

# Three Poems

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**SELINA BOAN**

## (Good) “Girls Don’t Hitchhike”

— Billboard signage along Highway 16,  
near Smithers, BC

Girl scars along the sideway,  
were we alone when we were alone  
when we were

last seen walking, bangs down, eyes  
up, last seen looking, last seen  
minding our own, so what—  
we were with a customer, so what—  
a thumb out,  
roots spilling from our hair,  
last seen at school hooking  
math under our sleeves,  
last seen in the skin of a moon  
under light, you’ll find us

held in the arms of our aunties,  
eyes bright and brown and brown  
and round as willow water sisters  
skidding, kidding, kidding, we’re  
sixteen all over, fear bottled in  
our chests, rising with the river,  
“soft news” now, tucked behind  
a breast, singing names  
into the hearts of candles at city hall  
singing our names

## Half/Brother

Had I known, maybe we would've learned  
to talk first in gesture, stretching the arch and o  
of our arms in imitation, watching words form  
from the end of our hands like bubbles  
babbling wave after wave of kid speak.  
I grew up lonely, with little thought of you.

Today, in my Vancouver apartment  
where tub water runs orange and silverfish slip  
book glue and tile breaks,  
I learn the Cree word for brother  
and wonder how to say it out loud.  
*Nitisân*, I still can't say for sure  
how we were kids red halved by *waniyihcikewin*,  
father blood slicked with son pain.  
My best guess is you grew up in it,  
know the hook of survival, our father's eyes,  
and the conflict of what that means.

I know now that *ohi* in Cree sounds like, oh, hi,  
but means: these things, here,  
where father worked himself clean  
on a bed and bannock business  
up north and the place where I first learn about you,  
hands on the keyboard,  
a tiny gesture in search of your name  
and a way to say hello

## Meet Cree: A Practical Guide to the Cree Language

Tires on concrete thrum of motorcycle pitch smack of shoe after shoe after shoe  
a podcast plays between a wall and a girl sits in a room with a window

she wants to learn a language but can't find the silence. She wants to see *aw'e'na na'ha*,  
to find *kiya*, wants to read herself past syntax, noun inflection, light  
looking, she wants footsteps in a word, coming closer

she's a tongue turned over her desk, half/nerved, not/knowing,  
a muscled red flop, stumble stuttered and spilling. How to say when a word is more  
than a word? How to say whether a word is really the one she wants?  
A difference between want and (l)earn and how the tongue shapes itself into sound,  
the girl gathers what she does not know into noise

clip of a rez car revving, lake laps and berry coke fizz, bingo pings, hill humming  
a podcast shut off under the wall, she sits in a room with a window  
looks up the word for lonely *kakaskeyihtamihk*,  
eyes on the outside, ears a tunnel where sound begins to wave