

## Thirty-Six Views of the Milky Way

*“...scientists...estimate that there are a minimum of thirty-six communicating intelligent alien civilizations in the Milky Way galaxy.”*

— CBS News, 2020

Thirty-six is the number I forgot.

I doubt I'd be able to tell you if thirty-six people showed up to a potluck, & I don't know what's thirty-six miles from where I was born except one Great Lake & so much asparagus.

If I had to send a chain letter to thirty-six people, I wouldn't know enough addresses by heart.

Thirty-six is the atomic number of krypton.

There are thirty-six inches in a yard, & thirty-six perished when the *Hindenburg* burst in '37.

Thirty-six feels like the upper limit of small fruit I can hold in my arms if I cup them against my chest, & in my experience, thirty-six is a tipping point. Low-middle. Wednesday.

The temperature that snowbanks begin their slushing deaths.

Still, I can tell you without a doubt thirty-six is the exact number of students at a high school formal where eye-contact becomes inevitable —

the anxious group bursting into a fidgeting crowd under out-of-season Christmas lights, & I hope that's what's happening up there after all.

Everyone the too-proud wallflower. None willing just yet to cross the gym floor

& start the whole room dancing.