

I'd like to focus on a question tonight: Why is there so much garbage out in these woods?

I want to conjure a child, fresh to this new North nowhere, Idaho. Fresh with their fresh parents. Outside in the woods they stumble through the pine needles, their foot hits something that was covered up; or; something glints leaning up against that tree over there. Maybe this kid hasn't seen the insides of a computer before, maybe they have. Maybe they recognize the empty digital display of an old DVD player. Maybe they can discern the husk of an old cash register, defunct. Maybe they think nothing of it. Maybe it's just trash. Regardless, they keep exploring. Seems like the trees and the weeds part, just about to head somewhere, but it opens into a huge swath cut through the forest, wide open, like the left overs of duct tape on leg hair. The kid can see down a long way but decides to spot the other side of this path they've found and does, climbs a tree and feels a haunting, notices a bit of twine tied around the trunk up near the top, and a stripped branch here amongst the others, comfortable to sit on. From here they can see the house, see the road, both surprisingly close by. They spot a lone truck coming down that gravel road and, terrified of being caught, climbs down. Heads back toward the house. Finds a circle of dirt, looser and lighter than the rest as if dug up a while ago and then filled in recently. They head past the house into the woods on the other side. Is that a spool, big enough to climb on? A lawnmower, over grown? A great brown rectangle of dirt, big enough to set a house in?

I wonder what they thought about all this, assuming they ever found any of it. Did they tell their friends? What about their parents? Did they throw it all out, thought it was too dangerous for their kids? Did they ever know? Maybe it's all still there, untouched by anything but the wind and the rain and the snow, slowly sinking into the earth. I like to think someone found it, and that they found a magic in those little things. Spinning little stories about how this tree slopes up sideways off the mound to chase the sun or why these ones line up so straight or what happened to make this patch of grass so green. I want them to feel moments of beauty and reprieve from whatever they're dealing with. Marvel at the incongruities that they haven't learned are strange yet. Find a way to integrate that absurdity into their life.

Imagine with me, if you will, who must have set these things here. Some lost wanderer, alone out in the ponderosas. A scrappy tomboy with nothing else to do but make home. I want to see this girl there, happy in the nook under the branches in the rain, snuggled up to her circuit board and okay living a life so different from what she had. See her perched up on that tree, looking out on the woods. Deep in the ground, digging that hole with a friend over a summer. Piling branches and breaking off saplings to clear herself a space just off one of the many paths she pounded into the undergrowth. Inside that prefab home turned storage space that sat on the dirt rectangle, furtively looking through the boxes of things that were once her mom's, trying to find jewelry she could call her own, trying to find where her dad put her journals, trying to imagine what her mom must've been like before her brain tumor got so bad, before she had a kid, before she got married or remarried or was in college or lived in Japan or Moscow or right here in Blanchard where the kid and the girl are. See her there. The girl, not the mom. The mom died a while ago. The girl is alone.

I want to remember her finding joy in the going and the staying, carved it out of all that hurt she didn't know she was buried in. She had to find ways to make those long car rides beautiful, make

life worth living. Despite her loss, I know that she is strong enough to make it out in these woods. She'll have to figure a lot of things out on her own now, and it'll take a long time, but she'll get there. I want to see her working that tiny spell for herself, filling all those little artifacts with magic. She's manifesting something she won't understand until she's much older, older than when I saw her through the window of my dad's car. Glimpsed her in a photo my friend had taken. Saw her across the room at that dinky anime convention. I knew then and I know now that there is some difference, some distance between her and me, but I'm not sure how much. I'm still, uh, working on it