

BRUCE RICE

Into the Wind

1

This is no place to be if you hate
weather, when lightning opens a crack of light

above the Lost Horse Hills—story of a mare that ran off,
wagons raided by Indians while the settlers were searching
and it saved their lives.

I am here for the last time with my brother, though neither of us knows it. He has shrunken
into an old man in an exile that is mostly his own. No more reading Goethe, translated
word for word with a second-hand dictionary. No more doggerel
delivered at midnight to the mailbox of the prettiest girl in town.

He is full of apologies now. It's in his eyes as he studies a rubbing stone that comes
to his waist. Just like we used to, we walk the brow of the coulee
looking for arrowheads. What I don't know is he's making his peace.

2

This is where he last stood, to the west of a lowland.
Who do the dead belong to? What is left

in the chosen place where ash is blown
or falls unexpectedly within a few feet because there is no wind
and we're not used to doing this, and what we scatter is gone for good, though we can't
scatter everything.

3

Thirty years on, I still hear him reciting as he scribbles a line; it helps me remember his voice,
the angle-iron frames of our beds, the yellow room and the stale air
when the aluminum window iced up in winter.

He paced as he spoke, the way I sometimes pace. What's
burned into me now is how big the moon was out in the yard
though the world didn't know it.

You could see everything, a pathway
of spilled stars—if you looked at it right you could see
we are all upside down, ready to fall off the earth.

Other times, I could tell something was coming that parents can't
or won't hear, like the rumble of a train a long way off gathering speed.

4

I sleep with my brothers down by the river. We pack our gear in the morning,
walk with no water and stop at a farm. The woman
looks at us funny, says, "Get your own drink out of the well."

My brothers fight as the road rises. We are lined up by age. They are playing a game they call
Double the Rent. One hits Two. Two hits Three, twice.

From milepost to milepost, I study them hard, like mathematics or retribution.
One day the one in the middle
will welcome the way death rolls toward him, headlights and rain.

5

I clear out his books. *Theorems of Euclid*. I expected that. But not the rare
first poems of my old writing teacher, *Dream Craters*,
thin and dusty, and I think how he would have read it, set himself
the chore of learning the book he got for free, until it became a kind of face
that he wore for a while.

6

We walked into the gap in the hills. He spoke a few words into the frail silence,
but really, nothing was said.

7

I am home for winter break. It is forty-two below in the warmest
part of the day. Tree-splitting cold.
I take my brother's snowshoes out of the porch, trek to the bluff.
I find coins of blood, white tufts of fur in a circle of churned-up snow.

All I can think is, I have come too far, but that is not what my brother
would say, so I shield my face and press on,
dogleg to the coulee through the unbroken snow, to the dam.

Wind hisses like red metal shoved into water. Deep snow out on the fallow.
I stumble the last hundred yards to the road, shuck off the harnesses.
Each stride jolts my frozen legs. A mile to the house, but I make it.

Weather exists. Horizons exist. Cold or storm,
it's the scale of the thing, a creaking barn that will not fall down.
The small range of hills, barely a bump on the land.