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Living on Highways

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Abstract

“Living on Highways” is a selection comprised of ten poems from my honors thesis. The poems focus on nature and views of human reality in the context of nature, two subjects that require attention to sustainability. I find my strongest inspiration in experiences of interaction with nature, simply being outside and observing the relationship between people and nature. Written in the environmental literary tradition of poets such as Billy Collins and Emily Dickinson, “Living on Highways” situates its poems within the context of nature but comes with a focused regard on humanity’s responsibility toward the appreciation of the environment and its preservation.

The Coldest Summer

Here, in my blankets,
My numb toes wiggle back frozen blood
And my icy hands begin to warm.
My face relaxes as it thaws.
I finally close my eyes
Against the memory of the frigid wind.

As the tent of blankets heats my body,
I pretend I lie in the baking heat of the summer sun.
My skin dancing to the sun’s touch,
My feet cooled by lapping water,
And my body melted into relaxed ease.
In my blankets, I imagine summer
As white flakes frost the corners of my window.

I’ll keep dreaming of summer
Until the summer comes,
My body melted into weary submission
To the violent, baking sun.
My tongue touches the oasis of an icy treat,
And I close my eyes and dream of winter,
My tongue and arms outstretched
To magical, swirling white flakes.

First Snowfall

At the time of year when everyone
Closes the top buttons of their coats
And huddles into themselves
To block the frigid cold,
We hibernate away in hoods and hats and scarves,
Caverns of warmth and solitude.

Suddenly, the tiniest, twinkling, frosty stars
Fall from the sky.
And everyone pauses; clouds of warm breath
Rising to the heavens
As pink creeps onto noses and cheeks.
Just for now, we're all children again
And our eyes laugh together
At the fairy dust that powders our world.

For this one day,
We pull back our hoods,
To let our hair sparkle with crystals.
And we put down our work,
To fill our hands with snowballs.
To better run and play and laugh,
And breathe,
We unbutton the top buttons of our coats
One last time
Before the winter cold closes in.

Living on Highways

Humans zoom at the speed of light
Under a sky the color of burnt toast,
A few brave stars standing out
Beside a shadowy moon.
Bubbles of light and sound speed along
The black curving calligraphy
With the white connect-the-dots down the middle.
Each bubble races home,
Oblivious to the shadowy scenery
That they have no idea looks bright in the daytime.
Each passes the hidden treasures
Of paths beaten by few footprints
And the secret spot where the trees part
To reveal a fairyland.
They may pass these places thousands of times,
Or even only once.
But the saddest part is that they'll never stop their cars.
They'll speed through life,
Seeking only destinations,
And never wander through the woods,
To see old and young trees hold hands
Or the headlights in marble eyes like night.
Everyone lives their lives on the fastest highways,
To get stuck in traffic every time.



In Steel

We think ourselves giants
And we stomp around,
Crushing all in our paths.
We proclaim our intelligence
And wave charts
And plan wealth
And pour concrete
Over the intricacies of the earth.
And we pretend that it's been forever
Since we were hairs away from monkeys.

And we lumber around in steel suits
Screeching in steel cars
To work in steel towers
In the sky where we can peer from above
Our world in steel.

But let your hand stray to your chest every so often
And remember that life pounds through your veins,
The same life that vibrates through the fleeing creatures
And hums in the ground below your feet.

Rain Dance

Dark sky looms with velvet silence
Yet silver shadows slide through outlines
Of midnight clouds.
The melting iron of sky
Plummets to earth below
And huddled figures shield faces
From the sorrow that threatens to crawl down their spines.
And while the whole world seems to hide,
A solitary child hasn't yet been taught to fear the darkness.
Embracing the storm with her fragile beating heart,
Her voice sings with raindrops
That coat her dress like mud, making it heavy with a delicious chill.
She dances, arms spread wide, hair stuck to rosy cheeks,
Celebrating more wisely than the gray men
In the depth of the stormy sky.

Ladder in the Sky

We wear feathers on our backs
And flowers in our hair.
We eat the creatures and plants
That are born from the ground
And grow our houses from little seeds.
We keep warm with the Earth
Buried deep below the rocks
And the yellow fire high above the clouds.

Yet we let ourselves become mesmerized
By what we have done
With all that we were given.
We touch the clouds with the tops of buildings
And create bright screens that show us
The colors of a rainbow,
The feeling of grass below bare feet
Forgotten.

Reminiscing with an Old Friend

Looking back on days gone,
Full of skies that were bright enough
As long as we were allowed to stay outside,
Full of the smell of warm dirt and laughter.
Playing outside while outside played with us,
The wind tousling hair
And dirt sneaking onto fingers,
Leaves hiding in the cracks of shoes,
Trailing behind like feathers.
And the lines of the old tree in our favorite spot,
Jagged and worn like fur on an old pet,
Stretched tall and wise above us
Into the endless sky.

Trudging through the old yard,
Frozen grass crunches under my feet
Below the gently frosted icing.
The old tree grins at me, just as I remember it,
The rough bark wrinkled around its laughing eyes.
I lean against it and we watch together
As my footprints alone harden
Into the pavement of the frozen grass.

To Be a Tree

The smallest cactus sits
In the florescent light of a stale office,
Trapped in the smallest pot
On a crowded desk.

The phony fern lies to all,
A statue of its breathing counterpart,
No more alive than the plastic toy
Lying on its back at the fake plant's feet.

The vine creeps across the floor,
Snaking in delicate curves,
Replicated far too precisely to be real.
The winding green line cut off
By little pink toes curling on the carpet.

Little signs of nature appear
In designs on our creations,
Hidden throughout the little bubbles
That protect us from the world.

Below My Feet

When you can decipher the patterns of the bottoms of shoes
By the footprints in the murky slush,
Or count the number of dried,
Discarded chewing gum remains in the pavement;
When you see the scars the white salt has left in the sidewalk
And the tiny blades of frozen grass trying to breathe
Between slabs of concrete;
When you see all these things,
You've been staring at the ground for too long.

It's time to grin into the sky,
To see that sun break from behind the clouds
And finally warm your face and melt the snow below.
If you're looking down, all you'll see is the shadows.
Raise your eyes, breathe in the sky and the trees,
Take in the beauty of the world above your head,
And leave your feet to tread upon the wounds below.

Golden Gone

Eyes hypnotized to phones
Endlessly cemented to fingers
I cannot help but feel that there is
Something we are missing in the morning sky
Or the light in every passing eye.
Minds so entirely plugged into our own shining worlds
That we forget about the vibrance of the real one.
That in fact we've allowed our minds to dull
Into the plastic substance that mimics gold,
When at birth, we shone with all the truth of
That proud, winking metal,
Marveling at the wonders of our world,
When nothing was pretended,
Every glint in the eye authentic,
Our worlds encompassing every crumb
That we could absorb in our eyes,
And every passing eye
Held galaxies untold
And was an honor to savor the moments
At which our eyes connected
With sparks like flying embers.