reaching past Sondek Park, the horse seen from the car window—remnant of the farms

Lost Transmission

this town once was—alone, tethered neither by fence nor cliff,
just the road's rushing danger.

A new map was drawn over what once existed.
Abandoned farmlands sold off to the Toll Brothers' mansion complexes,

modern castles that, even when occupied, stretched blank white walls

like palms to heaven, people unable to fill so much space.

Route 522 slapped across the town like a welt following the belt

and the map went crooked in my head, unaligned and reeling. Dayton

Video became CVS. Butler's Corner Store became Quick Check.

This is part of being human, you've told me.

Our map wasn't the first of this land. No place in history had generations

without another people tearing it up and making it theirs.

But Dad, I need to go home to something,
and if I returned I'd be the stranger.

Lost Transmission

There was no initiation into this feeling,
though you've described your own hometown:

Clifton's cathedral that itched like a wool rug, power lines
pressed into ancient oak bodies, the Parkway exits

that spilled noise into the neighborhood streets
and gutted the Rowe-Manse Emporium into a Planet
Fitness.

You knew all about time's erosive nature the day you left
home,
when you stood silent beneath the transmission tower's
shadow.

Swallows sharpened their wings on each other
and the air crackled invisible. I understand now too,
unbound as I am,

like the horse subsisting on weeds, a Roman wall
crumbling
years after invaders replaced the others with wood.

King Raven

A North Jersey Fable

by Emily Light

On the morning the Canadian wildfire smoke returns to vex, as if each house is a crooked cigar instead of a dwelling, King Raven and his court of crows reveal their dominion. He ascends the telephone pole, finally, after years of peripheral hints—a raspy, guttural bark rather than the conventional caw—and shows himself twice the size of his crew in tow. All those four-leafed clover days are gone for good. He will own the town's tower evergreens, go toe to toe with the heavy-chested hawk, kick some chipmunks from the patio to the curb. With this posse, even the obese raccoons will slam the garbage pails shut and scuttle back to their sewers. He wears a crown of all the pollution-drenched stars, he bears a plastic straw scepter, he cackles back to the overgrown yard where the kits yammer a spasmodic song to a sun that looks like a blood moon in this summer's obscured sky.

