

ON A HILL

Emma Baumgardner

By the parking lot
under the rain cover of an old tent
in the lightning dusk of Mt. Rushmore
I've spent my life on the road to somewhere
with Willie Nelson in my back pocket

Above the black and blue hills of Texas countryside
starry eyed wonder
of gas stations at 11pm,
and what a good twizzler can do to a sleepless drive
I've spent my life measuring the seam of a car seat
the sting in the whites of my eyes
that dusty sunlight
the wear and tear of rubber
how a good shoe never lets you down

I've spent my life proud of the lightning,
because it's easy to forget how to start from the ground up
the careful considerations
the science behind astonishment
it's the pure feeling of home
with parents who fit into a bigger understanding of morals to live by
there are always disagreements,
but there is always time

This is easy to forget now
when chances made to speak of love fall short to generations of details
it is hard to find that bigger picture

On the interstate at night on the way to Alaska
in the high beams of hail
and in miles of billboard ingenuity
I know what it is like to feel loved by my country
I know how lucky I am

It is astounding growing up in the lightning
in the middle of a movement of political activism
in the Women's March on Washington
of presidential protest
of demanding humanism
but I have forgotten how to extend my hand
I have forgotten all those families taking pictures
at the Big Bend entrance sign
and the candy bars they buy at gas stations at night
I have forgotten how to put my ideology aside
how not to demonize
my own family

I refuse to be part of the generation that discusses the future separately

Because eventually,
when all the lightning clears up,
we cannot be left with nothing.

NOW AND THEN

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When I was little the world seemed a whole lot smaller,
the learning it takes to comprehend,
how to take each day by each day, falling in love, and learning to find your-
self in a different way,
down and dirty with the go-getters and long mornings on the floor, the "It will
get better."
kind of wishful thinking,
I fell in love with dreaming,
raised on the crowded trails of Big Bend, on road trips, on playing pretend
weeks and months of seeing nothing but road, constellations, wrapped up in
a world of once-was wastelands
firing up the radio and
pretending to never look back.