

Winter

by Heidi McBurney

My breath condenses as I hike through knee-deep drifts,
prowl through Douglas fir trees along the bank in search of something
I've forgotten, something buried a long time ago.

My heavy boots pound prints into virgin snow,
my pants create friction between my legs—swish-swish.
Frosty air blisters my lungs and throat as I push forward.

Snowdrifts sprawl across the mountainside,
dragging down tree limbs, swallowing my feet,
encircling Cottonwood Lake in eerie stillness.

Then snow gives way under my boot. I slide
headfirst down the embankment, the front of my coat
filling with cold powder. I can't
get any grip to slow myself.

I come to rest next to the frigid edge of the lake,
a fragmented sheet of icy glass,
Stare down at a face staring back at me—
a much younger me gazing through time, frozen,
tear drops glittering on her baby fat cheeks.

I remember.

His heaviness pounds imprints into virgin flesh,
a burning friction surges between my frail legs.
A sob stings my throat, chokes my lungs.

I remember.

A dead sun shines feebly, worn by winter.
The sky is flat, sick, blue, strung across the heavens.
Ice crystals bloom around my mouth from breath—
a phantom of warmth

floating away.

Dear Survivor Self
by Heidi McBurney

Thank you for protecting me
when I was too young to process,
when I was small and scared,
when feeling became unbearable,
when my self-hatred became self-harm,
when the world became too much, too loud.

I am growing now,
rebuilding atrophied emotions-
muscles too long unused.
I am coping now,
old enough to process the trauma,
sometimes scared, but no longer small.
I am learning now.
Who I had to become to survive
is not who I have to be forever.

Thank you
for keeping me safe when I needed to be,
for keeping me alive when I didn't want to be,
for teaching me the strength to pick myself up.

You can rest now.

Heidi McBurney graduated from Utah State University in May 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Creative Writing and a minor in Latin Language. Her first experience with reading her poetry aloud to an audience outside of a classroom was when she was invited to read at the USU English Department's Symposium in the spring before she graduated, and she has since read at Helicon West and various private events. She has primarily used poetry to process her own traumas and mental illness and is currently working on a chapbook about her experiences.