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Burials

Neil Aitken

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Burials



Neil Aitken

Pulling through Montana in the snow
we cling to the tail lights of the last car
blurring back into the darkness.

“Like the inside of a coffin,” my father says
as if knowing the exact shade the dead see
lying stiff, frozen eyes peering up through closed lids

he shifts in his seat, watches the road disappear
thinks again of dying and the burials we’ve seen,
his father’s simple reduction to ashes.

[44]

How small the urn, how light, for a man
that stood 6’3”, carried a boy on his shoulders,
lived on trains as a youth, picked apples as a man.

This past summer, watching him thin
to disappearing, blurring out lines between lives,
my father trying to return pieces, fragments, time,

the body burning, the dark smells of crematoriums,
funeral homes, and pale-faced lawyers.
Something merges, ends, and begins.

My father placing the ashes back into the air,
offerings to the skies, to the seas,
unaware of how Buddhist he is at this moment,

how the faint sound of bagpipes echoes
how the ashes fall catching light
reflecting something back into the silence,

the dark birth of the sun coming into view.