"Schoolhouse Road."

For Reichle…
...and all who inhabit this land...
...past, present, and days to come...

Deep blue stretches over chilled sagebrush steppe
still cloaked in night,
white trim on every horizon,
where the tussle between night and day
is of most pronounced fashion.
I have yet to see this sky at night,
but my father must be right about the stars.
Here, I venture past sleeping herds,
guided by my headlights and the shadows of rolling slopes.

Schoolhouse Road
flanked by sagebrush and rocky brown pasture.
Lucky am I to see another vehicle at this hour,
save for highway traffic across the way.
Here, brush and sky are my company.
I scan distant iron rails—

I am three, once again,
riding shotgun with my father
to countryside crossings.

I park by the tracks
as sunlight cloaks the first snow on a distant ridge.
I indulge in the cool air down my throat,
my camera at the ready.
Occasional tints of fog and silt
evaporate before a glistening autumn frost,
as a front of light creeps eastward, conquering morning shadows.

Rolling brown hills retire their shadows.
Wooden crossing signs shimmy in a steady north wind
that batters my ears.
The Pioneers are awash with light.
Wooded hills to the north,
retire their shadows upon the Big Hole River
    as dawn reaches Glen…
There, the railway meanders up a ravine.
    I enjoy a phone call with my father back home,
    370 miles away.

No trains that day,
    but I saw my first wild pronghorn.
My return takes me through Glen to the old highway,
    past the two-room schoolhouse,
    home of the Reichle Racoons
    I visited six months prior.

Every day off, I return, camera at the ready.
Ranchers pass me by with a glance and a wave,
    eyeing this scruffy-haired weirdo with casual eyes.

One day, this, too, will be a home to me.

    Chats with my father are regular—
    every day, a new sky
    new fauna.
I return for the view alone…
    Then a north bound cracks the November winds.
    As it shakes the ground,
    I forget how numb my fingers are.

    “It was worth it,” I tell him. “It was worth the wait…”

Come spring,
    to Schoolhouse Road
    to the sagebrush steppe.
No trains since,
    as I chat with my mother from 370 miles away.

A rainstorm approaches,
    blurring a valley up the Pioneers
    with fine gray streaks.
Months flash before me.
I have yet to see the night sky,
but my father would probably be right about the stars.

So many stories I could tell, I think,
if only he were still here.