

ANIMAL TIME

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I do better in animal time,
a creeping dawn, slow ticking toward dusk.
In the middle of the day on the Nebraska prairie,
I'm unnerved by subdued sounds, as if listening
through water, even the high-pitched drone of the
cicadas faint; the blackbirds half-heartedly singing.
As newlyweds, my parents drove cross country to
Death Valley, last leg of their escape from New York,
the thick soups of their immigrant mothers, generations
of superstitions that squeezed them from all sides.
They camped under stars that meant no harm.
It was the silence that alerted them to danger.
They climbed back into their tiny new car, locked
its doors and blinked their eyes until daylight.