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Elegy for a Satellite

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Corey Marks

Elegy for a Satellite

There are two ways to die:

you could fall into the air
that would peel you, flame after flame,

or you could rise, beyond the bustle
of other satellites that keep

eyeing us, and settle farther,
in a graveyard orbit,

like a thought tucked away
from being thought anymore.

But what thought? When I saw
your slow gleam between constellations

I couldn't say what you were for.
Did you track loggerheads?

Or cuckoos? Or the stork
on the Nile, a tracker clamped

to its ankle crooked above
the river's stream of data,

the one a fisherman mistook
for a spy? Or were you occupied

with topographies, the same ones
orbit after orbit? The salt lake

in Iran shrinking by the year,
its color transmogrifying, green to red?

Or the island in the South China Sea
assembled by tiny vessels into a C

closing—each pass you took—
into an O, an exclamation?

Or did you spirit drones
to smite our enemies and sometimes

our friends? You never saw
the hostages burrowed in their cells.

You didn't make the call, you
who were an instrument, not a will.

Or were you something to me?
Shadow? Guide? Did you steer me

past other people's calamities,
or lead me the wrong way

down a one-way street,
cars parting like angry geese?

Did you listen when I lied to my mother
from my father's hospital room?

The phone turned quiet
as water welling in my ear.

What did I say that was so unforgivable?
But that's more than I should ask.

You're done. You've had your fill.
Rise, let your codes dwindle,

and don't fall, don't flame, don't careen
back where you no longer belong.

The world can change without you now.