



# Trestle | CREEK | Review



**No. 37 | 2023**





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*Edward Flathers*

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## **KTNN 660 kHz**

In the thermosphere, beyond the Kármán line,  
the anacoustic zone: where air is too thin to vibrate,  
there is no sound.

By daylight, solar winds wash through,  
chaotic, electric, an invisible hurricane of fire.

At sunset, the eye of the storm,  
a calm that can carry a skywave.

Radio reflects off ionosphere,  
and nine hundred miles away, I hear the Voice of the Navajo Nation  
until morning, when the eyewall passes again.



**Diggers below**

We have a secret place, a nest of vetch  
 and vine enmeshed beneath a brow of fir,  
 discarded pallet for a floor behind  
 a screen of currant flowers blooming white.  
 A hunting blind in fall, though earlier  
 disused at least until the snow melts off  
 from southern aspects of the slopes along  
 the rim of Boulder Canyon's watershed.

Some nights we stay up, readying our packs  
 to venture out in pre-dawn murk among  
 the paperboys and drive the pickup truck  
 out quarry road to park it in the trees.  
 From there, we hike a mile in to find  
 our cloister, lay a blanket over rime,  
 ensconce ourselves with steaming thermoses  
 before the third shift rises from the depths.

Our vantage shows the diggers unobserved  
 emerging from the penetralia bored  
 into the mountain, fractured deep and hauled  
 away as gangue and ore and tailings waste.  
 We come to study them, to know of how  
 they drill and blast and scrape and muck the Earth  
 in stone a hundred million years from sun,  
 exposing secret places of their own.

**Standing beside Moira's potting shed the night she died**

A Radio Flyer half under the eaves of the backyard shed  
 collects rain water in dirty terracotta pots and plastic saucers,  
 and in the bottom of the wagon, too.  
 Propped against a pot, a trowel sheds muddy rivulets into debris beneath:  
 litter from the weeping willow, maple samaras, a ragged tennis ball.  
 The dog is buried behind the shed, though signs of him persist—  
 his rabies tag hangs on a ring of keys from a hook in the kitchen,  
 the letters worn away.

Silhouettes move against the light of the kitchen window  
 accompanied by a faint banging of pots and muted voices;  
 the company is gone, and I am getting cold.  
 The wagon, the garden implements, the keys—persist.  
 Mosquito larvae flit around in the bottom of one saucer, unsettled by the rain,  
 and I tip them onto the stones of the path before going inside.

## Greatest Treasure



## Bristol House

Let's say your name is Lillian Grace and you're five years old. There is no man of the house. You don't understand the look they give you when they hear that, but they always give it to you. They tell you how sorry they are.

You are not sorry. No matter how many times they cross their arms and look at you, tapping rulers against palms and pencils against desks, they do not make you sorry. Only your mother makes you sorry.

When she gets that look on her face and says "*Lili*," you are sorry then. Your mother looks at you like she wants to put her head in her hands, but adults don't do that in front of little kids, so she doesn't. You are very sorry then, and you take it all back.

Your mother is the best mother ever. You tell that to anyone who will listen, especially the ones who give you the look. She lets you eat dinner in front of the TV, and when it storms, she sits on the porch and lets you play in the rain. None of the other kids on the street get to come out and play in the rain. You stomp every possible puddle and laugh as mud and water splatter up your legs. Every so often, you look up at your mother and find her watching you with a look you don't understand, beer forgotten in her hand. She never puts her head in her hands, but you think she might want to. You think you understand the look they give you now.

A few years pass, and you're in elementary school. Your mother works more than she used to, and you think she is relieved. She never sits on the porch in the rain anymore, and you've stopped asking her to go outside with you when it does. You are not allowed to eat in front of the TV anymore. Now, you sit at the table with your mother. She sits on one side and stares at the door. You sit on the other side and stare at the wood grain.

You think maybe she is waiting for someone to come back. You think maybe you are waiting for her to get up and walk through it. So you lift your head, and you tell your mother you love her. You say it seriously, and it always brings a smile to her eyes. You think maybe if she remembers she loves you every day, she won't leave.

So you try your hardest to be a good daughter, a good kid. You don't think you're very good at it.

Now you ride your bike to school every day because your mother can't drive you anymore. You always forget to wear your helmet, and the teacher outside

the school always frowns at you when you lock your bike. One day, you are going to be late, but good kids aren't late, so you throw on the first pair of sneakers you touch. They're old and ripping out at the sides, but you make it to school on time.

Your teacher frowns at you when you slide into your seat, but she doesn't say anything. You're not sure what's wrong, or why Gemma Spencer keeps looking at your sneakers, and then at her own sparkly white Skechers. She sits in the desk right next to yours, and you don't like her very much. You like her less the more she wrinkles her nose at you. At lunch, your teacher pulls you aside. She asks you where your mother is, and she frowns when you tell her. She frowns all day. When school is over, your mother is there to pick you up. She puts your bike in the trunk and you get in the car. She begs you not to wear the sneakers again. Or your shorts. You promise you won't, but you don't understand why.

It's hard not to cry.

You're in junior high now, and your mother drove you to school today. She usually can't find the time, but today is the first day, so she makes an effort. "Please, Lili," she begs before you get out of the car, "just be good today." You don't know what that means anymore. But you promise anyway.

You don't make it to lunch.

In second period, Will Sebaaly called you fat, and you stood up and told him where to stick his opinion. Mrs. Gloucester didn't like that, and she sent you to the office. You sink low in the black plastic chair, arms crossed. One of the secretaries views you with pursed lips and a stern expression. She tells you there is a very strict no-bullying policy, with a pointed glance at the anti-bullying posters plastered across the wall above your head. You tell her there isn't because you get bullied all the time. She calls your mother. You probably shouldn't have used the word *motherfucker*, but you aren't sorry.

You're never sorry.

Principal Jenkins brings Will Sebaaly into the office during lunch and demands you apologize. You might have considered it, for your mother's sake, if he hadn't given you that smug look, standing a step behind stern and mustached Principal Jenkins. Instead, you write *FUCK YOU* in all caps on the backs of your hands and show him. Principal Jenkins makes you scrub your hands until they're red and you're crying, but still it doesn't come off.

When your mother gets there, you hide your hands behind your back. You sit in the car while she talks to Principal Jenkins, and you let yourself cry then, because nobody's there to watch you. You tell your mother you're sorry, and you think you actually are. She says, "Okay, baby," but you know she doesn't believe you.

She never believes you anymore.

\*

You're fifteen now, and you don't try to please your mother anymore. She doesn't come to the school anymore—you just sit in the office and count the cracks on the wall until the final bell rings. Last week, you cut all your hair off with a pair of scissors in the middle of biology, and you sat in the office for six hours. You feel like a king.

Your mother just sighs when you get home and attempts to wrangle the choppy ends into a neat line. You smell like smoke, and it's been dark for hours, but she doesn't ask where you were. You don't think she remembers she loves you.

On Friday when you steal a bottle of beer and a pack of smokes from her, you think she'll say something. You think you've finally made her care again. But she just sighs and shakes her head. You don't bother to come home Saturday.

Instead, you end up on a rooftop with Jesse Witherstone. You don't like Jesse very much—he has too many piercings and not enough manners, but he also has a six-pack of beer, so you let him stay. You play a game—how long can you make your mother worry before she calls you? Jesse plays another game—how many beers can I get Lili to drink before her mother calls?

That night, you sleep in a boy's bed for the first time.

You spend a lot of time with Jesse after that. Your mother doesn't know his name, and that's just the way you like it. You don't think she cares either way. She cares when you take her beer, and so you stop and just take smokes. Jesse brings a six-pack, and you meet on the roof of Bristol House almost every night.

Jesse teaches you how to blow smoke rings, and you laugh every time.

Sometimes someone will come out on the street, searching for the noise, and you'll lay down side-by-side on the roof, his breath warming your cheek. You try not to stare at his lip ring. He pretends not to notice, touches your choppy hair, and tells you you're the prettiest girl he knows.

The next night, you let him kiss you for the first time.

By the time you hit senior year, you're an addict. You like to drink, you like to smoke, but your drug of choice: Jesse Witherstone. You're pretty sure you're not going to graduate, but you don't care anymore. For your eighteenth birthday, Jesse takes you to get your belly button pierced. It hurts like a bitch, and you're pretty sure you chugged half a bottle of tequila in the car, but it is worth it to see Jesse smile.

You ride around in Jesse's car for hours, the thrum of the stereo pounding like a second heartbeat between you. The cool evening air lashes your bare skin like a whip, but you can't feel the cold. All you can feel is the heat of his hand where it holds yours on the console, pulse points pressed together, the pounding of your heart in your temples, the vibrations of your throat at the laughter you can't stop.

Anytime you stop there's another bottle to be opened, another cigarette to be lit. The night is quiet and the two of you race through it like the burning tail of a comet.

You think you might still be drunk when you wake up in Jesse's bed sometime later. Your phone has been quiet all night, and even though you wish it would light up, you know it won't. It's your birthday and your mother hasn't called. She knows you're sleeping somewhere, and that must be enough for her. You wish it were enough for you. You lie there and watch the numbers on your phone tick. 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, but it stays dead and quiet.

With each decisive *tick*, something inside you grows quieter and quieter. You don't know what it is. You're pretty sure you need it. You're pretty sure it's too late to matter. The pressure in your temples grows, and you're surprised you haven't already crumpled like a tin can. The thrum of Jesse's heartbeat against your back is a steady and slow rhythm, but you can't hold onto even that. The world is slipping further and further through your fingers, and you lie there in the dark until you slip too far. You slide out from underneath Jesse's arm and climb out the window without making a sound. You leave your phone on the nightstand.

You don't remember climbing up here, but when you stand up on the edge of Bristol House's roof, you know three things:

1. Your mother doesn't love you.

You think maybe she did once. You're not sure anymore. The combination of tequila and cigarettes made your head blissfully fuzzy for a few hours, but now it's like the inside of a vacuum. You wonder what your father's face looks like. You wonder why you aren't cold. You think maybe you're too drunk—or maybe you're too lucid. You sway in the wind.

2. The world is awfully small.

You can see the glimmer of the gym's lights—the basketball team always meets extra early on Tuesdays. You think of all the useless trivia in your brain. You can see the lightpost outside your mother's house from here. You're pretty sure she can't see you. You're pretty sure she doesn't care. But not totally sure; you're still standing here. You don't hear the rooftop door open behind you.

3. You have never seen fear in another human being before.

Jesse looks afraid for you. You didn't think it was possible to scare Jesse Witherstone, but you've been drinking—or maybe you've gone too long without drinking—so you don't think he is scared. You're not sure. This moment feels like a novelty, a rare and beautiful gift from the universe in a final, fragmented moment. You don't let Jesse pull you down off the ledge until he starts to cry.

You've never seen Jesse cry before.

He wraps his arms around you, and the sensation is a foreign one. You think you're supposed to wrap your arms around him too, and so you do. He

refuses to let go, and for the first time since you were five years old, you don't *think* somebody loves you. You know. You think you might collapse. You know he won't let you. He makes you promise to stay alive, and for the first time in your life, you don't promise to try. You promise you will.

When the two of you finally hit solid ground again, he doesn't let go of your hand. You don't think he can, so you lace your fingers together tightly, and you don't let go either. It's not far to Jesse's house, but you walk slow, and the sun peaks over the street before you make it. The street is still and calm, and when you smile at him, it feels real. This moment feels real. The vacuum in your head is finally quiet.

It's been six weeks since Jesse found you on the roof of Bristol House. It's nine p.m. on a Friday night, but for once you don't feel the need to be anywhere else. You're sprawled on the floor of Jesse's bedroom, surrounded by old vinyl records and biology homework.

You know there are plenty of other places Jesse could be on a Friday night, but he's playing videogames in the corner from his beanbag chair. He doesn't like to leave you alone at night anymore. You think he might be scared for you, so you try to prove he doesn't have to be. There's a glass of water near your elbow, and you haven't touched a cigarette in weeks.

He holds your hand at night, even in sleep, and you listen to him breathe. You like lying under Jesse's comforter, you like the smell of his t-shirt and the music posters on the walls. Here, you feel safe, cocooned in a bubble of metal bands and Old Spice.

He skips his physics class to wait outside of yours, and he smiles every time you walk through the door. You know he's worried about you, so you smile and try to tell him you're alright in the ways you can.

You are afraid to tell him you love him.

You graduate high school.

Your mother didn't think you could do it, and honestly, you didn't either. But she shows up, and you think maybe it's not too late to make her love you. Jesse holds your hand the entire time you're on the stage, and when you smile, it's real. Your promise is a mantra.

*Stay alive. Stay alive. Stay alive.*

Your mother tells you she's proud of you. You're not quite sure you believe her, but you promise to come home tonight.

It's five p.m., and you're standing in your mother's driveway for the first time in. You're not sure how to feel. Your cap and gown are rolled up into a messy ball,

tucked under one arm. You're pretty sure you were supposed to return them, but a not-so-small, gleeful part of you couldn't help it. You wanted a reminder, something to hang in your closet and point to.

The gravel of the driveway looks dirtier than it used to, and the porch sags a little. Your mother is nowhere in sight, but the porch light is on, so you pull the key out from under the mat and let yourself in. It feels wrong, like maybe you should knock, and you hesitate before you walk inside.

You don't hang your coat by the door, and you don't kick off your shoes into the pile next to the shoe rack. You have a graduation gown under your arm, and you feel out of place, like you're walking into a stranger's home, unsure of the etiquette.

Your palms feel sweaty, and you miss the feeling of Jesse's hand in yours. You tell yourself not to call him, to keep your promises. So you step away from the door and walk towards the hallway, toward the lone light underneath your mother's bedroom door. You duck under the rickety stairs that lead up to the little loft bedroom you haven't slept in for so long you've forgotten what it looks like. You pause before the door, not sure if you're supposed to knock. Not sure what your place is at all. You touch the door with your fist and it swings open silently.

Your mother is crying.

She jerks like a doll on a string when the door opens. She folds the paper in her hands in half, but you don't need to see it to know what it's a picture of. You don't ask to see it.

You've never been brave enough to ask to see it.

Your mother wipes her tears away with the back of her sleeve, and she manages to smile at you. You don't think you smile back. You think you might be staring at her hands.

"Did he love you?"

That wasn't the question you were supposed to ask. You were supposed to say something like "Hi, Mom" or maybe even, "Do you love *me*, Mom?"

You don't ask questions about him.

Ever.

She sets the picture down and turns to face you. You feel like running. You don't think she's going to answer you. You're relieved. Until—

"I like to believe he did."

The words are out there, hanging between you, among the other, unspoken ones: *Did he love me, Mom? Did you?* You know you need to say something—anything—but you can't. You can't stop staring at the crinkled and stained back of the photograph. You picture your mother's face like it was when she would sit on the porch and watch you jump in puddles in a rainstorm. You think maybe she was happier then. That maybe she still believed he'd come back.

You're not sure you ever believed it.

"Lillian, your father—" she begins, but you flinch like you've been struck. Those are the words that were taboo within these walls, the ghost that sat between you at the dinner table. And the unspoken rule: If you did not look at it, if you did not acknowledge it was there, you could both pretend it wasn't there, and that this home was made of something other than holes.

There is a deep sadness etched into your mother's face. You wonder why you didn't notice it before. This version of your mother is one you have never confronted before, and facing it now feels as if the room is sliding out from under you sideways. She shakes her head, and just like that, you feel steady again.

Disregard. Disappointment. You are comfortable again because you understand her edges again.

"You are so very much like him," she whispers. She whispers it again. You are not sure she's talking to you anymore. You think maybe this is why she cannot look at you for long without looking away.

The silence stretches between you like a vast ocean until you find the wherewithal to remove your hands from your pockets, to step fully into the room. You hand her your house key. You don't know why, but you think *she* might because her eyes fill with tears again. You don't think this is what you want. You don't think you can do anything else.

You keep your promise—you spend the night.

And in the morning, you go up to your little loft bedroom and fill a box with your coats and shoes and concert t-shirts.

You leave your bike in the driveway.



et cetera



newton should have simply eaten the apple

there is something sleeping beneath the hunger  
more real than the hunger itself—its branches  
flagellate in memory's electric empty—lava  
lamp slow in the dim glow // you were watching  
a documentary on sedimentary rocks / when  
you conjectured either there was nothing, finally  
in the center, or the center itself was irrelevant,  
composed, as it was, solely of lightmatter repressed  
into stone. ever since, this thought has slept in you  
like a dog who has spent his whole night pacing  
beneath rain clouds, sniffing the mud, hoping  
to catch the scent of a bone he'd buried days ago.  
this thought pangs in you as you begin to wonder  
what it means to feel full—as if you've somehow  
found you've found yourself hollowed like a log  
ran through by the sleepy waltz of termites, dub  
slow in the haze of the already-antiquated morning.  
but even the sun, as it rises, dense & hostile, grasps,  
pulls everything it can towards its center, until  
one day it collapses in, finally, on itself, having  
finally had its fill &/or vacated its pit of longing.



### the dinosaurs will never roam the earth again

i'm done chasing you like a child  
 chases a blood red balloon,  
 faster & faster, until  
 he's breathless & heaved  
 over the grand canyon, begging  
 for an inhaler & as he watches  
 that plastic object float  
 hopelessly over the chasm—  
 wisdom, should you need me,  
 you can come find me, exactly  
 where you left me: helplessly  
 drunk, howling the name  
 of my dead brother over  
 the bones of every reptile  
 buried beneath me. even  
 now i hear them stirring—  
 the eldritch crack of their  
 backs as they rise from stones,  
 shaking off the melodic rust  
 from millennia of dead dreams—  
 righteous & angry for a moment,  
 as if straining to recall the shape  
 of a comet you wanted so desperately  
 to wish upon, if only you hadn't blinked—  
 before they crumble back down  
 into the quiet dirt they crawled  
 into when their large hearts  
 finally popped.

### i would sever the roots myself if i had my grandfather's axe

seven miles & still counting  
 the stars in the rearview. my body  
 refuses what my mind rejects  
 so i dream more than i sleep  
 but each morning in the silent light of dawn

words fail to open my mouth  
 as if i'm unable to grasp the gravity  
 of a day & in the first bokeh look  
 at the tree outside my window  
 i see only a ghost that says  
*one day, certainly,*

*you'll lay*

*in this bed*

*for the last time.*

but i refuse to speak of all those days  
 piled up behind me, hazy-eyed  
 like my grandfather who has grown  
 tired of driving his scooter in circles.  
 like him, i have no sense of direction  
 other than

*maddeningly*

*to the end.*

perhaps it is a kindness to lose  
 your mind at the end of it all,  
 a way of settling down into oblivion—  
 a gradual vignetting, a black that keeps  
 forgetting, a tree that, despite its roots,  
 has never known its home.

## Winter Design



## Autobiography as an Idahoan Botanical Index

SAGEBRUSH	Shocks of frosted green across browning foothills. Patches of shade where dried-out rabbits go to die.
HEINEMANN'S MOSS	Coats riverbeds in an alkaline glaze: slipping hazards for unsuspecting waders. <sup>1</sup>
GOLDEN LOCUST	Two rows of leaves branching from the same stem—more yellow than green. In fall they scatter like a gold blanket across the lawn. <sup>2</sup>
LAVENDER	Spouting in bushels from the corner of the block. Stalks spill with honeybees drinking deep from smoky flowers.
LAMB'S EAR	Blooms of peachfuzz. Proliferative and invasive <sup>3</sup> and a pleasure to come across on a walk. Look with your hands.
IRIS	Great beards that hang from puckered lips. <sup>4</sup> Fuzzy tongues inside goad licks of pollen from bugs eager to feast.

1 The creek behind my house gurgles from a black plastic tube, poorly concealed behind skeletal bushes. We used to float leaves down it, chasing them as they sloshed around bends and hurtled towards the unknown beyond a grated pipe.

2 When I was seven, my dad took a chainsaw to the tree that stood out front. He replaced it with a sapling, barely taller than I was. It was the same year bulldozers flattened the cow pasture west of our subdivision to make room for new development. They were my younger siblings: the tree and those houses, but they outgrew me fast.

3 *Stachys byzantia* is from Iran but finds no trouble thriving in the arid heat of southwest Idaho.

4 My great grandma grew irises in her yard, haphazardly strewn about the flowerbed like weeds. When Grandmother died, my sister pillaged the flowers looking for any pieces of her that might have been left buried in the bark. She took two of the wilting plants home with her.

mea culpa



West Lamme Street, Bozeman

Childhood memories  
now a parking lot  
diesel shop across the alley  
gone, too  
the old backyard shed  
held  
garden tools and sawhorses  
that took  
a saddle our grandfather, Baba,  
once rode on daily  
business  
and we climbed on to dream  
of actual horse muscle  
bucking us into dust  
and wind  
laundry flapping  
on the clothesline  
saddle leather creaking  
the summer sun.

21 June 2022  
Bozeman, Montana

## Cork

The night I heard Mommy cry into the phone  
 I knew you had died and for weeks  
 after that I tried to find you in the mirror, probing  
 my pudgy face for evidence of your high cheekbones  
 and searching for your porcelain skin beneath my patches of  
 freckles. I remembered that time when Mommy called you  
*Black Irish*, so I used black crayon for my hair in my  
 kindergarten self-portrait and when the kids on the bus  
 still called me Carrot Top I cried because they were mean  
 and you were gone and nobody could tell me how long  
 I would remember that you always had lollipops in  
 your purse and ice cream for dessert and bowls of  
 hard candy that looked just like jewelry and eyes  
 that crinkled into moons because I made you happy.

Fifteen years later I walked through Cork and saw you  
 on every corner, crossing the street in sensible shoes,  
 speeding by on a bicycle, shopping for groceries in a  
 bright red shawl. When I gave the man in the laundry  
 your maiden name he laughed: *Yes, every third person  
 here is named that. You're swimming in her gene pool.*

I paddled around. The water was warm.  
 But I still felt like a tourist.

## If only it could be

the right-handed glove left  
 on the gravel road  
 with no recollection of its other hand

the sun collecting  
 in the forest basin  
 that shoos along the morning mist

a dust bunny born of skin  
 nesting under the couch  
 okay without its congenital soul

not catastrophic:  
 the loss of me  
 for you  
 my thirty-year-old son  
 with a forty IQ



### Exacto Knives

The art instructor hands out exacto knives  
 instructs us to cut our favorite part  
 from our newly painted canvases  
 Weapons in hand, we are tempted,  
 by the casual lie, to consider anything—  
 this well-shadowed blue drapery  
 rather than slit the throat  
 on the portrait, my lovely girl

I recall this shocking assignment  
 as they tow away my wrecked car  
 brilliant red with beige leather seats  
 precious office on wheels  
 my mobile sanctuary  
 an escape from the ordinary  
 smashed to rubble

My daughter-in-law waves speeding cars  
 past the scattered debris  
 while I gingerly clutch my chest  
 ask through staccato breaths  
 if everyone is okay  
 The lanky young man whose car I hit  
 rubs his knees, gives me a hug  
 says *these things happen*

Yes, *these things*:  
 An unbeatable grandpa abruptly dead  
 after a rousing game of tennis  
 An old friend who held the center  
 where we all gathered—a place  
 even the hummingbirds knew

Now simple empty sky  
 where pigments once held  
 and here, it is a busy littered street

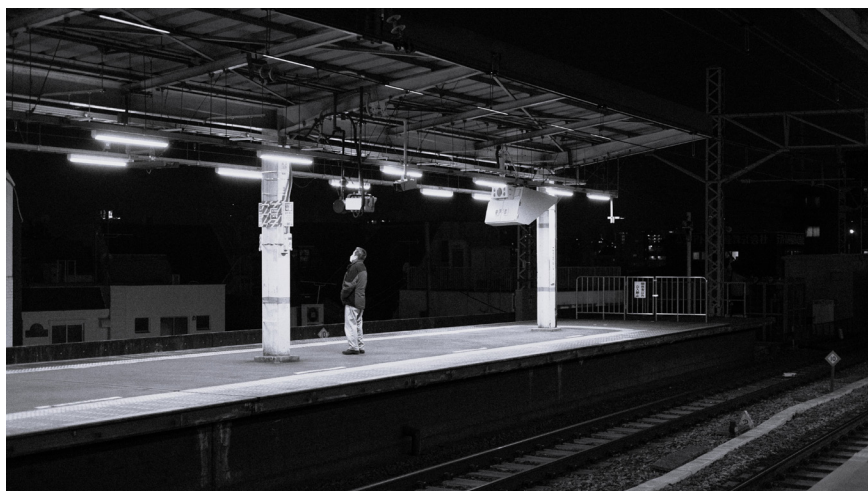
You knew I would tell you  
 how lucky I am to be in the ER

It will be a fractured sternum  
 the bony plate  
 that protects one's heart

*Displacement*, the doctor says  
 as she reads the echocardiogram,  
 but perhaps she means, *opening*.



## Man, that pillar sure is interesting



## Whisper

いま確かに生きている。 Right now, you are surely alive.  
 その実感を体中で受け止めてください。 Take this feeling into your whole body.  
 寒さや暑さ、痛みさえも、 Cold, heat, even pain,  
 生きている実感としてとらえてください。 Treat these as the true feelings of being alive.

— 枅野 俊明、曹洞禅の僧侶と作庭「明日への思い」

Masuno Shunmyō, Sōtō Zen priest and landscape artist, “Thoughts for Tomorrow”

## Izu

When we arrive in the Japanese city of Izu, it is past six o’clock in the evening. Izu is a twenty-first century conglomeration of four historic towns: Shuzenji, Toi, Nakaizu, and Amagiugashima, all within the prefecture of Shizuoka. Izu shares its name with the mountainous peninsula engulfing it, west of Tokyo on the Pacific Coast. The area where my husband and I are camping is southwest of Shuzenji Station. We step outside onto the open street, and I orient myself. A flat, clear compass hangs from an orange cord around my neck; nothing grounds me more than this.

We stroll through downtown, a paved set of streets lined with tiny, three-story buildings cloistered together. The sky is a burnt orange, the light fading fast. We walk towards the setting sun. I check my compass at a crossroads, lead us south. Along the narrow road, I spot bus stop signs, but I cannot discern whether any route is still running at this time of day. We continue on foot, but not fifteen minutes pass before a white bus with colorful stripes appears.

The bus driver seems to pick us up between stops, halting suddenly when he notices us walking by the roadside. We are visibly *gaijin*: foreigners, likely lost and confused. The doors fold apart noisily, and the driver looks at me expectantly as I put one foot up on the first step to lean in.

“Yasutake?” This is the street closest to our destination. The driver nods, and I wave my husband onto the bus. We set our heavy backpacks down on the floor. An LED monitor is mounted above the driver’s seat, listing street-names with numbers underneath. I search the board for the two *kanji* used to write Yasutake, which means “cheap bamboo.” I find it with the number three hundred below it: six hundred yen for the two of us.



When our stop comes, I step up to the coin machine beside the driver's seat to pay our fare. I eye the slots, a thousand yen note in my hand. The bus driver directs me to feed my bill through the machine, which then spits out coins like a spigot. I thank him, thinking it has already deducted my fare, but he corrects me right away. He is straightforward and a bit surly; it is the end of this man's long, long workday, and I boarded this bus oblivious and unprepared. He picks the correct fare out from the coins in my open hands, the first and last time anyone in Japan handles money this way with me.

I thank him again, very sincerely, and join my husband on the sidewalk.

There are times in Japan when someone is a little harsh, abrupt, impatient, or stern with me; I imagine most Americans would find this rude, offensive, or unkind. I find it endearing. There is an honesty to their frustration: there are social expectations I have not met, and they are not pretending otherwise. They are clear with me, their motives uncomplicated.

I am a foolish foreigner. I try to ease their frustration as best I can by being humble, patient, and properly grateful for their help. Somehow, I feel more welcome in this country when I am scolded than when people anxiously act as though I did not cause a problem.

Twilight. Yasutake is a long, straight road through rice fields. The scent of blooming rice floats in the air; the clear sound of water running through the paddies accompanies our footsteps. The constant, comforting hum of cicadas wraps us around like a blanket. The sky is a color I have no name for.

Our campground is nestled against a bend in the Kano River. I lie down in our tent, and the sound of the river runs right through me, grounding and constant. The cool, soft earth against my back is amiable, welcoming my weight and shape. The smell of grass pollen and fresh water permeate the space. Cicadas cry. Through the open top of the tent, I stare straight ahead at the brightening stars in an impossibly clear sky, and bliss fills my body like a waterfall fills a cup.

When my husband lies down beside me, I wrap myself around him. A slow sigh rolls out from the depths of my chest like I have set down a load I never knew I carried.

### *Togakushi*

Halfway through our trip, we camp for three nights at Myōkō-Togakushi Renzan National Park, located in Nagano Prefecture within the Chūbu region of Japan.

The campground lies at the base of Mount Togakushi, a densely forested mountain with a 1,904-meter craggy peak. The area is rich in history: its five Shinto shrines and adjoining village have roots going back to at least the seventh century CE. Although the Meiji Restoration enforced a legal separation of the religions in 1868 CE, indigenous Shinto mythology and local folk religion intermingled freely with introduced Buddhist practices for centuries; the mountain-based ascetic sect known as Shugendō synthesized all these elements. Within this history, Mount Togakushi is a sacred site. Once I venture into its depths, I discover this truth for myself.

American culture often portrays “the wild” as something to fear and conquer; a realm apart from human civilization, which we challenge to prove ourselves. Yet, in much of Japan, nature is integrated as a part of the human experience. Although the land itself is new to me, what is most unexpected is how the physical presence of nature is treated. There is a reverence, an intimate affection for nature. Shrines are built within natural landscapes not to change them, but to honor them. The footpath to a shrine leads you deep into the forest to reveal what wanderers long ago understood: the arresting, enigmatic beauty within.

We embark on our pilgrimage to each of the five Shinto shrines, a journey said to bring good luck. The first, Hōkōsha, sits atop a strikingly steep, green hill that juts out of the mountainous surroundings. I crane my neck to catch sight of it from below, but even the tips of its arched roof are hidden in the dense cedar canopy. There is a unique feeling to these spaces, as landscape architect Kurisu Hoichi describes, “You want to go, but you cannot see the way.”

Steep stone stairs stand before me, leading straight up. I pass through the *torii*, a gate which heralds the presence of a shrine somewhere ahead. My husband and I purify ourselves at the *temizuya*, a small pavilion sheltering an ever-flowing basin of water, and walk in between the *komainu*, a pair of lion-dog guardian statues. We climb Hōkōsha's stone steps, two hundred and seventy in total, and breathe in its pure air. At the top, we offer our efforts, our coins, and our prayers to the spirits.

By the end of the day, there are only two shrines we have yet to visit: Ōkusha and Kuzuryūsha, seated together at the base of the mountain. Ōkusha is said to grant good fortune and answer prayers; Kuzuryūsha honors the patron spirit, or *kami*, of the village—a nine-headed dragon. In Japan, dragons are associated with water. Here, the dragon is a bringer of rainfall, a blessing for the buckwheat harvest. They wait for us at the end of a long dirt path guarded by ancient cedar trees, some four centuries old. We set off in the late afternoon after walking for hours in the humid summer heat. Exhaustion runs bone-deep through our aching bodies. Wet, sore, and sun-scorched, still we persist.



I run my hands along the base of a cedar tree, touching mere centimeters of its endless, upright wood, which reaches beyond the sky I can see. The woodgrain aligns with the grooves of my fingerprints, the marks on me constantly renewed by cellular regeneration. The smoothness of the bark, the knowledge of its ancientness, and the bright scent of wild grass on the breeze captivate me. My body hums with awe.

There is a tangible sense of being nature's guest. I am a visitor not only to this country, but to each natural space I meet. I must acquaint myself, be respectful, polite. I watch, listen, and learn how to talk with it. In Japanese, personal introductions include the standard phrase, "*Yoroshiku onegai shimasu.*" This is often translated as, "Please treat me well."

I walk the dirt path with my husband by my side, passing between the sentinel cedars. In my mind, I ask the mountain for permission and benevolence on my journey.

I cannot tell you what I find in these woods. Trees, shrubs, and flowers whose names I do not know linger here; eons of erosion and rainfall have carved the mountain's smile. The forest at the foothill of Mount Togakushi bears down on me, like it wants to whisper in my ear. I can try to tell you the color of the light through the trees, the scent on the wind, the thick quiet that echoes deep into the mountain, but these words cannot teach you the shape of its spirit.

Sometimes when I stand in nature, I want to cry. Kurisu Hoichi once said that nature allows us to find our true selves: the deeper we delve into nature, the more of ourselves we reveal.

In the hot afternoon sun, I face Kagami-ike, the Mirror Pond. On a clear day, it reflects Mount Togakushi as a perfect mirror-image. Today, there is a light breeze. The water quivers, its reflections hazy and soft. Standing at the water's edge, scattered pieces of myself catch in the light and move through the waves, diffused. Where the ripples meet, there is no distinction between the mountain and my own image.

## Zigging

Nowhere to dabble,  
daft drakes waddle  
along an iced-over pond,  
all of them quacking low,  
like they know, making snow  
covered tracks, reckless  
convolutions toward

shore, spun like ground spinners  
dragging fresh powder zagging,  
their paddle-waggled web steps,  
the topstitch from the old Singer,  
the apprentice pedal gone wild.

**carpe diem**



**Hope**

Emily called hope “the thing with feathers.”  
But maybe hope is a thing with tentacles,  
a pearly white octopus lying low with you  
in a salty tide pool just out of sight.

Hope uncurls, beckons, brushes your cheek  
and says, softly, *it's not so bad.*  
Hope, kindly, nudges your face toward light.

## Bent Grass River

Sadie the dog drags one leg  
sideways like a hurt duck

The river rolls brown June  
the mountains come to town

So much bird song  
who needs a radio

It might have rained  
but sunshine keeps warming us up

Blue dog follows Ben-boy  
back to the house for more coffee

One of us has a wicked hangover  
others are glad we left before the whiskey appeared

Scot and I knock down oyster mushrooms  
from on high in a dead cottonwood

with a sharp stick  
Carry them home in his shirt

All I can smell is the stench of woods  
and coffee spilled in the grass

The insect buzz is stronger than  
the traffic across the river

Someone has to help Sadie  
get out of the big brown river

Uncrumpled bird song  
slides over the seething water

*Spring runoff along the Bitterroot River  
Writing workshop with the Bent Grass Poetry Troupe*

## Optimism

There was that woman told me  
she'd left the USA five times in search of a perfect country,  
after hearing me say I'd left on a Yugoslavian  
freighter, 1966, thinking I'd never come back—  
so pissed at the war in Vietnam.  
“Are you an optimist?” she asks.

I think of the Cree, starving amidst  
vast herds of cattle on the same land  
they'd once hunted vast herds of buffalo—  
natural boundaries now replaced by private property.  
The Crees, herded by Lieutenant Black-Jack Pershing  
into railroad cars for deportation,  
the 1890s—those Crees who'd survived  
starvation by eating coyote carcasses  
poisoned by ranch hands and dumped into  
local ravines. How's a poisoned coyote  
taste to a starving Indian  
soon to be relocated  
amidst a brutal Montana winter?

But then again, there was Nicholas Black Elk  
in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean  
giving me something to return to:  
He and his father giving back to the wild  
the carcass of one of two deer they'd killed,  
in gratitude, and remembering the porcupines  
huddled, whimpering, against their teepee  
through a freezing night.

Dear woman searching for a perfect country,  
of course I'm an optimist.  
Pessimism is strong poison.

Find your perfect country  
in the spiral nebula of your own heart.  
Ask what you need  
to give back.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**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*, *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, and in anthologies published by Thoughtcrime Press and the Spokane County Library District.

**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, in September 2019. 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 three times. Currently, he is beginning his ninth year of staple-gunning the work of other poets monthly to utility poles and in small businesses in his Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, neighborhood.

**Serafina Dwyer** is a comic artist, writer, musician, theatre costumer, and avid birder. A small town citizen who loves to travel, Serafina is drawn to rural landscapes and the interesting experiences found within them. Self-taught in Japanese, Serafina translates comics and music for fun in her free time; she visited Japan with her husband in 2018 and looks forward to returning someday soon. She will be graduating with an Associate of Arts in Theatre from North Idaho College in Spring of 2023.

**Jenni Fallein** is a poet, painter and teacher of Neelakantha Meditation in Coeur d'Alene, ID. She has one volume of poems entitled *If Beauty Were a Spy*, published in 2012 by Foothills Press. She has published poems in various other collections including *Civilization in Crisis* (Foothills 2021), *Poems Across the Big Sky* (Many Voices Press 2007), and recently was interviewed for the Montana Poets Youtube series with Montana poet laureate, Mark Gibbons. She is married to Roger Dunsmore and together they host a poetry circle in their home.

**Edward Flathers** is a forestry researcher in the Inland Northwest and an alumnus of the University of Idaho, where he studied both creative writing and natural resources. He has the privilege of working in nature, which is often inspiration for his poetry.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Former Trestle Creek Review co-editor **Farley Egan Green**, from Spokane, rediscovered poetry a few years back after retiring from a communications career. She says she writes for the pleasure of working with words and sounds, to tell stories, and sometimes to help make sense of difficult experiences. She has published in literary journals, a couple of collections and her high school alumni magazine, which could hardly turn her down.

**Susan Hodgins**, a Louisiana native, is a retired English teacher who lives with her husband, D'Wayne Hodgins, and their two housecats, Lucy and Dodger; she is a founding member of her poetry writing group called the Fort Russell Writers. Susan has also served as Moscow's second poet laureate, 2018–2021. Through her career, she has been a longtime advocate for Idaho Poetry Out Loud, and she is currently filling a long-term substitute position at Paradise Creek Regional High School in Moscow.

**Elizabeth Mathes** has lived most of her sixty-two-year life in North Idaho. She has published poetry in small literary presses across the United States. Professionally, she is a counselor headed full steam towards retirement. She is married to a retired music educator and composer. She has an adult son with autism who lives with them. The natural wonder of North Idaho and her family most often inspires her writing.

Although **Maribel Martinez Mogilefsky** 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.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Helen Parsons [cover artist]** is a self-taught, process-driven, multi-disciplinary artist with a focus in fiber arts. With forty-five-plus years in textile exploration and as a life-long student of contemporary art, her work ranges from large ethereal installations to bold silhouettes in rich texture.

Parsons's intent is to investigate and document humanity by way of deconstruction and reconstruction. Recent work explores narratives of graffiti culture, sense of place, and the complexities of wanting to be both anonymous and acknowledged.

Parsons's work is collected internationally and is in private and public collections. She is a twenty-year resident of Spokane, Washington, where she is a gallery curator, full-time artist, and an active community arts advocate.

**E. Poteet** is a nonbinary queer resident of North Idaho, intent on creating safe spaces and spreading laughter; they love to make pickles, play in the dirt, read, and participate in creative expression.

**Erik Rockey** is from Western Washington, but over the summer he was going to school in Japan and decided to buy his first digital camera. He likes taking pictures with it. It's fun!

**Lydia Selph** is a student at North Idaho College. While not photographing sunsets and reading good books, she spends her days watching them and writing them.

**Hannah Strickland** is currently a student majoring in theatre at NIC. She adores all things artistic. Whether it's performative, visual, industrial, or musical, she has a passion for the arts in every regard. She especially loves exploring B&W photography for its unique look and feel.

**Mason Stubbs** is an undergraduate at the College of Idaho. He is currently studying animal biology, literature, and creative writing. His family is from the Inland Northwest, where he visits often during the holidays.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**David E. Thomas** grew up on Montana's Hi-Line, earned a degree in political science from the University of Montana, then jumped into the cultural melee of the '60s and '70s with both feet. He has worked as a gandy dancer on railroad maintenance gangs and a laborer on big construction projects like Libby Dam while pursuing an interest in literature fueled by Jack Kerouac and the Beats. He has published seven books of poetry. The latest, *Afternoon Stroll*, is available from FootHills Publishing. He has appeared in several anthologies and many small magazines. He lives and works in Missoula, Montana.

**taylor d. waring** is a multimedia artist, content creator, and educator based in Spokane, Washington.

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# Trestle | CREEK | Review

welcomes submissions of any genre of literary or creative work for its 2024 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 Pacific 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](http://www.nic.edu/tcr). Submission deadline is **January 31, 2024**, for May publication.

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