

Michael McDowell

Obsidian Falls

Three Sisters Wilderness

Walking the Obsidian Trail is like walking a kitchen floor
after the earthquake has emptied the cabinets:
crunch, crunch, crunch.

The trail sparkles as if for millennia the deer and elk
have tossed their beer bottles over the cliffs,
shards embedding in dirt.

Such a mess—broken glass everywhere,
black that flashes bright in the sunlight
black that brightens the lupine and paintbrush meadows.

My daughter and I crush and scatter the obsidian chips
sparkling and shining
as we talk and walk along the mile-high black-glass trail.

Our comments domesticate the wilderness to make it ours,
to make it our home
from which we've been away too long.

Sometimes we hear the sound of boot on fresh snowfall
when the temperature's below freezing,
a muffled crunch in the quiet of an overcast day.

Sometimes we hear the brittle rattle of thin sharp glass underfoot
like when you wonder how you could have dropped the vase,
prelude to dustpan and broom.

Sometimes we hear the clinking of marbles shot across a rug,
dice in a cup,
a handful of poker chips dropped on the table.

When we stop, in the silence we hear the rockfall
of knapped arrowheads and knifeblades
which slid for centuries from this cutlery to all points of the compass.

