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The Sign
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Wishing immortality, he built a sign bearing his name in the moun-
tains of Montana. The sign stood over thirty feet tall, on four steel
pylons sunk into concrete beds. The name itself was made from small
pieces of colored glass which he spent several months soldering care-
fully into place.

His hopes for the sign were great. After he died, he imagined, an
unsuspecting hunter would stumble across the sign and throw the switch
that ignited the several rows of alternating, multi-colored lights. Stunned by
its beauty, the hunter would report back to people in town, who would
spread the word to family and friends. Soon the sign would become a
tourist spot. New roads would lead to its feet—or, far into the future,
people would approach by hovercraft and wonder at the name
emblazoned in crystal and light. Stories would circulate. The sign
would become myth. And after the first representatives of the Zarnax
Empire landed on Earth, they would carry across the galaxy stories of a
learned people who had seen the name of their god written in the hills
and thus been saved.

But things didn't work out quite that way. After his death, the few
hunters who happened by took pot shots at the sign, destroying whole
sections of the intricately arranged glass. A new freeway drew travelers
to the south, making area roads obsolete. And even the Zarnaxians never
landed, deciding that Earth was worth neither friendship nor conquest.

Not that the sign went completely forgotten. Every now and then, on
a crisp autumn night, a teenage boy would take his date into the hills to
see the sign that his drunken uncle had once recalled on a hunting trip. He
would throw the switch, and the rows of light would shine like a beacon,
reflecting off the piecemeal shards of glass. There the boy and girl
would share their first kiss, or something else. And eventually they
would marry and move east to cities like Grand Forks or St. Paul, west to
Boise or Seattle.

And years later, when people would ask how they came to choose
one another, he would recall a drunken uncle who told legends about
signs in the hills. And she would remember mesmerizing rows of splendid
light, spreading beyond the mountains, beyond all spans of time
and distance. The light, they agreed, symbolized their love—a jagged ember lodged intractably in their hearts, a surrender written in color for all eternity.