

Trestle | CREEK | Review

No. 33

2019

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Trestle Creek Review is published once a year by North Idaho College. Submissions are open to students, alumni, faculty and staff of North Idaho College and to residents of the Inland Northwest. Submissions of manuscripts and black-and-white art are accepted year-round. Submissions received by January 31, 2020, will be considered for publication in Trestle Creek Review no. 34. More information is available at our website, www.nic.edu/tcr.

Trestle Creek Review wishes to express our gratitude to Liz Adkinson, Polly Buckingham, Aaron Cloyd and the NIC English Club, Russel Davis and the staff of Gray Dog Press, Melissa DeMotte and the staff of The Well-Read Moose, Lloyd Duman, Jamison Lee, Jessica Raetzke, and Blair Williams and the Art Spirit Gallery for their generosity and support.

Cover Art: Neil Crosbie, *W'bo'd Blame Them*

Layout: Crystal Carney and J. Lyon

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[I wanted to do]

I wanted to do something spectacular—I wanted to sing you the sweetest of songs—specked with honey-lined laughter and mountain blues and an inconsolable grief—Maybe in the town you were born in—Maybe in a field. Yes. Or in the space between home and everything else—But I could only visit you in the brush where they laid you down and clean your name with the ice scraper from my car til the letters were once again visible—making something like a tribute for those still learning how to mourn.

[You have a daughter now]

for steven

You have a daughter now.
And her eyes seem to
gleam like the atoms
that made this town

and destroyed others.

She's six months
old and she likes to hold
my hand and bite my
painted nails.

We were too young to understand
the pride of nuclear production.
But we were old enough to understand
the shame of forty years of clean up,
130,000 deaths, and jokes about whether or not
the fish in our river have the right number of eyes.

She's too young to understand any of it.

But someday she'll be old enough to
understand the sweet smell of sagebrush,
and yarrow,
and life made out of nothing.

Which is more than enough
over here.

More than we could have asked for.

[Climb onto your father's shoulders]

Climb onto your father's shoulders
to see the future you are told is coming.
Have the same conversations again
and again and tell yourself that it's love.
Crawl inside your mistakes and come
out as a better mistake.
Make homes in the corners of other people's homes.
Be afraid of winter, and dying, and
words that sound like an ending.
Confuse your body for the one you wish you had.
Cry through your own projections of other
people and from the smell of department stores.
Convince yourself that gender is just another word for violence.
Fold your favorite dresses and store
them in the darkest corner of your room.
Mouth the words I love you like an apology
for all the times you've ever left.
Wait for someone to hold your body
like it's the daughter of something, or someone,
or somewhere else



Here at Bluebell

Here at Bluebell we have a strict schedule.

On Mondays we all get up early. The girls do the laundry and clean the house. The boys do odd jobs, set the traps, and keep guard. Myrtle organizes the pantry and also the cellar because she is the only one who will do it.

On Tuesdays we send someone to the supermarket. We rotate so each of us only has to go once every five weeks—five because Margie is excused. The town terrifies her.

Wednesdays are spent practicing archery and shooting guns.

On Thursdays we do real schoolwork, out of books. Constance insists. We sit inside around the table, bent dutifully over our books, doing sums, reading histories, studying how to write and speak clearly.

On Fridays the boys empty the traps. The girls all bundle up and go into the woods to hunt for herbs and berries. Myrtle looks for mushrooms and nightshades. No one else is allowed to touch them. No one else wants to.

The weekends are spent for pleasure. We all prefer to do different things, but even on weekends we keep to the boundaries of our property.

Here at Bluebell we keep our house carefully.

The house has three bedrooms. Miss Lawrence used to sleep in one by herself. Since she was buried, her room has been locked. No one has been in it in years. It is likely buried under inches of dust. No one thinks it will ever be needed again. No one speaks of it.

The boys have one room to themselves. It is a mess. They have three beds which are never made. They have a closet that is open and often empty. The laundry hamper in the corner is also often empty. They have one large wooden chest to keep their other things in. It is open, displaying jackknives and axes and books.

The girls' room is much the same, but the floor is bare and the closet is not. The chest is shut tightly. It was once Constance's hope chest. It contains quilts and napkins and two golden candlesticks. There are paints and more books on top of these.

The kitchen is downstairs on the main floor. Myrtle cooks in it: deer and rabbit and wolf and all that the boys' traps catch. Mushrooms and berries and herbs gathered in the forest, vegetables grown in the garden outside.

The cellar is located under the house, where it's dark and cold. Most of the shelves are lined with colorful jars of preserved fruit, pickled vegetables, crushed dried herbs, and brined rats.

The cabin is tiny and has one room. It is far away from the house. Four walls and a window. A table and chair and lamp, and the bed that all three girls sit up on all night for one week every month, listening.

Here at Bluebell there are six of us.

Constance is the oldest. She is tall and serious. She is experienced. Once she was very beautiful. She is not old enough to say this, but it is true all the same.

Myrtle is seventeen. She knows poison like no one else, and more than poison. Things we don't usually think about. She owns a cat, which is black. Margie is the youngest of all. She is small and mousy. She takes care of the animals and sometimes the garden. Without these jobs, we don't know what would happen to her.

Jonathan is tall and broad-shouldered. He carries an axe everywhere he goes and patrols the boundary of our property every hour.

Aiden is short and bored. No one has ever seen his hands hold still. He whittles and buries the carvings in the ground. Sometimes he burns them. Sometimes he gets Myrtle to store them in oil.

Vincent is indeterminate. We don't know how old he is. We don't know where he came from. Even he doesn't know these things.

Here at Bluebell security is not taken lightly.

The bounds of our property are fenced off with rows of rusty barbwire. We all know where the bear traps are. None of us have ever accidentally stepped in one.

Every Tuesday and Thursday during the full moon, we go out and sprinkle salt around the cabin. The girls stay there during the full moon while the boys hunt.

No one has ever been hurt during this.

When Miss Lawrence was here, she held darkness at bay. Our house stood alone, the only light. Within our borders we were safe, and we had no cause to leave.

Here at Bluebell there are signs of our past.

The clock in the hall is worn-faced and stopped. It hasn't ticked in years. Constance dusts it every day.

The shepherdess on the mantle is made of glass and painted pink and

white and gold. She smiles her smile at the empty room. She stands guard over pearls and weapons. We hate her but we keep her for the sake of Miss Lawrence.

That stain on the floor has been there a long time. We don't think about it anymore. Margie does sometimes. She was very young, and perhaps the closest with Miss Lawrence.

Here at Bluebell we dream.

We have nightmares about things. Mr. Burkley, especially. He walks in the woods every night, prowling around our bear traps and evading the little carvings Aiden has buried.

Sometimes we just see him swinging on the rope over the river, his feet trailing back and forth across the water.

The night will come when Mr. Burkley returns to cover his tracks, when the howls in the woods will be his. We hide now, not knowing when he will come or where, but when he comes, we will not hide. He will prowl as in dreams toward our cabin seeking the last witnesses, the last victims.

Here at Bluebell things have changed.

When Miss Lawrence was here, we held dances and we sang. Then, we were accustomed to visitors. Miss Lawrence invited town people to dinner, and her lunches were famous throughout the county.

Here at Bluebell we know there are whispers.

Rumors in town about Miss Lawrence. Rumors about Mr. Burkley. Rumors about us. The closest to the truth are the worst. The police can't touch us now. Jonathan was the one they put on trial and because he escaped, so did we. People still hide when he walks past. They whisper things about guns and psychopaths and Miss Lawrence, and Jonathan ignores them and keeps walking. He only spoke to a townsman once, shortly after the trial. The grocer gave him his groceries, barely looking at him, and frowning deeply when he did. The whole store went silent, watching like a roomful of ghosts, staring at Jonathan. He stopped at the door and said, "It wasn't me." He never spoke to them again.

The night will come when Mr. Burkley stands by the river. His thoughts will be dark. He will consider how to cross, how to reach us, how to kill us. Not knowing he is watched, he will hesitate by the river's edge. Jonathan will not hesitate.

Here at Bluebell we have our fears.

Constance watches the rest of us all the time. When Vincent swam too deep in the river, she ran half a mile to pull him back.

Myrtle bottles her fears and puts them on the cellar shelves. Snakes, rats, spiders, poisons, anything that frightens her.

Margie creeps into bed with Constance when the moon shines brightly. She whispers to herself that she is not afraid.

Jonathan fences his fears out, watches his fears quietly, evades his fears, hunts his fears, watches but never strikes. Only the other five of us are safe from him.

Aiden walks to the river daily and hangs new ropes. He mutters to himself and thinks about the day when we will catch Mr. Burkley.

Vincent climbs the highest trees, swims the fastest rivers, and hunts the fiercest animals. On full moons, he paces outside the cabin impatiently. He pales at the howling of the wolves.

Here at Bluebell we are filled with mistrust.

We welcome no one into this, our only home. We do not blame Miss Lawrence. She, like us, was not wanted. She, like us, was discarded. She, like us, was hungry for peace. But we do not dare repeat her mistake. We knew, though she did not, that Mr. Burkley meant the end. We knew, though she did not, that Mr. Burkley would destroy what she had built.

The night will come when we stand over a pit, looking down at our work in disturbed silence. Perhaps we will pay for it. Jonathan has promised it will be him who pays. We know he will do this for the rest of us. This is partly why we dread our revenge. This is partly why the girls whisper and murmur in the dark of the cabin as we listen for the sound of wolves.

Here at Bluebell we are alone.

No one comes from the village. No one has approached our boundaries in years. Only to buy food do we leave. Only for necessities. In the first days after they let Jonathan come home, people from the village gathered at our closed gate and shouted their threats at the house on its little hill while we hid behind curtains and spoke in whispers and ate the food Myrtle prepared for us. They left when they grew bored. Under Constance's guidance, we began our new life.

Here at Bluebell we wash our dishes and salt our floors and burn our candles in a world where we are hated for the small piece of the world where we have each other and will have each other forever.

A Spell for Crocuses

On a night with no moon, make your way
without shoes. Walk until you feel no frost.

Stop. Pinch pine needles between your toes.
If they snap and sigh, balance on the balls

of your feet until the soil beneath softens
with your weight. Raise your mouth to the sky

and fill your lungs with the dark. Fall on all
fours. Summon earthy sounds, guttural and

low to the ground, then lie face down to
feel the planet curve beneath your breast.

Cough into your depths to loosen what you
have left that's young and green and hurts.

Then scream that ancient word into the dirt.



Justice

I bought justice
at the campus bookstore.
It seemed impolite
to order online
and have her
shipped to me
for free.
And I refused
to buy her used.
I couldn't bear
to see justice
all marked up.
I have too much respect.
And while I haven't
had much time
to open her yet,
I carry her
everywhere.
She feels so light.
Not heavy
like you'd think
she might.
Sometimes
I lift her up
in front of my class.
The students nod
and murmur
their respect then
quickly we read
from more
relevant texts.
Something about jobs.
And where the commas go.

→

And how far we've come
now that we can
all have dreams
because Martin Luther King
was nice enough
to tell us his
back when things
were bad but
isn't it nice
that those bad days
are gone?
But when I go home
I place justice on the table
beside my bed
and murmur a prayer
I learned somewhere
about yokes being
easy and burdens
being light and
arcs being long but
bending towards
everything
eventually
turning out
all right.

Cup and Saucer

I would have never chosen you for my own but
every great-granddaughter got one. So there you sit,

three-footed and so pretty it hurts, legs curled and
perched on a scalloped saucer, pink roses spraying

your delicate sides, rim painted gold for bow-shaped
lips to hover over, blow, and sip. But her mouth

was drawn in a tight, straight line, that North Dakota
woman who had you first, the one who mowed her

own lawn until she was ninety, the one my dad once
proclaimed too mean to die, who outlived her

only daughter by decades and did without indoor
plumbing for most of her time. My grandpa feared her

as much as he fears God. Maybe more. But as you
sit behind the glass, I know very well how much

I'm detached from all that was hard and harsh and
brave about her life. And I am glad.

Please, Let Me Lounge



Providence

after Sharon Olds

There was too much atmosphere
in that fucking city. Too much pressure
to manufacture a life, to seem unphased
when flaming dormitory chairs went flying
into the streets from eight floors up, and keep quiet
while Margot climbed through the window
over my bed with a new boy each night,
huge brown leaves blowing in around my hair.

When I told my professor I was dropping out,
he tried for a moment to change my mind,
then put a hand on my shoulder, and let me go.
I was sure all the men there meant to hurt me
in their own ways. Like the one on Weybosset Street
who held a silver clamp up to my eyebrow, pierced it
with a sewing needle. Go, I said to myself, keep going.
Keep banging bricks together until something breaks.

I remember yellow flowers

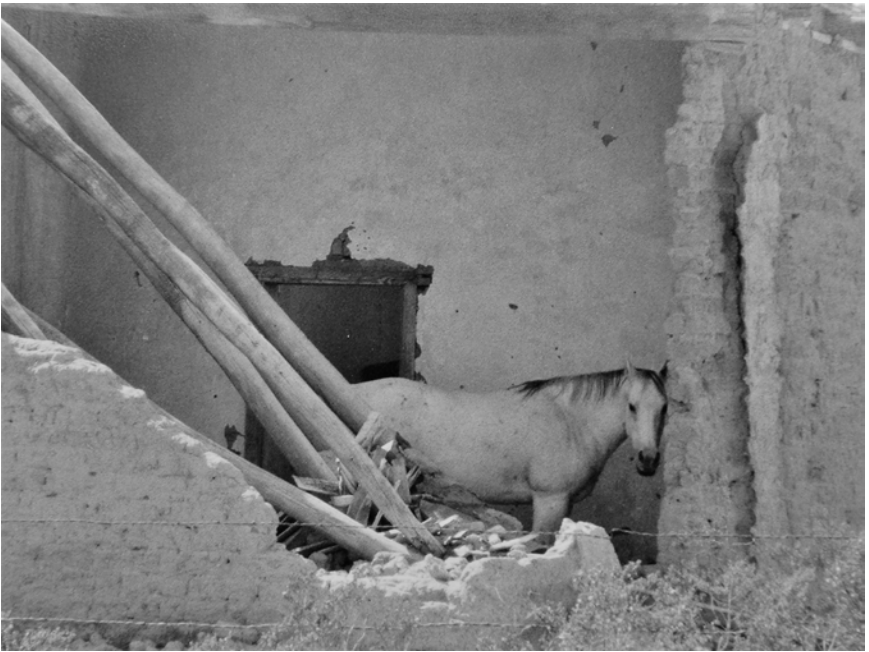
on the edge of the highway. I didn't know you then,
but I kept on existing without you.
That seems important now.

I tell myself you could have been anyone
with dark hair and light eyes [and a terrible childhood]
and I would have tried to love you [to fix you].

Now we lie among broken shells, bodies
of small crabs and no flowers.
I keep trying to picture leaving you—
driving down a long drag of highway
yellow flowers bobbing in the breeze

or rising alone from this beach towel
sun stinging my eyes
little bits of sand and salt
falling all around.

An Adobe House, 2010



[I'm a dull kind of glowing]

I'm a dull kind of glowing
the kind you see from a clouded moon or
old sleazy neon signs
these lights are tired burnouts
like the ones I saw riding the bus in Los Angeles
at eighteen
or the ones I saw drunk on New Year's Eve
I don't miss being eighteen
lately, I think, I miss smoking cigarettes the most

[have you subscribed]

have you subscribed to a certain brand of nihilism
you know, I'll still try to make you laugh
but it won't matter when we're dead
neither will our credit reports
or diets
or lovers (that word still makes me cringe)
we kept having sex when the snow fell
or when we were searching for something
and here I am, in this moment
propping my bones up underneath a sexy dress
and I remain neutral
because thoughts can betray reality
and at the end of all this
I'm thinking about what a good choice it was
to get bangs

Pitching Curves



Three Wheels

The public library doesn't open until noon on Sundays, and he wants to use a computer. It's one of those days when he wakes up at the crack of dawn even though he doesn't have anything important going on that day and he's annoyed because he can't seem to get back to sleep no matter how hard he presses his face against the pillow, and he curses the energy drink sitting on his dresser, which he exchanged for four quarters at the gas station, and curses himself for thinking that taking a couple sips of it last night wouldn't hurt his sleep cycle.

It is Sunday.

He has an adult tricycle that is currently at a friend's house, with a sizeable basket on the back. Ever since he was four years of age, he was afraid of crashing and falling off of bikes, a fear that has kept him off of anything fewer than three wheels for his entire life. The tricycle's basket can easily hold three large paper bags full of groceries.

It is Sunday.

I have nothing to do, he thinks. No classes, no work today, and he'd do his homework but all his assignments are to be submitted online. He shuns the warm yellow light of the morning sun, this forced interval of detachment from the cool blue plane of a computer screen. Whether it is for work or pleasure that he desires this aura is irrelevant. He needs to go grocery shopping, he thinks. He checks the fridge. Not much here. He has no car; normally he would rely on public buses to get him to the grocery store and back, forsaking three wheels for four; but the buses do not run on Sundays. And lugging what is usually thirty pounds of groceries halfway across town is a thought he cannot bear.

It is Sunday.

The triangle is the most structurally sound shape in geometry. People revere the triangle: they build bridges, skyscrapers and the like from them; they caption pictures "Wait, did you see that?" over the X-Files theme for comedic effect on the Internet; they name them, right, acute, obtuse, equiangular; they locate things by triangulation; they add one wheel to a bicycle and turn it from a wobbly vehicle that stays

upright through speed, to one that stands firm even at rest. Even in literature, the rule of three is holy. Triangles are synonymous with strength, with longevity. And why wouldn't they be? The triangle's three connected points, as opposed to the line segment's two, is more than just an addition of one. It transforms a line into a plane, the first dimension to the second, the frail to the steadfast.

The dichotomy of three versus four is well-documented. The working masses dread the four days Monday through Thursday, yet revere the remaining three days of the week that end on Sunday. The selling point of the Great Pyramids of Giza are their triangular structure, not their four-sided nature.

Asian cultures fear the number four, as America fears the number thirteen. In Japanese and Chinese culture, the word for four and the word for death are similar: *shi*, the sound of wheels through fall leaves. Add one to two, and the sacred number, three, is created; attempt to improve it further by adding one yet again, and you create a number that you won't find on the elevator buttons in Hong Kong or Kyoto. There are three little pigs, but the big bad wolf brings the character count to four.

He often rides a bus with four wheels.

He owns the same make, model and color of tricycle as his housemate, who had gone shopping the day before, on a day that was not Sunday. His housemate did not take the bus to and from the grocery store, instead riding his tricycle, which would have been laden with groceries. He, on the other hand, has not ridden his own gray tricycle in a year or so, for several reasons that are not real reasons: the wheels squeak from lack of attention, there are no gears to adapt to hilly streets, and the bus takes him where he needs to go more swiftly and with less effort.

But it's Sunday, and four wheels will not help him.

He walks to his friend's house.

An Early Call

The phone rings.
It is Mom,
Apologizes for her misdial.
“Who are you calling?”
I ask.
“Crossword puzzle,”
She says.
Emotions rise up
I am speechless
humor and sadness.
“There is no number for crossword puzzle,”
I manage to relate.
“Oh,”
She whispers.
“There are some crossword puzzles by your chair.”
“Yes.”
Her voice changes to joy.

My mother
Fades and brightens
I never know when.

Hokusai Performs a Painting for the Shogun

a found poem, worked from Hokusai's biography

He spreads an enormous sheet of paper on the ground,
also a broom-size brush, bowls of red and blue paint
and a rooster in a cage.

He brushes waves of light blue watercolor onto the paper,
unlocks the cage,
dips the rooster's feet in the red paint

then releases it across the paper.

This, he says, bowing before the Shogun,
is a picture of red maple leaves

floating down the Tatsuta River.

The Shogun, completely silenced, bows deeply
to Hokusai's blood-bright rooster tracks across the blue water.

And has the scampering bird snatched, plucked
and stewed in a pot of savory rice and greens—
to dine with Master Hokusai.

On the Same Page

There will be no whiskey or cakes on this holiest of unholy days
due to deep infection of the heart.

I wear the sweater my brother gave decades ago
to remember when we still behaved as if we were brothers.
The butt of my right hand takes the brunt of ice
when I fall picking up the morning paper—

Though I study the young man in the stunning
photo, one arm raised up,
the other clutching the pistol he has just
assassinated the Russian ambassador with,
shouting “Remember Syria! And Aleppo!”
the barrel bombs and poison gas poured over their neighborhoods,
his face incandescent with hatred and grief
before he is gunned down:

On the very same page
a young woman honors her ninety-four-year-old grandmother
by publishing her recipe for molasses cookies.
“Food is a way to bring people together,”
she is remembered saying.

What’s afoot now has been afoot for thousands of years:
a young Syrian consumed by unbearable grief.
How are we to conduct ourselves now that the gloves are off?
There will be no candy or whiskey today.

Unless I remember the way back
to those who always stood up for black strap
and tangled sweaters
given in the spirit of real brothers.

Artist's Statement

A direct response to the 2016 election year and its continuing aftermath, nine word poems are a study in the inflammatory nature of words. Language is central to electoral fervor if only because of the polarizing reactions it produces. Racial slurs create outrage for some, while others are affronted by so-called politically-correct language. One is familiar, of course, with the four-letter words typically understood to be bad or naughty, but the 2016 election battle greatly enlarged the ranks of the four-letter word. The words in this series were appropriated from social media, that venue for cheap provocation and fear-mongering. Reflective of the inflammatory nature of a bullying meme or a click-bait headline, these poems hold up a mirror to a fractured culture, revealing its fearfulness, its militant ideologies, and its willingness to press words into service as weapons.

mobs love fear



some zero game



evil race raid



thin skin bile



Moonrise/Moonset

July 19/9pm/82°F

Jupiter snuggled up against a crescent moon, the pair hanging like pals above the western horizon. Sitar riffs floated on night winds across a field from a farmhouse where other Sixties rituals are practiced. Coyote pups that denned in the outfall of a basalt cliff yipped and howled, at the moon or at each other as they frolicked on a summer night like teens in the middle of an endless and perfect summer.

The waning of another long day—the fading light after sunset, the smell of hot grasses mixed with cool night air, the soft voices on a neighbor’s porch—is reason enough to celebrate life. Such days make teens feel immortal. That possibilities are endless in lives that spread out before them.

But more of my life trails me than lies ahead and these summer days can be numbered. The slice of moon was enough reason to pause, to be still until darkness fell. A little sadness tugged at my heart. Some might call it nostalgia – for youth, the Sixties, a sense that adventures were waiting for me out in the years ahead. I know that the sadness is disappointment in lost opportunities, in a collective generational confidence that we let slip away. Amid the sitar music and haze from bong-smoking hippies chanting Sanskrit mantras we reached for the stars and touched the moon. The one small step into moon dust defined a generation’s dreams. It propelled us into a future with limitless possibilities.

We should have gone back and reached for the stars from there.

That we did not makes me sad on a night in July when I see Jupiter tucked into a sliver of the moon in the fading light. I thought we were going to be a generation of explorers. But instead of leaving footprints on Mars, we went home and invented a four hundred-channel entertainment landscape.

We should have gone back until some chose to stay. Not just to leave more boot prints or see what sitar music sounds like in the moon’s thin atmosphere and write poems about the sun, the earth, and the stars. We should have reached for the stars because we know that the reaching is what we do. Explorers go. Destination matters less than the journey.

Instead, we left it to the next generation to send New Horizons as a proxy explorer hurtling into the night sky toward the edge of the Milky Way. Viking and Pathfinder look for life on Mars. Shift workers watch the discoveries from NASA headquarters, safe and at home on Earth.

On a waning July night out in the field I pause, looking wistfully at the moon and listening to the Sixties fade into the darkness.

For Malcolm, who explains

It is, you say,
the wobble topple
of a child's toy
spun by chubby hands
a bit of spin
sometimes glorious
then off the table's edge
plummets
through
delusional air

Your friend, Ed
is banned
from Albertsons
believes himself
engaged
drops off love notes
to the beautiful young baker
a tiny Vietnamese
who kneads the dough
like 9-1-1 and does not
know his name
until the store manager
calls the cops

Not your story
but you know
the brink
You've gamboled
the precarious pivot
into bipolar land

Have you eaten, I ask
Not today, you say
We wait for gyros
chew slowly
your eyes white
as Wild Horse Island

Autumn

Miles

between

secrets

of strawberry fields

Dusted
dashboard
with cigarette ash

Warm
f r e c k l e d shoulders
with
morning sunlight

On the radio
tuned
into oldies

Laughing about
the way
you sing along

But now
I have a
bitten
b
l
o
o
d
y
lip

The chill
of the
air
flushed cheeks

Stuck in
a record's

e c h o

The fields
russet
parched
from cold

And my bones
ache
starving
for warmth

Searching for you
I've walked
for days

Stopping at
every acreage

I
see

My thoughts
blister
my heels

Filtered through
chain smoking
cigarettes

Playing
those
songs
on

~~repeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeatrepeat~~

Escape Artists

It's 1:32 p.m. on a Wednesday, and there's sunlight lazing across the creased faces of Montana mountains. Sun stinging my eyes red while I gawk at them. We're stopped at a gas station in Rocker, a village of 150 people smudged on the bank of Silver Bow Creek. Our stuffed caravan is on its way to Denver, and we've got another ten hours til we can roll out of this car for good. No complaints though. I stretch my arms up, flexing, inhaling.

The day before I had sweat through my collared shirt telling my boss, Debby, that, I'm so sorry, I'd be leaving for a week. My Aunt Liberty won a spot at a gaming convention in Denver, and she gets to showcase her two blooming card games. There was an extra seat in the car, and she dared me to come with them. I needed an escape from routine. Debby collapsed her face into a well-worn hand, holding up wrinkles that rippled at the corners of her mouth. She assessed my blushing face like I was her wild and nervous daughter. "I guess you better go then."

So my Uncle Meko fills the gas tank, my three pixie cousins scramble out of the car, and I crack my bones. I've got time to wander, and I start looking around. My eyes too willingly cheat on the postcard blue sky and mountains painted carefully in the background, and I walk until the sight of scenery is eclipsed by the line of roof that grows over my head. My eyes fixate on Lucky Lil's, a charcoal-painted casino shack that squats beside the white walls and welcome signs of the convenience store next door. The building itself looks beaten and hungover, like it should've squealed and melted back into the pavement as soon as the sun peeked its head up from the east. The sign for Lucky Lil's emits an obnoxious radioactive green that whistles for attention from the eyes that wander from the gas pump.

I want to see who's gambling at this time of day. I peek through the blackened windows at Lucky Lil's. It might be closed. Then I spot the curved back of a man, his shoulders slumped forward and his eyes buried beneath squinting lids. A pale exposed face and neck glazed with the outpour of dancing colors projecting from the screen in front of him.

I wish it was easy to peek inside the souls that flock to casinos; those in particular who return more often than they would care to admit. One night, months before the Denver trip, a cluster of friends pounded at my apartment door

and let themselves into my kitchen. It was a Sunday, Mother's Day. It must've been late enough to sleep because they told me to put on real clothes. I protested. "We're going to the Casino," Brandon said as he flicked the edges of his cash, counting.

I had never been to a casino before, so I hid behind the parade of swagging black jackets as I soaked up the scenes of a slot room on Mother's Day. With wide baby eyes, I saw the drooping women who did not want to be looked at. Middle-aged women holding cigarettes like sixth fingers, stubbing them out and reattaching fresh ones without breaking their gaze from the screen. Harshly wrinkled women with walkers at their sides, plastic sacks of bills and change sitting in their laps like obedient children. I watched over Brandon's shoulder as he doubled his money, and I witnessed the women gamble their cash away for hours without flinching. Then it was an ungodly 3 a.m.; we slipped back out the doors and left the statues behind. I couldn't rid them from my mind.

Should I go in? I feel the eyes that shift to watch as I push through the glass door, and I sweep my hair forward to cover the edges of my reddening face. I'm old enough to be in here, but I'm now a first grader who barged into the wrong classroom. Fitting, this one-room building is no bigger than a classroom. My tour around the perimeter ends quick, so I perch close to the leaves of a fake miniature tree that sits near the entrance, its plastic branches attempting to tickle some life into this place.

I listen to the ticks and bell rings that erupt out of the mass of twenty slot machines. The rainbow screens stand shoulder-to-shoulder, and if I squint my eyes, they become a uniform body that snakes along the walls like a flashing playpen keeping the players within their bounds. The ceiling hangs low over our heads, black and glossy like the dead screen of television. I count six other people here: three men and three women. There's silver hair tucked behind ears, shoved beneath ball caps. Gray streaked manes pulled back tightly into buns. They sit separately and silently, coats off, coffee sitting close by. How long have they been here? How long will they stay after I'm gone?

I find a lone chair underneath a TV spewing infomercials, and I sit and steal a few glances at the older men and women as they twitch their pointer fingers. Over and over, they push the glowing button that triggers the reel of symbols to spin furiously before clicking to a stop. The untouched machines appear just as alive. Humming, hibernating, waiting for the next player. They dance like the loyal puppets of programmers' hands. The colors and cheery jingles are orchestrated to win over the wanderers, like me.

Casinos don't exist to give people money. I do not believe the men and women I see at these machines are being fooled. Their wrinkles say experience. Gambling is a risk, maybe it's about the concentrated taste of thrill. Maybe they're feeding the starved hope that today they'll be the one. Maybe they show up to be toyed with; to be teased and excited, winning enough to feel the peak of euphoria and then losing it all just before they're ready to quit. It's real money, real emotions. Maybe it beats the flatness that greets them as soon as they push back through the black doors into daylight.

I've only just noticed; the ceiling is dripping. Every few inches there's a black bulging pupil. Cameras are everywhere. Fifteen of them stare back at me and I begin to feel like I'm doing something wrong with my notebook propped open in my lap. I'm scribbling down all the messages that flash around the room. Fluorescent, cartoon-like images cover the walls, tripping over each other, burning their messages into your eyes. 777. Keno. Goodluck. Stacks of cash. Pairs of dice. Four leaf clovers. Flashing on and off, twinkling above the slumped heads of gamblers like crosses bolted above congregations. I'm a non-believer, slumped in the farthest pew while the men and women bow their heads.

A young man with slicked back hair approaches me. He asks if I need something. I reach for my ID in my bag and explain that I'm just looking around. He shakes his head, he looks embarrassed. "We can't allow anyone to loiter here. I'll give you five minutes but then I'll have to escort you out." The pupils are watching him, too. I say "okay" and watch as he disappears behind the bar. I think I've seen enough. I get up and leave.

Weeks later, back from Denver, I decided I had to go looking again.

When I pull up to the Coeur d'Alene Casino, it's 9:54 p.m. on a Thursday night. I feel prepared this time. I've got a roll of fives in my pocket, a pack of American Spirits and...no lighter. I duck my head through rain and jog over ponds reflecting the milky light spilling out from revolving doors. I lift off my hood once I reach cover, and I'm welcomed by the bloodshot eyes of three wrinkled, unshaven men with cigarettes tucked between their lips. One man sways into my path. "Hey darlin'," he says. "How you doing?" I nod, "I'm fine, and you?" I stride past quickly, watching them swallow me up as I go.

I start down the hallway following a crowd of sloppy twenty-somethings; a mass of arms thrown over shoulders as they maneuver towards the bar. I weave my way until I find the threshold. I step into the massive ballroom buzzing like a carnival: muddled voices, shrieks, flashes, exhaled clouds of smoke. It's

overwhelming. The ceiling is covered completely by a plane of square-shaped mirrors. It's so high up that all our scalps beneath are dots and the flashing machine lights our stars.

I trace the edges of this place and take in the crowd. I might be the youngest one here. The people standing up walk clumsily, swaying into each other, slurring into each others' necks. The ones sitting in front of slot machines are leaning into it, focused, like they're solving equations with each button press. The gamblers also meet my eyes the second I glance at them. Alright, then I'll quit staring and enter the realm they're in. I feel for the bills folded in my pocket.

I take a seat at a machine with a small, dull screen. It has four reels, classic symbols. Cherries, liberty bell, BAR, diamond. I insert a five dollar bill and bet one cent at each spin. The penny machines have the lowest stakes in the room. The men and women in the same row likely dock here for long periods of time, in the hopes that eventually a miniscule penny bet will earn them a jackpot. Now I'm in it. I click a button alongside a line of hunched-over humans. A worker pushes a cart of drinks behind us, speaking quietly as to not disturb the fingers that twitch again and again. I'm offered coffee, soda, a drink spiked with some kind of liquor. Stay up all night, drink, have a good time. You can escape, just stay a little longer. I'm already on edge, so I grab a water. There's this magazine called *Strictly Slots* that caters to experienced slot gamblers. They pushed out a survey to their subscribers, a handful of questions to try and prod out an answer to the question: why do you gamble? The answer that outranked winning more money, the obvious goal behind feeding limited cash into a machine, was excitement, thrill, pleasure. Others admitted that the ease of betting at the press of a button provided relaxation, serene monotony, an easy escape.

A man slides into the chair next to me and reaches over to feed twenty dollars into my machine. He slurs "good luck" and presses max bet, only a dollar on this machine. No win. I offer a cigarette and ask for a light to keep him around for a second; maybe he can tell me what I want to know. He must be thirty, with bloated cheeks and drunk eyelids that crinkle at the edges when he shows his teeth. He tells me to bet high. He points out to me with his eyes the men and women who haven't moved for hours. The people that, he bets, will be here Sunday night spending more and betting high to undo the mistake they made. They pray to a machine composed of doctored algorithms to give them their losses back. I'm busy scribbling down his words, and it's clear his donation will not buy him any services from me. So he retreats, telling me to quit smoking before swaying back towards the bar.

When I look at these gamblers, it's like seeing humans inside isolated glass boxes. Each their own exhibit, their own history. I wonder what brought them here. The man with the bald head and wedding ring smokes his cigarette ferociously. His quick hand from lips to button to lips looks like a wave in my peripheral vision, so I look and he looks right back into me, his black eyes alert and hungry. My motivation to ask questions shrinks with every tortured look I receive.

I'm at \$15.51 when I hit max bet. The symbols align and the screen begins to shake, flashing and singing. I watch my balance throb as the number spins. I doubled my money and some change. \$35.31. I'm smiling and I feel a delicious wash of dopamine soak down to fill my chest. I want to keep betting, but I resist and press the cash out button. I slide the printed ticket in my pocket, and I promise myself that once I'm out of cash, I'm done. I pull out another five dollars and get up to find my next machine.

Two years ago, I got into cars with friends who enjoyed polishing off a couple joints on the way to and from Spokane. I would happily pinch the paper and hold it to my lips, suck it in and blow it out the cracked window and watch the cars that passed us, wondering if the passengers would be angry with me if they knew what was in my hand.

When we all lived with no jobs and no direction but a mystical degree held over our heads and a few classes a week, chronic boredom was fought off ritually by rolling delicate burritos full of bud. We'd pile into someone's car and smoke on our way out of town and over the border. We'd pull up under the fluorescent signs of the clover green shack and send out our twenty-one-year-old boy to grab a few more bags for the next two days.

Hours of euphoric dreaming cradled and motivated our drives. We'd sit in silence, except for the music that gave chills up the legs, down the arms. We drove at dusk and car lights swelled and passed on our left; the sun laid itself over the curve of earth in front of us and put on a show.

It was a risk, always. Paranoia had a seat in the car. But I was often the one who drove, and on back roads late at night I'd hold the wheel with both knees so I could lift a purple glass pipe up to my lips and light it without any help. I'd burn the stuffed glass bowl, inhale, and let the smoke swell beneath my collarbones with pride.

I gambled with life eagerly and often. I emerged each time from the car, miraculously without a scar on my skin or my record. I can close my eyes now and replay over and over the scene of a girl with bleached hair and bloodshot eyes,

driving farther and faster into a surreal dream, reaching a hand backwards to grab the joint being passed. If we'd been plucked off the road by all-seeing fingertips and held above the highway like an emblem of caution, we could've warned about the dangers of boredom and uncertainty, stress and escapism.

The nightly habit only began to dissolve when friends in other cars got court dates. And in my own mind, the highs began to turn sour. I'd need more and more to get to my rosey, warm bath of bliss and distraction. Then friends trickled away, quitting so they could realign themselves, and I thought maybe I should too.

Even since quitting, the craving to escape from the mundane lurks in my bones. I want to know if that's what I saw behind the eyes I've met at casinos. If the same thing that lives inside me, lives inside them. Maybe I'm not alone, maybe the craving is a universal temptation that can be satisfied by all different flavors. Drugs, sex, alcohol, gambling. Stimulations, dreamy baths of dopamine. You pick your habit. Or abstain, have just a taste on Friday nights. I can't say every person I witnessed at the casino was scratching their need for an escape. But then, even innocent curiosity and dabbling can drag a person down into underworlds that could've been avoided.

I could go back to the casino on a Sunday and take a seat next to the statues of men and women and I could ask them what they think. I could curl up and tell them the truth, that I'm nervous and trying to find direction. I'd tell them about it, my fascination with vices. I'd ask them who they are, and why they're here; if they're fulfilled and what they wish they had known when they were young and curious. But I haven't yet. I'm not sure I will. I'd prefer to dream up their careful answers from the safety of my bed, as I lay and wonder if eventually I'll be one of them.



Worse

Look at what you did.
How could **you**?
Good for nothing little shit.
I dont want you.

They say break a leg
But i hope you break both.
You wer never **good** enouf
And you never wil be

How dus it feel
To be a freak?
Its embarassing.
Absolutely **Pathetic**.

Kil or be kiled here, hun
Yor life aint **worth** a dam
Self- harm is pashonate
Plees tel them

How to Want to Be Alive

after Wil Gibson

I

The first time
you re-experience suicidal ideation
after being told that the attempt
was due to a medication change,
it will be surprisingly easy to control yourself.

Maybe the taste of activated charcoal
is too fresh in your mouth
or maybe you finally wrote a poem
that you actually like
either way,
you wonder if this is the new status quo.

II

When Michelle,
like you,
made it out alive
your own pit wasn't quite that dark yet.

You were visiting the ocean
learning more about love from six year olds
in the poorest zip code in Washington state
than a Valentine ever could have taught you
when your youth pastor
handed you the phone
your mother's voice on the other line
sounded like an apology,
a telegram bearing only bad news
she says that Michelle
"is okay."

She is scarce on the details,
the way obituaries for suicide always are.

She says the words “made an attempt.”
You think you know what this means.

You were visiting the ocean.
You would not be home for four more days.
It was July.

Now it is December.

III
December is the harshest month.
December is as cold
as a scalpel,
the empty side of the bed.

You wrote a love poem to December once.
That was before you learned that the winter
will never love you back.

When December ends,
instead of wishing everyone
a happy new year,
say, “Thank you
for reminding me
why the winter is worth surviving.”

Thank your suicidal best friends
for not pulling the trigger,
for putting the razor away,
for not staring down an empty pill bottle
like the barrel of a gun,
for going to the hospital.

In the end,
they’re glad that you made it out alive, too.

Not a Suicide Note

One day,
I will walk over the Monroe Street Bridge
and not think to myself:
“What a beautiful place to die.”

Winter Hunt



Smack

There was a long night once. I couldn't tell you what day of the week it was or even what year. What I do remember is the way the fluorescent bulbs outdoors in our apartment complex cast this piss-yellow glow onto everything in sight, a gross burnt amber shade. I had spent most of the day and night getting high with my friends and hanging out. We would lay around on this bare twin mattress on the floor in the dining room and listen to music. We did that a lot, back at the start of the thing.

I had recently begun experimenting more seriously with opiates, trying to find the best methods and combinations to turn my brain to mush. I think that's why I was doing it, to drown out all the feelings of unworthiness and pain. I knew a lot of kids who were playing this same game. Many later overdosed. Some lost their lives. That evening my companions and I had obtained some oxycontin. They were these little white pebbles stamped with the letters OC80 on the front. We would take these pills, usually only one at a time as they were quite expensive, and lay them beneath a dollar bill. The bill helps keep all the pieces in place when you crush it with a plastic BIC lighter. We crushed the pill, mashing it to powder all over some dead president's face. I carefully arranged the resulting powder into six equal lines. They looked like fuzzy caterpillars waiting to turn into beautiful butterflies inside my sinus cavities.

I don't actually like snorting pills, they burn inside my nostrils and set my brain ablaze. You think the hard part is done, but the bitter pill, it comes back to haunt you. It slides down your throat from above, leaving a sharp snail trail seared into your esophagus. Like I said, I hated doing them this way. I remember my mom telling me once that she used to parachute meth. That's when you take the powder and fold it up inside a small piece of tissue. Then you swallow it whole and the tissue acts as a quick vessel to your insides. Supposedly it gets you higher faster without burning holes in your nasal cavity.

I tried this once. It went horribly awry almost immediately. I wrapped the powder inside a paper towel instead of something more delicate like a Kleenex. Pedestrian mistake! When I tried to swallow it, it became lodged in my throat. It felt like a hard, jagged rock, and I struggled to breathe. The panic set in; I could feel my heart pounding in my ears. I called my mom, begging her to tell me what to do. She didn't seem surprised when she heard what the problem was. Moments like this

with my mother remind me why I did drugs in the first place. She told me to drink a lot of water. “Just keep drinking and drinking,” she said. She was able to talk me down from my panicked state and eventually I got the little bundle to pass into my stomach. Euphoria followed.

Back to that night in some unknown moment in the past: We didn’t have enough money to get another pill. They were fifty dollars a pop and we only had thirty between us. I could tell my boyfriend, Dom, was thinking hard about something because his eyebrows furrowed in a familiar way. He was the greatest love of my life. I knew he had tried other stuff before but wasn’t actively using it, or so he claimed. “I have an idea,” he said. “There’s cheaper ways to get high, but I don’t want you doing this shit.” He knew exactly what he was doing, though until the day he died he would deny it. He knew he would pique my interest. He knew I was chasing oblivion just as hard as he was. “I know where we can get some heroin.” Then there was a feeble attempt to sway my desire for oblivion, but he knew I’d say yes. He was always right.

So off he and a friend went. While I waited for them to return, I thought about many things. As I felt my high from the pill quickly fading, my mind started thinking clearly again. This is exactly what I was hoping to avoid. The pills hushed my thoughts. They softened the constant emotional nagging that went on inside my head. When I was sober, I thought about a lot of things. I wondered why my father couldn’t be bothered to be a presence in my life and what that meant about me. Was I flawed in some way that made me unworthy of love? Maybe that’s why my mom did drugs for most of my life. She couldn’t be bothered to love me the way a mother should love her child either. Sobriety often caused me to see connections in things that weren’t there. My father was absent, so he must not love me. My mom did drugs because I am unworthy of life. I know now that these things aren’t true but that’s what I was grappling with that night while I waited for my boyfriend to bring back my escape.

They appeared again forty-five minutes later. Dom went into the kitchen and pulled out some tin foil. I remember being confused—was he going to start baking something? He noticed the perplexed look on my face and explained that we were going to smoke the heroin off the tin foil. He knew what he was doing, like he’d done this a thousand times. Was he lying to me before when he said he was sober? He cut a small four-by-four square of tin foil and began burning one side of it with a lighter. He did this for a minute or so, burning then wiping the soot, over and over. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a round bundle of plastic.

Why am I like this? Why am I always throwing myself so recklessly into bad decisions? I knew this was wrong, just like every other stupid choice I'd ever made in my life, but I ignored my inner protestations. I think about this night a lot. It was the night that changed the trajectory of my life and my relationship with Dom. It changed it irrevocably. Years later, when I got the call that he had overdosed, I thought back to this night: the night I decided this is what our love was going to be about. Mutual destruction, enabling each other's demise. Would this be all he remembered me for? Did he ever pour over this memory like I did, agonizing over every detail? Every glimpse of memory that I grasp for inside my drug-tarnished mind slips away faster than it materializes.

He opened the round bundle of plastic like a garlic clove, carefully peeling away the top layer to reveal a sticky black blob. He broke off a piece and balanced it atop the tin foil and then pulled from his pocket the hard, outer tube of a ball-point pen. He placed it in his mouth and lit his BIC lighter underneath the foil, holding it about an inch away. The little black blob suddenly jumped to life, hissing and crackling on the foil. It smelled acrid, like sour vinegar. He tilted and turned the foil, causing the black to leave trails along the foil while emitting a steady stream of smoke. Sucking the smoke up greedily through the straw, he took a lung-crushingly long inhale like a wolf about to huff and puff my whole life down. I remember thinking how strange we must have looked. Four quasi-adults, crammed onto a bald single mattress on the floor of a dumpy apartment, huddled over a piece of tin foil. It was my turn next.

As a child, I used to roll myself up inside my blanket and call myself a human burrito. Then I would stand up, blind to the world and bound up tight inside my comforter, and yell, "I'm a burrito, I'm a burrito!" Running around and bumping into objects and walls, I'd laugh and laugh as I fell over onto the living room floor. I didn't have any siblings and lived a lonely childhood. An only child has to get creative to entertain themselves. On one particular evening, my stepdad Albert seemed deeply annoyed by the sight of my enjoyment. "Knock that off!" he shouted, yelling like I was in another room, even though I was only six feet away. I was a defiant child, and didn't often take direction from him without putting up a fight. So, I went along my merry burrito way and ignored his demands to quiet down.

Something inside him snapped, not unlike the dozens of other times he lost his temper, and he stood up quickly. I heard him get out of his chair and stopped dead in my tracks. He ripped the blanket from around my body with considerable force and unfurled me onto the carpet. "I told you to stop!" he screamed in my ear.

He dragged me by my feet from one end of the living room towards my bedroom. By this point, I was kicking and screaming, grabbing on to pieces of furniture for purchase. My room was down a small hallway to the left, and as he whipped me around the corner, my head smashed into the corner of the wall. My world went black. I woke a fraction of a second later, as he was tossing my limp body into my dark bedroom. (The dark has terrified me my whole life; is this why?) I came to just as my body smacked down onto the carpet like a rag doll.

That feeling, slamming into the ground with full force, is the only way I can describe what it felt like to be that high. It hits you all at once. All I knew is that I never wanted to be sober again. I could do this all day, every day for as long as life would let me. And I did. I spent nearly the next decade in and out of sobriety, trying to silence my inner critic. I don't know what changed. Maybe it was Dom's death. No, that's a lie. When he died, my drug use really kicked into high gear. I couldn't wait to join him. I moved away from my hometown a year after he passed. I think that's what did it.

I left my hometown behind me, along with it all desires to escape my own life. I think about my first love often. I wonder what he'd be doing now, if he'd be proud of what my life has become. Probably not. I see my mother less and less. It's better that way. My stepdad Albert disappeared from our lives. That's better too. Sometimes I worry he'll find me. I worry I'll come home and turn on the lights and there he'll be, waiting. I wish I could turn the lights on and Dom would be there, waiting. Maybe I'll see him again, when the lights finally go out.

Smash Through Walls!!!!



Mortified

Thankfully
my inner child missed
the bullet of Firefly
being cancelled
and was too young for
Buffy the Vampire Slayer
or Angel
but it couldn't avoid
Borders
Hastings
Toys R Us
as if my childhood and
inner child were being
emotionally and financially bankrupt.
I try and forget the TNT original series
Witchblade
even though I watched it
religiously
more religiously than religion
every Sunday.
And made my grandma
record it on VHS
but even VHS are dead now.
My father's image and voice
transmitted
across time and death
through the wonders of tape and
there are kids alive who have never
had to rewind a tape before returning it.
The monsters.
Before save games and
Teddy Ruxpin
dial up internet
before they were too old
to remember
what they had lost.
This is where childhood
happens: somewhere
in the remembering of it.

January

The lid of heavy grey removed during the night reveals a pale cloudless sky. The winter morning light is at once soft and vibrant. White frost unites a landscape of disparate objects, making even the moss and crumbling shingles on the garage roof shine, creates a thoughtful mosaic of the random stepping stones, gravel, and abandoned projects.

I stare out the window and tell myself to hold the sight of my garden in January in mind. A meditation on stillness, on patience, on time being something to sit in, not something that slips, like water through hands, never quite clasped.

I ran in the park yesterday, around young families pushing strollers and holding toddler hands through puffy mittens. It is the mildest January we've had in years; if you consider only the weather. And not the politics. And not my heart.

For once, for now, this month stretches out around me and feels long. Each day, moves forward
but not quickly. The calendar fills, but the year is merely winding up again, hasn't started rushing, slipping, sliding. I think, perhaps, this is the year I'll do it all, hold all the broken pieces in my hand still enough and close enough to look and feel like wholeness.

Today the sun is out, the sky cloudless, except for a few pastel piles rolling along the edges. It will be cold on my face later while I walk downtown, but bright. I will be smiling, the sun
a flood
of relief on my face. I hate the heavy, grey days of pale winter clouds. But also, I am loved. My heart opens to the blue sky.

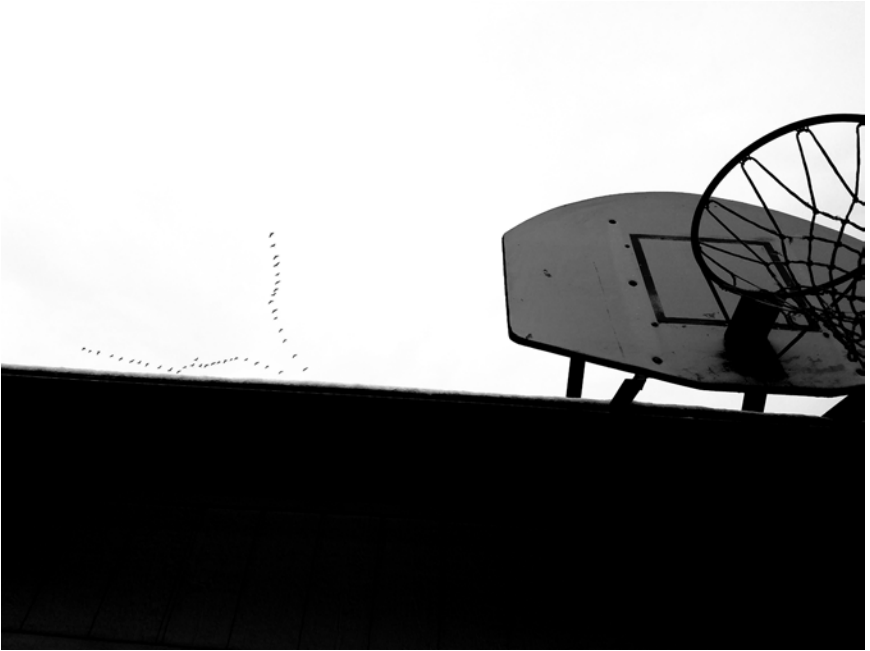
I run my hands along your face, half-wondering if you like this feeling, but also not caring. I like this feeling. My thumb sliding back and forth along your jawline, my fingers resting on the soft skin of your neck below your ear. I can't stop marvelling
at the way your eyes hold mine. You keep not leaving, and when I shift my body to get up, your arm, wrapped around me, pulls tighter and you say, wait, not yet.

So this is what it feels like to fall in
love, again, in winter.

Afternoon Snow



Fowl Ball



Instincts Still

muscles ripple, swing, pace soft-footed
on a concrete slab, flies feast on secrets
pooled in the corner of the beast's eyes,
“Hi there—how's it going,” a woman hails

the lion like a neighbor out mowing the lawn,
a man joins the woman at the steel railing
his cotton shirt breathing heavy, its tail trailing,
the male cat quiets, collecting human eyes,
his mate, splayed across a caged shadow

her planked ribs rising and falling her life,
lifts her head extending her dream
to human flesh—across the hill ocelots mew,
monkeys howl, children screech—

the couple ogling the lions ends their chatter,
a fly freed from the cat's eyes crosses
the twenty-foot ravine and visitor railing,
unbalances the order of predator and prey,

alighting on a paisley shirt, the insect crawls
whispers, inside auburn locks

instinct still, across
demilitarized zone

What to Heed, Here to There

I kill the call. Fling my cell phone, dreidel like,
across vinyl counter tops. Out the door I walk.
Winter sidewalks slip me past glass-windowed
ballerinas, balancing on toes, disfigured,
cued up at the barre, waiting for what comes next.

We have to do an MRI, my doctor had said
rule out sinus issue or possible—brain tumor.

How do ballerinas, their muscles tensed, stay
their cue? Do they dream of leaping *grand jeté*
into air vibrating applause, do they count rounds
of the red line on the clock, ticking their class to close?

I angle across the street, skidding my way
through City Park. Equinox passed,
maple trees all skin and bone, their fingers
reach to uncertainty in gray-blue sky.

In outer limbs of a tree trembles the diamond
of a kite, greeting park visitors. Its tail
and strings, dismembered, circles thick,
a cottonmouth nest inside tree arms.

What do fallen airfoils heed between
gliding transcendent and grounding decay,
masticating, obliterating them
into something lesser than what they are?

Phone receptionist had agreed to minimize my MRI wait.
Fifty-eight days out, their first open date.

“Do people ever die on your waiting list?” I asked,
“I don’t think so,” she replied.

Brittany Biglin is a human woman.

Michelle Brumley is a student for life, a failed poet: the toothless comic relief (that's sarcasm, also pain) who misses her North Idaho College English Club and campus more than she thought possible. And, someday, a fantasy and science fiction novelist. Failed or otherwise. She wins whether you print this or not.

Megan Atwood Cherry's working life is rooted in North Idaho, where she balances public service with studio practice and teaching. She holds bachelor's degrees in both fine art and theatrical design from the College of Santa Fe along with an MFA from the University of Idaho. Megan was a faculty member in the North Idaho College Art Department from 2010-2018, where she specialized in teaching arts and humanities core classes. Megan now serves Emerge of Coeur d'Alene with curriculum development and instruction for the Artist Incubator, a professional development program for emerging artists.

As an active member of the Sandpoint Arts Commission, Megan developed a fondness for the collaborative process of tending a city's public art collection. This passion for creative organization and community engagement has carried her to the City of Moscow, where she serves as Arts Program Manager. When not at City Hall, in the classroom, or in the art studio, Megan can usually be found in the midst of woodworking and forest stewardship collaborations with her husband James.

Tanner Chile Criswell: Collegiate student of the fine arts at North Idaho College. Seeking further inquiry about the societal, cultural, and physical boundaries that are placed upon themselves within the spaces of his existence.

Poet/painter/singer **Neal Crosbie's (cover artist)** work functions like contemporary haiku or Zen koans: playful, teasing. His Coyote-Man icon, which adorns many of his paintings, assures us we're in the company of a trickster. Morphing among clouds, mountains, canoes, and weeds, the image suggests the poet/painter himself as a life-bemused, wild mountain man. A special voice among poetic contemporaries, Crosbie acts as a kind of stand-up shaman. His poems—in recitation and song, on canvas, paper, and walls—have mastered the commingling of high spirits with fresh seeing and hearing. Crosbie frames his biography this way: "I was born in San Francisco. It was 1951. When I was nine I fell out of a tree in Golden Gate Park. In silence I set out for Mount Fuji."

Erin Davis lives and writes near the Little Spokane River and teaches English at North Idaho College. Her work has been featured in *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, and in anthologies published by Thoughtcrime Press and the Spokane County Library District.

Robert Dricker is a student at North Idaho College majoring in photography, and general studies. He will take pictures of everything and anything. This photo—taken at Hisey Park in Granger, Washington, of a sculpture made by Public Works — was his first time trying photo editing, and layering multiple photos to make one

photo. He enjoys goofing around and doing silly photos with his camera, but can be serious with the camera when he needs to be. He's always on the lookout for a different perspective on anything while he's taking pictures of it.

Roger Dunsmore taught Humanities, Wilderness Studies, and American Indian Literature at the University of Montana (Missoula & Dillon) from 1963-2013. He is the author of numerous books, including *You're Just Dirt* (2010, FootHills Publishing) and *Earth's Mind: Essays in Native Literature* (1997, University of New Mexico Press). His fifth volume of poetry, *On the Chinese Wall: New & Selected Poems*, 1966-2018 was published by Drumlummon Institute of Helena, Montana, last September: (Here, among echoes of Archilochos and Meister Eckhart, can be found a poem for a loose ram, a poem for a woman kissing all the icons in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, a poem for a trapper in Montana whose pet wolverine loved Oreo cookies, and a man named Mike Blue Horse, 'best night-hawker on the Hi-line,' dancing solo in a bar in Montana.) He was a founding member and mentor of the Bent Grass Poetry Troupe, 2005-2013. Humanities Montana selected him as one of their Humanities Heroes in 2012. Dunsmore has been short-listed to the governor for the position of Montana Poet Laureate twice, 2005 and 2007. Currently, he is beginning his sixth year of staple-gunning the work of other poets monthly to utility poles and in small businesses in his Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, neighborhood.

Susan English lives and writes in Spokane. She summers in the Selkirk Mountains, where on clear nights satellites can be seen criss-crossing the Milky Way.

Jenni Fallein has co-hosted poetry circles with her husband, Roger Dunsmore, in China, Montana and now in Coeur d'Alene. She has published one volume of poems, *If Beauty Were a Spy* (Foothills Press). Jenni is also a painter and leads a monthly kirtan/music gathering at Garden Street School of Yoga.

Lucia Gregory resides in North Idaho. She approaches photography intuitively and works to discover uncommon beauty in everyday life. She shares images nearly daily via Instagram (@looshagee). <http://luciagregory.com>

Jeremy Hahn was born in Palo Alto, California, in 1996. Throughout his childhood, he showed a talent for creative writing, and through the encouragement of his friends and loving family, decided to pursue it.

Keoni A K T Harrison is a hairless ape that enjoys plenty of things that are none of your business.

Mika Maloney is Program Manager at Spokane Arts.

Jill Mikael was a teacher of the visually impaired for forty-four years and is now retired. She currently teaches yoga in Hayden, Idaho. Jill cherishes the time she was able to be with and care for her mother, who had dementia the last years of her life. Her mother Dorothy, who also wrote poetry, passed in April 2018.

Although **Maribel Martinez** did not pursue a degree at North Idaho College, she has enjoyed attending classes over the years. Her main interest was the pottery class with Professor Larry Clark. In addition, she enjoyed the dance programs and the swim training class with Lynne Pulizzi. For several semesters, she returned to the pottery class because it fed her need for self-expression. It was a great joyous space of creativity and community. As a lover of art, any time spent in the expression of creativity is important for her mental health and sense of well-being.

Another creative practice for her is photography. She loves capturing simple moments that express and measure her gratitude for life. It's an exercise of intuition and trust that the beauty and wonder of life shows up in simple ways. She strives to see the everyday moments around her with a new vision. Photography for her is a meditative practice, looking for the stillness in the moment.

She has a BFA degree from the University of Montana, 1995, focusing on painting. Currently she works for the Coeur d'Alene tribe at Marimn Health as a yoga and meditation instructor.

Elizabeth Mathes is an emerging poetry writer with one publication of a short story in a small Idaho literary magazine many years ago. She has been living in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, for close to thirty years. Professionally, she is a mental health counselor who has specialized in autism. She is married to a music instructor at NIC and composer. They have a twenty-eight-year-old son with autism whose residential care she directs. She taught as an adjunct psychology instructor at NIC for ten years. She has attended both poetry and prose classes at NIC.

Emma Parten grew up in Olympia: home of the weed lovers, buttoned up government workers, and ocean creature art parades. She moved to Idaho because of a pretty solid gut feeling and a need to escape her hometown after high school. She found a job, lived with her lovely family, and completed an associate's degree at NIC. She plans on finishing school someplace completely new, fresh, and scary to her, though she has a perpetually unmade mind and has no idea what she should study. So she'll keep working, reading, writing, and paying attention. She'll figure it out.

Kate Peterson's chapbook *Grist* won the Floating Bridge Prize and was published by Floating Bridge Press in 2016. Her poetry, prose, and interviews have been published in *Sugar House Review*, *Glassworks*, *The Sierra Nevada Review*, *Rattle*, *Willow Springs*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, and elsewhere. Kate is the director of Get Lit! Programs, home of Spokane's annual week-long literary festival.

Eli Poteet has spent the majority of their time reading books, playing in the dirt, or just laughing in general.

Danielle Estelle Ramsay is a queer woman born and raised in Spokane, Washington. She has been writing and performing poetry for over a decade on stages both local and national. She currently serves as Executive Director for Spokane Poetry Slam. Danielle is a pastor for poets and needs to be drinking tea at all times.

Cait Reynolds is a writer and visual artist residing in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. She has had poetry featured in several independent publications, participated in local group shows, and teaches printmaking classes. She's currently obsessed with history podcasts and dead celebrities.

June T. Sanders is a writer and photographer from the shrub steppes of Eastern Washington State. She lives there still. She holds an MFA from Washington State University and holds a BA in media disparity from Fairhaven College. Her work is about gender; dirt; expansions; home.

A lifelong lover of books, **M. N. Valentine** has been writing since she could hold a pencil. Her other hobbies include playing violin, photography, and collecting house plants. She writes mainly high fantasy and contemporary fantasy for a YA audience, and recently published her first novel, *The Council of Sorcery*. You can find her at mnvalentine.squarespace.com, on Instagram @mnvalentinebooks, and on Twitter @mnvalentine1.

Zoë Walsh is a writer living in the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. When she's not writing, she spends her time getting involved with her local community and hanging out with her cat, Patrick Swayze. She is a former editor of Trestle Creek Review, and her work was most recently featured in *The Ekphrastic Fantastic* gallery show at Emerge Art Gallery and online in *Hobart Pulp Magazine*.

Trestle | CREEK | Review

welcomes submissions of any genre of literary or creative work for its 2020 issue. Submissions of poetry (3-5 poems per submission), prose (5,000 words maximum), or black-and-white artwork (any style or medium) may be sent via email. We consider work by any member of the North Idaho College community—including students, faculty, staff, and alumni—and by residents of the Inland Northwest.

No previously published work can be considered, but simultaneous submissions are welcome. Please include a brief bio with your submission. More information and complete submission guidelines are available at our website, www.nic.edu/tcr. Submission deadline is **January 31, 2020**, for May publication.

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Established in 1982, Trestle Creek Review is published annually by the students and English Department of North Idaho College.