

Creede
Emulation after Ron Hansen
by Rachael Harbourne

The town is Creede, Colorado, located just 253 miles south of Denver – out of the way, secluded by pine trees and rolling hilltops, tucked away by a sea of wood and clouds. Blankets of snow lay silently across the town, muffling the violence of ax chopping wood and strikes of match fire, burning the furnaces of houses made up of thin wooden slats that do nothing but let in the soft flurries of snowflakes that amble their way down the smooth slopes of winter, drifting like skaters in soft woolen caps and broken leather shoes that small toes peek out of.

The town in December is made up of snapshots, breaths caught in frozen clouds of steam as icy wind thunders past, cracking through the air like weight on thin ice, burning the ears of brave, lonely travelers. The sky is painted in shades of greys and light blues, as dusk filters through in monotone sun rays. Smoke billows high from the frosty stone chimneys, stuttering and choking out fiery hot ash – the ice tries to quench it but it burns its lips on a single taste. A single red brick peers through the snow of the giant white column of smoke and a young boy points up at it before his father drags him away out of the swirling white flurries. December in Creede is the tip-top of pine trees, the clopping of horse hooves on muted white cobblestones and frustrated huffs from the overworked horses, the snuffles of noses running from shock in the chilly snow air, the crunch of a work boot against icy slush and the rustle of gloved hands shoved deep into pockets. Children come rushing out to whisper secrets through the wind about underground play dates and meetings for the next game of jacks, before mothers grab their thick woolen coats and yank them back through open doorways, scolding the same dictum, “You’re letting the warmth out child!”

The pharmacy doors swing open and closed as people rush to and fro from the Medicine Man. Vials for herbs and remedies for coughs line the wooden shelves of the stark white room, the clinking of vials against vials against oaken wood countertops ringing through the shop and out through the door, like echoes of pickaxes singing off sheer walls of glinting black coal in the deep mountain caverns. Small nods are given and mumbles of courtesy are exchanged with the small paper dollars and thin, heavy metal, the clinking of medicine in clutched paper bags – the murmur of “Excuse me I’m sorry”, and “Pardon me ma’am”, as shoulders are nudged in accidental meetings from brisk gaits and averted gazes as necks are scrunched down under thick knitted scarves. Snow flurries trickle from the corners of doorways as the bell to the Medicine Man signals an escape.

The blare of a horn from a coal blackened steam train scores the hushed town of a white winter wonderland. Eyes fly awake and stare through the wood slats, hearts beating faster than the breath of the wind. Johnny Croulox stands in little red long-johns and cracked leather boots, warming him little as he steps through the snow. His mother runs out, “Johnny my word!” and throws on a blanket as they stare through the distance. Johnny hears the train whisper a soft melody of the places it’s been and the things it has seen. The ground gently shakes as the train barrels past, the snowflakes float upwards in a slow motion rewind, and the town becomes green as the pine trees are shaken. Johnny whispers back in a soft steady, “Shhhh”, as the train passes on and the country settles down. A town in a snow globe and a rushing black beast, the blare of a horn disrupting the twilight – a place still exists far out of reach, hidden from walls of blizzards and ice, on the verge of a crack from the slightest of chirps and tick-tocks of clocks, as time passes on, but not slowly enough.