

Ut pictura poesis, with eight-year-old

by [Brett Foster](#) in the [September 7, 2010](#) issue

We drove past the darkened restaurant, early
summer, having left the park. I said "Mokeyhouse"—
inside joke and looking for his memory
of a burnt-out letter, the name in doubt.

"No," he said, "it's Smokehouse again, all fixed,"
and then a pause as we observed the sign.
He signaled otherwise, noticing the shared
effect of what was once defunct singly.

The storefront was dark, but in the dark
backseat a growing mind grew luminous.
Closing time opened a seam in his thinking.
"It goes like this," he decided, motionless

alert, intentional: _____.

"That's good," I said. "I think I see what you mean.
Silence, right? Since the lights are off tonight?"
Him: "No, that's not right." In the mirror he's seen

shaking his head. Not that? Then what instead?
"Is it nothingness? Or something empty?"
"No," he insisted. The sign's completely black.
Saying the thing's not there is like a glimpse

of its fulfillment. Lack is undercut
when "lack" divides the air, comforting the ear.
(Those, I confess, are my own betraying words.)
His answer's better, and in the rearview mirror,

was truer. Like the sign itself, still active
but less apparent. I barely saw his mouth,
emerging from the shadows. It kept moving,

to keep alive the broken functions [*smokehouse smokehouse . . .*]