

Meteor Shower, Isère

Seventeen.

Not my first holiday without my parents
but my first abroad. We'd heard during dinner
how the stars would slide, had rushed our meal
and grabbed warm sweaters against the evening air
to hurry through the tiny village with its evening scents
of cooking and mown hay, the gently-steaming pile
of slurry from the milking shed.

Now we lay, six careless girls,
three by three across a narrow road,
its tarmac warm still from the day's sun,
under a black sky stitched with sparks
bright as chips of quartz. The only sounds
were our quiet breathing and the cicadas
rasping and the world settling amiably
round us. *Don't look for meteors* we'd said,
having learned about rods and cones, the way
eyes work in dim light. *Stare straight up,*
you'll see them at the edge.

We stretched, opening to the dark, devouring
the shoaling stars and the points of fire tumbling
profligate, their tracks burning at the periphery
of vision as flux melts and runs...

and I fell in love – with the freedom to lie
on a single track road half-way up an alp,
your gaze butting ever deeper into space
till you know your whole being could float up
and follow. We watched for hours, seizing
a show packaged for us alone as we rocked
and dreamed in our hollow until the constellations
guttered and began to fade and the pulsing earth tilted
towards dawn as we were tilting towards our future.

Marilyn Donovan