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Bozeman Creek

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BOZEMAN CREEK

It starts up in the Hyalites
where elk dab their
tongues and run quick on rocks
down through farms sparse then
thick to developments
then town. All of this in ten
miles packs history to an instant
lesson where the pupils are awed
by the teacher's knowledge but
never learn.

The fast water moves to undercut
meadows to parks then beneath
pavement, buildings, old houses,
railroad tracks, then out to join
the slower streams and rivers
rip-rapped with broken concrete
and old cars.

In town the law leaves fishing
to the children, so they learn best.
One might drift a worm under
the tire store, the Eagles Bar,
the bank parking lot, the old hotel
and catch brook trout: pale, thin
memories of cutthroats that
lie upstream or prophesies of survival
in rough German browns that burrow
downstream in the carcasses
of rusted out cars.

One spring the stream took two
girls fresh from drink at the Eagles
and pulled them under downtown Bozeman
where they died
in the range of those dim brook trout.

It is spring again and the water comes cold, hard and fast from where the elk dips to where these ghosts hold firm in the current under the old hotel waiting for the children.