

# CutBank

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## Two Poems

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## LAKE COUNTY ELEGY

The creek loops the town  
with a splay of stone —  
each year's melt gouging a new bed  
& shrinking to a thread of scum.  
Bull pine & scrub oak — I walk  
bluff-backed to the wind,  
long-armed to water & the granite  
grained smooth like skin.

Turning old faces  
I look for the cut of water —  
the year the boom failed,  
a marriage dried onto the rocks  
cold sheets, stiff back, or  
the promise that keeps me coming back  
like a 78 with a divot, the skip, the skip  
Caruso of the static  
singing arias to the days of full houses & cooking smells,  
a child's pride in a dream of when the mines  
were worked, the houses built,  
the wagon trip west.

The Mirabel's timbered mouth  
gapes like a rusted can  
& the blood  
thinned in the hard thirties  
curdles as the myths  
trickle like rust from a junked car,  
the mottled skin of the old  
pocking so thin  
the wind blows through.

God! how many points of stone  
plot our turnings — more  
our being turned — the tumble  
& slide honing the curve of granite  
a flash of mica  
& the glint like eyes & gone.

**F.S.A.  
DOCUMENTARY PHOTOS OF THE THIRTIES**

Light burns an instant  
through the lens  
as the shutter blades cut  
& the salts steam recognition —  
glass plate like a leaf of grass  
processing toward the harvest  
of ash, the feast  
of gray light  
& two dimensional flesh.

I look through these images  
like some fat-bodied sybil,  
some new-styled Ma Joad  
hunched by the woodstove in a black dress,  
one gray lit burner  
like an eye propped open by a thick iron finger.  
One by one she burns the family relics —  
the post card from St. Lou—the exposition—  
a love letter, a daguerrotype, the patriotic  
etching from *Godeys* magazine.  
Then turns over the clipping of the family crime,  
looks into the gray eye  
& slips it into her dress — ready now  
to leave for the trip west.  
She knows that the bowl of dust  
will not be the golden bowl  
of grapes & green orchards.  
The men cluster to the old Reo & dream  
on “the valley” as we dream  
on the photos, old movies, Guthrie songs  
so hungry that we think to feed  
on these gray tumbleweeds  
the parched roots as rigid as exposed nerves.

Dry wind  
& shallow roots.  
Dust blows  
away the horizon,  
texturing these photos,  
downing the fence wire,  
drowning the posts in drifts  
that blot all boundaries  
& leave us thinking a little will  
can make a past,  
a few posts a place to stand.  
Dry wind  
& we drift the prairies, eyes squinted  
against the gray sun that swells  
as it sinks into dust,  
squinted against the dust that blows within.