

Dying in the Southwest

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ABSTRACT

Dying in the Southwest

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Dying in the Southwest explores the relationship between the individual, the collective, and the larger socioeconomic systems that provide the foundation of the places we call home. The collection focuses primarily on the city of Windsor, Ontario, which was known as “Ground Zero” during the 2008 Financial Crisis. Due to high rates of unemployment, stagnant wages, and low desirability for investment, the people of Windsor-Essex County found themselves trapped within a constantly shaken snow globe. Inside this microcosm, habits and routines were broken and patched over hastily in order to survive. The poems follow the small, personal dramas that play out alongside and within the macroeconomic crisis. *Dying in the Southwest* captures the many attempts made to endure, adapt, or escape the city. Stagnation and failure pervade these attempts. Misdirection, error, and unwillingness to change lie at the core of both the cause and effect of the Financial Crisis. Throughout the collection, *Dying in the Southwest* maintains a balance of hope and cynicism for a city so ravaged by large-scale systems beyond its control.

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Suburban Symphony

Weed whacker whirrs –
a chronic humdrum in the land of lawns.
Open, garage door. A rumbling nostril.
Some people call this style of house a home

sweet home.
Sounds like tinny turns
of AC fan blades. Sounds like
broom bristles against sidewalk grooves.
Sounds like soccer practice is over. Nails
on a chalk paint wall.

Open, garage door, on some conundrum at sundown:
a row of snout houses with kids
spilling onto cement like boogers.
Cheering, chanting, carrying on
trampling over fresh lawns.
Echoing off minivan doors,
but no one seems to hear the commotion
over the weed whacker whirring
and the yacht rock blasting
from a Bluetooth boombox.

Storm

Wind gusts cold
against humid plumes.
Sea vents on the sidewalk.

Squalls flip leaves
like a hand smoothing over sequins.
Image changes in an instant.
Barbecue covered. Chairs scraping
against cement. An umbrella collapsing.
Dark over Windsor. Bruised sky
swelling with hail.

Kids clamber out of pools
taking noodles with them.
Shivering with puckered
skin under towels.
Peering at the sky.
Surely, this will pass soon.

One Hill Town

One hill, nine churches, twenty thousand people, seven bars, two Tim Hortons, two grocery stores, three, no - four, now, stoplights, one main drag owned by two different people, five empty buildings, three new subdivisions, two elementary schools, one Catholic, one public, one high school serving three surrounding villages, two gas stations, one full service, one with Slushie machines, one serious coke problem, two pharmacies, six pizza places, two ice cream shops, zero cafes, zero microbreweries, one Beer Store, five banks, three car dealerships, and one dream of making this town just like all the others.

Commute (I)

I imagine this is a comfortable life
where every morning the sun rises
at Tim's. Sun-soaked car hoods wrap
from drive-thru to main drag,
someone's mother behind
another's father behind
Someone I May Know
from Facebook.

A town doesn't need a clock
to run like clockwork. Just settle
palm into steering wheel
and show up to dance
whatever choreography
the boss comes up with.

Road wears down in parallel
lines. There are multiple ways
to get to work but everyone takes
the same route. I get to know
my neighbours by their license plates.

[Great Canadian Poem]

Here you are, walking along
[street name], approaching [street name].
You know the intersection. Everyone should.
There are attachments to this pin you've placed.
The view lacks, though. Bring your own atmosphere:
lingering scents/sounds of [nearby water body].
Bodies wearing [hyper-specific garment],
slurping at [coffee shop].

You have lived your landmarks, visited [point of interest], and dis/agreed
with consensus. Yet there's something so special about
[Great Canadian City]
that you pause to make synecdoche from streets.

Bar Trivia

Point Pelee is the southernmost tip of mainland Canada.
The bonus feature no one asked for at the end of Ontario.
Michigan is North. Americans see more snow,
but cross the border with skis strapped to SUVs.

The tip shifts. On a daily basis,
Canada is a little bigger or smaller
depending on riptides and rain.
A skin tag dangling off the bottom of the country.

Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes.
During high winds, even the water shifts
away from Windsor.
For that, St. Catharines has a nicer bridge.

The Ambassador Bridge is the only privately-owned
border crossing in the world. One family
trying to turn one bridge into two and double their wealth.
Concrete chunks fall onto student cars in Lots A and B.

Rats scurry down Indian Road. Crawl into cracks
between window boards. Prime real estate.
Murdering neighborhoods is an easy business
for millionaires with billion-dollar dreams.

A health-unit study finds that residents
of Windsor-Essex need to stop smoking.
Doctors hand out nicotine patches in clinics.
Nurses visit schools with blackened lungs.

Rust-coloured sidewalks line the roadways
near the mall. A smelting metal scrapyards
blows smoke. As innocuous as a grandfather
with a pipe.

The highest rate of deforestation in the province.
Pockets of trees hide colonies of inbred deer.
Another doe leaps across the pavement and into headlights
trying to save herself.

Windsor is called "The City of Roses." A lonely child
imagines friends to keep them company.
City employees yank up rose bushes and replace
them with shrubs as part of the beautification budget.

An anonymous artist achieves international fame
after Jimmy Kimmel shares a shrub sculpture
on late-night TV. The bandit evades capture
while the mayor charges them with embarrassing the city.

Unemploy

a verb creates
an adjective, in turn,
makes family dinners uncomfortable.

maybe not always an adjective
but a past tension becoming
a noun:
a person, a thing,
a place setting at the table.
Rendered not in use.

The Fisherman

Water slops against a break-wall.
The fisherman wishes for the spray
to catch his beard.
It never comes. Been too hot
here lately. No rain in five days.
Neck skin spotted brown and red
like a trout. His hat covers only his face.

The wife thinks he's been working
outside. He sets his rod down against
the rocks separating him
from the lake. From his pocket,
he pulls a pack of cigarettes.

There's nothing for miles.
Ohio is a blotch no darker
than a storm cloud. The fisherman
has never seen the ocean.
He's been scared of flying ever
since a friend of a friend died
on an airplane.

The fisherman flicks his cigarette butt
into the water. It bloats up and mixes
floating in the soupy
debris against the shore.

A mechanic with many years.
Cars were designed to fall apart.
There are airplane mechanics too.
Maybe airplanes weren't built to last either.

He casts his line out. Satisfying plop
of the bobber on the water.
Three weeks ago, a storm ripped through
town, dumping hail and rain and pink
slips onto the windshields of the parking lot.
His car was hit. The slip crinkled in his pocket.

Bobbing red and white. Waiting
for any movement. Patience.
Nothing caught means nothing
to explain. To the wife
jobs are getting harder to come by
and the fisherman is lucky to have his.

He'd already gone and stood in line
at all the places in the city. Alongside
former colleagues. Alongside kids
with degrees. Alongside people
chronically in line. There is nothing
for miles. He fishes to exercise patience.

Ruddy water. Dead lake. The fisherman
doesn't remember when the last time was
he had so much time on his hands to fix
the garage door and the toilet upstairs.
There's no pride in being at home
with the wife on a Wednesday.
Not when he could stand alone on the shore
waiting for something to bite.

Fortune Cookie

You won't be disappointed
this year you will find you
are capable of the sequence
of events to follow
your path lies ahead
a good omen will point
you in the direction of hard work
makes all dreams accomplishable
in sleep.

A Love Poem

Days slide off his tongue in puzzle pieces.
Her lap is covered.
She excels at fitting incongruent
pieces together. A jam –
to musicians or
traffic enthusiasts.

Surely, there's no peanut butter here.
Even if his day swirls
recombinantly, like honey drizzled
over and into its own pot,
she will point to the dripping wand
as proof of inconsistency.

Koi (I)

After-dark adventure
through sepia suburb streets
shadows of rain drip across concrete.

There are no cars passing.
There are only two fish
splashing up the sidewalk.

Sweet nothings and giggles
barely heard beneath the cloak
of the tall grass orchestra
whipped to action in brief gusts.

In a pond of butterscotch
lamplight, two slippery fish
find themselves out of water.
Mouths agape, they drink
in the sweetness of the moment
forgetting air
kills in large doses.

Fish Hook Murder

Second death in two days
down by the docks.
Erie ebbs.
Concrete grows green hair.
Fish musk blows in with
gravel pit grit. A sight
for sore sinuses.

A crime scene
splashed amid the sludge.
Dawn's haze on Erie's
haze through hazy eyes
of a reporter, a coroner,
a constable.

A glimmer in the filleted thigh flesh:
a gold hook
a sickle
twining around a broken vein.

County Love Bug

High schoolers coughing,
not cigarettes or swigs of vodka
from plastic water bottles.
No, this is a new plague

sweeping through classrooms:
the County Love Bug.
Coupling up everyone who touched
hands over a bowl of chips
or made eye contact in gym class.

Sufferers say it causes dreams
of love affairs.
Of producing two kids
with names that have a “y”
where an “I” should be.
Of a raised ranch with a garage,
a driveway, a yard for the dog.
Eventually, a pool.

The only cure is to get married
and, if lucky, divorced,
within the same decade.
Ensuring the next generation
will be immune.

The Essex Fun Fest

Every year, on the second weekend of July,
every chicken, hen or rooster flocks back to this coop
of a stretched-white rental tent
to stand in a circle and listen to a Bruce Springsteen cover band.

And every year, a storm passes through on the Wednesday before,
dumping buckets onto thinly-grassed fields.
Once a swamp, revitalized to its glory days. The return
of the prodigal sun by Thursday does little to dry
only heats the mud. Essex County's finest spa treatment,
the subsequent headline, "Former Swamp Opens New Pop-Up Spa."
One weekend only. It'll suck your socks off.

In this mire, we crack beers like the Deluxe Diner cracks eggs:
Farmers' hours. Enough for a full restaurant.
We sink in to the ankles as though we never left.

The Zipper

Rickety rides bloom every year
from parking lot asphalt cracks.

Shut into a cage –
spray-painted to cover rust –
you peer from between
handlebars damp with sweat
of riders from past towns
and decades.

Only this fact prevents
the seed of doubt from fertilizing.

Possibility of malfunction unfolds
with each metallic groan
as you are hoisted
up.

Cage tumbles
over. Your seat
fades away from the edge
of your spine.

Lurch
into handlebars. Face
parallel with asphalt.
Glorified bobby pin
separates you from
your worst case.

Thrust back
on your back.
Foam cushions squeal.
More metal clanks. Screams.
You can see your house.
Now you can't. See your friends
waiting in line. Now they're replaced
with body-shaped cages.

And you are still
suspended above.

Final Frontiers

I've been standing on
the cutting edge for so long
my socks are getting bloody.
A delicate balance requiring
a ballerina's toe. Too clumsy
for that. I wear platform shoes instead.

A costume change here
and there tends to help
keep my soles cleft-free.
Lately, there's no stage. No need
for costumes. Same old shoes
split up the sole straight to sock.

Deepening the arch
in my foot means
there's less of me attached
to Earth. I would split myself
in two if it meant I could
eat ice cream in a volcano
without melting.

Dying in the Southwest

Ty says he wants to die
in a plane crash less than ten minutes after take-off. He rambles
about collective death and bursting into flame. It's noble,
he says, to die like a lobster. It's wrong,
I tell him, lobsters get boiled, not burned.
It's all the same to me, he sighs,
it's all the same. I'm a vegetarian afraid of the ocean;
I know nothing about lobsters.

Alex and Chad are here on a Tuesday
because the door is always ajar. Alex cracks open
a bottle of cinnamon whisky. He begins, I am dying,
I am dying of boredom. I agree and we sip.
I think I understand Ty's vision. I whisper,
we haven't even reached cruising altitude.
Chad doesn't know what I mean. I tell him it burns as I swig.
Would it be better if Detroit was burning too, he asks.
Detroit already burned, I answer. Now it's just setting
the record for world's slowest phoenix.

Every roommate is home and wedged onto the couch
watching *The Departed*. It's a clown-car affair. Families are
always rising and falling in America. The couch leg breaks
under the weight of six people. It's inevitable.
I want to make a joke about how
many university students it takes to fix a broken couch
but none of us move to fix it. We sit on our slope
and take bets on who survives to the end.

Chad and Alex are over again, but on a Friday.
We want to go to The Loop, but the building's
condemned now. Something about the stairs rotting.
If someone fell through, there'd be a lawsuit.
Instead, we spend our Saturday on the overpass
over Huron Church Road. We want our feet to dangle
like in the movies. Six hands latch onto a fence,
and six eyes peek through hexagons.

I pretend my house isn't where it is.
Everyone joins the fantasy, acting
as though the furthest place from Windsor is the west
end of Windsor. We're convinced
we are somewhere else.

Every Thursday, the roommates invite
everyone they know to come over and drink
on the kitchen floor. We hold emergency council
after someone climbs a tree and someone else crawls
up the stairs to recite "Lady Lazarus" in my bedroom.
Our council vote is unanimous, and we stop
holding Thursday night meetings.

Chad lives on my couch for four years,
rent free. He moves in with an alcoholic
for a year after that. He believes in perpetual motion.
Toronto is the only place that can keep up, he tells me.
But he has to make ends meet.

I walk along the river with Alex.
There are steps leading into the water
with no fence in front of them.
He points to the slick rocks. Do you think
it's cold? I ask. Do you? He knows.
I want to dip my toe in;
I don't want my socks to get dirty
while they wait for my foot to come back.

Ty comes over after work.
He's been repairing cooling systems all day.
I've gotten a bonus, he says, and I know
what I'm going to spend it on.
Don't let it burn a hole,
I warn, you should save. He nods,
and shows me his plane ticket.

Green Day Graduation Song

VFjWXuWCRXx BUixrpf QieSMfluimrVhdi
VFjWIuWCRXx BUixrpf QieSMfluimrVhdi
VFjWIuWCRXx BUixrpf QieSMfluimeVhdi
VFjWIuWCRXx BUixrpf QieSMfluimeVhbi
VFjWI WCRXx BUixrpf QieSMfluimeVhbi
VFjWI WCRXx BUixref QieSMfluimeVhbi
VFjWI WCRXxtBUixref QieSMfluimeVhbi
VFjWI WCRXxtBUixref QieSMfluileVhbi
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VFj I tCRNxtBUiorefqQyeSMfauileVhbi
VFd I tCRNxtBUiorefqQyeSMfauileVhbi
VFd I tCRNxtBUiorefqQyeSffauileVhbi
VFd I tCRNxtBUioreflQyeSffauileVhbi
VFd I tCRNxtBUioreflQyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjNxthUioreflQyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjNxthUione flQyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjNxthUione flSyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjkxthUione flSyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjLthUione flSyeSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCjLthUione flSysSffauiledhbi
VFd I tCokLthUione flSysSffauiledhbi
VFd I tookLthUione flSysSffauiledhbi
VFd I tookLthU one flSysSffauiledhbi
oFd I tookLthU one flSysSffauiledhbi
oFd I tookLthU one lSysSffauiledhbi
oFd I tookLthU one lSysSffaNiledhbi
oFd I tookLthD one lSysSffaNiledhbi
oFd I tookLthD one lSlSffaNeledhbi
oFd I tookLthe one lSlSffaNeledhbi
oFd I tookLthe one lGlsSffaNeledhbi
oFd I tookLthe one lGNsSffaNeledhbi
oFd I tooksthe one lGNsSffaNeledhbi
oFd I tooksthe one lGNsbffaNeledhbi
oFd I tooksthe one lmNsbffaNeledhbi
EFd I tooksthe one lmNsbvfaNeledhbi
EFd I tooksthe one lmssbvfaNeledhbi

EPd I tooksthe one lmssbvfaNeledhbi
EPd I tooksthe one lmssbvfaveledhbi
End I tooksthe one lmssbvfaveledhbi
End I took the one lmssbvfaveledhbi
End I took the one lmssbvfaveledhbi
End I took the one lessbvaveledhbi
End I took the one lessbvZaveledhbi
End I took the one lessbNZaveledhbi
End I took the one lessbNjaveledhbi
End I took the one less Njaveledhbi
End I took the one less Gjaveledhbi
End I took the one less Jjaveledhbi
End I took the one less Jjaveledabi
End I took the one less JjaveledLbi
End I took the one less JjaveledZbi
End I took the one less JjaveledHbi
End I took the one less tjaveledHbi
End I took the one less tXaveledHbi
End I took the one less tOaveledHbi
End I took the one less tOaveledHbi
End I took the one less tOaveleddbi
End I took the one less tZaveleddbi
Bnd I took the one less tZaveleddbi
Bnd I took the one less tZaveleddbw
Bnd I took the one less tMaveleddb
Hnd I took the one less tMaveleddb
Hnd I took the one less tMaveledebw
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Hnd I took the one less tMaveledeba
and I took the one less tMaveledeba
and I took the one less tMaveledMba
and I took the one less tgaveledMba
and I took the one less tgaveledMbo
and I took the one less tgavelednbo
and I took the one less tgavelednbq
and I took the one less tgaveledkbq
and I took the one less tKaveledkbq
and I took the one less tKaveledkbA
and I took the one less tKaveledkbh
and I took the one less tKaveledkbD
and I took the one less tKaveledGbD
and I took the one less tKaveledGby
and I took the one less tyaveledGby
and I took the one less tyaveledyby
and I took the one less tyaveledJby
and I took the one less tyaveledvby

and I took the one less traveledvby
and I took the one less traveledvby
and I took the one less traveledQby
and I took the one less traveledQby
and I took the one less traveledQby
and I took the one less traveledVby
and I took the one less traveleduby
and I took the one less traveledXby
and I took the one less traveledPby
and I took the one less traveledOby
and I took the one less traveledOby
and I took the one less traveledOby
and I took the one less travelediby
and I took the one less traveledHby
and I took the one less traveledHby
and I took the one less traveledHby
and I took the one less traveledfby
and I took the one less traveledfby
and I took the one less traveledKby
and I took the one less traveledNby
and I took the one less traveledNby
and I took the one less traveledNby
and I took the one less traveledPby
and I took the one less traveledWby
and I took the one less traveledpby
and I took the one less traveledoby
and I took the one less traveledAby
and I took the one less traveledAby
and I took the one less traveledAby
and I took the one less traveledOby
and I took the one less traveledhby
and I took the one less traveled by

**

Title of poem taken from Green Day's "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)"
Target phrase taken from Robert Frost's "The Road Less Travelled"
Algorithm Programming by David Mulatti

The Genetic Algorithm

Seek target. Struggle through letters.
Through errors. Endless errors. Scrabble
to unscramble to understand. Search.
There is a target. A point.

Curious about error because
the conditions are ripe for failure.
Low stakes fertile ground by design.
Experiment. Seek target. Shoot
for the moon even if you miss.
Have to land somewhere.

Even computers have a homing
instinct. Page. Button. Screen.
Returning. Machines for home
or business. Bifurcate purpose.
Every split root leads into the same ground.

Seek target. Start search from A-Z
and back again to point B.
Understand You
and I
will always love You. Understand.

Wade through letters. Data pool
of twenty-six plankton
sighing. Scooped one-by-one
in record speed. Saving
time one second at a time.
It all adds up. Understand.

Seek target. Fail mission
immediately. Familiar is failure.
Isn't it? Repeating something
enough can make it mantra
or meaningless.

Heavy Rain

I cut two of my fingers off
to save my son in a video game.
There were other options,
but this one was the fastest.
Think like a father distraught.
He can't keep anything he loves
alive: plants, cats, wives, sons,
daughters. Hungry ghosts.

I once shot a man
in his daughter's bedroom.
He begged me not to,
like a father, but between my missing
fingers, and my trigger finger,
I hadn't saved my son.
There were other options.
But I'd made a mistake

in the previous scene, I overdosed
on a fantasy drug and spent
the rainiest night in a hotel.
Think like a father on a trip.
No kids, no wife, only hungry ghosts
and lost time.

My son's waiting beyond
the save point in the sewer.
Puddles become threats,
become pools lapping
at ankles, at knees,
at corners of chapped lips.

And I am in a bedroom
missing him.

An Exceptional Undergraduate Experience

First week of classes and kids on campus
complain about living
arrangements. The windows don't open.
It's 81 degrees in September. Maintenance staff on strike.

Air conditioning in the STEM buildings fails.
Air conditioning in the Arts building
never existed to begin with.
A prof cancels class to quit smoking.
He fails. He cancels class again
because he's upset. In our next class,
he lectures about union solidarity
then turns to *The Canterbury Tales*.

There is no reprieve from
77 degrees in October. Not enough
ice to keep the beer warm.
Cold fronts come through.
What goes down never stays down.
Windsor has a gag reflex.

The University sends a pledge in an email.
All systems fixed by Friday. The day rolls around.
A van pulls up and turns without stopping. Picket line
cheer. Students bead sweat through tank tops.
We wonder if we will be compensated
for the extra deodorant.

Little do we know the demographics
floating over our heads. Student success
measured in terms paid for.
Cash or debit only.

Pirate's Life

Kitchen hums fluorescent.
A modern lighthouse
directing ships to port.

An outpost overstocked
with rum in red cups
and ever-shrinking bags of limes.

Convention of sailors
swearing. Slurred oaths on Saturdays
are obligations on Sundays.

Loose tongues tie knots.
Tight lips save ships. Trade
white caps for night caps.

Live a little. Wake up
in the middle of the morning
chanting

“Water, water everywhere,
but not a drop to drink.”

Following Morning

No matter where I am, the mornings follow.
My kitchen's a collage
of bottle caps and crumbs. Still hazy,
I scrub a frying pan in a sink
full of dishes. He stirs.

His mornings are sharp
reminders of the discomforts of waking up
on the couch with no cushion.
He cracks his neck.
While I crack an egg
into bacon grease and push
the lever on the toaster and press
the plunger on the coffee, I wonder
if I should have given up
my bed.

Siren Song

In a dream, I am a mermaid
with soft skin instead of scales.
Though you have me,
line, and sinker, you haven't
noticed. Now I'm blowing
bubbles with a hook in my cheek.

With enough time, pliers remove
every snag I am willing to pry.
Maybe it's nice here. Held
in the radius of a fishing rod's cast.
One day you will have to reel
in your line. I can't place bets
on what will last longer.
My stomach or your indifference.

When mother cats pick up their young
by the nape of the neck,
kittens go limp.
Pinch my cheek with your lips
and I'll stop struggling.

Koi (II)

Watching the pond again.
Flowering calico ribbons.
Narcissus reflection dulling
in comparison.

One fish breaks rank.
Bulging eye bubbling along the algae line
winks and flutters away.

New Year

Recycle myself for myself.

No one is here to take out the trash
and I will spend the afternoon

making windchimes out of every
word we've ever said to each other.

From there I can only conclude
that every river has two shores.

Routine Creation

Put your swampers on,
we're going in to mine
for oysters in puddles. Tomorrow
we'll shoot the horn off a unicorn.

Muck around, no luck
with the mollusks today.
Aw shucks, you caught me
with your big wide net.
This would be funny
if I weren't so mad.

We should sift
for gold instead of prying
pearls from muddy mouths.
But we both know we lack the time.

I've heard that
to dislodge the secret
from the belly of the whale
I need a key
straight from the horse's mouth.
But you disagree.

Tomorrow, we will discover
where unicorns live
and I will tell you:
I am a broken clock
with a shattered face.
I am right twice a day,
but I never know when.

Basic Math

How can I breach an asymptote?

Understandably, this problem
demands a solution –
and fast –
as I approach y with
the velocity of every hyperbole ever imagined.

I know that $1+1 = 2$, and I know that
Thom Yorke said that Orwell said that
the government has proof that $2 + 2 = 5$,
but this isn't that simple.

This is basic math:
as I approach,
exponentially I become closer
forever without ever touching
 y .

Quittin' Time

I haven't had a cigarette in eight days.
My fingers are still pincers,
but tension eases
with each step.
This, I declare, is a new era in motion.

I have never quit anything.
Only given up. Look around:
A fridge full of rotting leftovers.
Damp laundry still in the dryer.
Last night's beer isn't empty,
not full either.

I tell myself my mother didn't
raise a quitter. No. But, she did
raise a near-sighted self-starter.
Every day is sink or salvage.

In through the nose,
out through the mouth.
Recycling the same air is in
my best interest just like everything else
that'll make me live longer.

Elegy for The Loop Complex

We fell in love with a building
condemned to condos. Guttled,
leaving exposed brick behind.

Opened the same time Windsor's
downtown core solidified in concrete and steel.
First, The Loop was cold storage
for a fishery. Then, cold storage for Model Ts.
By then, it was drafty enough to support two sweaty bars.
One where a band played their first show.
One where weekends faded into memories
fond or formative.

We can spend years prowling
for a new watering hole.
We get picky when we're thirsty.
And the holes in the roof meant
there was always fresh rainwater
in The Loop. Which is exactly why
we had to set our sights on solid ceilings.

“Exodus of Youth”

I can't return home given the cost of lumber.
Pricey wood means pricey frames means
the whole foundation of a house
is a different language. No amount
of dressing up will help me pretend
I will have my own lawn in my hometown.

Todor spends his savings getting away.
First to London, then Toronto, then
to Ireland. Within a day's travel is
too close. The globe gets smaller
by this logic. If he could, he would
live on the sun.

Kristina always said she would stay
until she visits the mountains.
Her escape is buried in bonds.
She will connect every dot until she
traps herself in her own web.

Travis flies out of Detroit
to LaGuardia on a one-way Spirit flight.
New York is big enough to hide in.
Anxious boys burrow in boroughs.
Schrodinger's someone. He relinquishes
home to create a new one in style.
He becomes himself best in loneliness.

Committed couples make their beds
with sheets gifted from parents.
Five to ten years too late to get in on the ground
floor. Grab a partner, baby. One, two, three.
The leap from renting to home owning
is dual-income and dedication.

Finally, Steph has luck.
A good deal sold privately. She jumps.
Three beds and two baths. A basement
for a roommate. An office for her computer.
There is a such thing as perfect
timing. Loose the arrow and pray
the target doesn't move.

The house beside my parents sells
for nearly half a million dollars.
Three guys I went to high school with
wash their cars in the driveway now.
My parents consider selling their house
and moving out east. But they're a year
too late. Housing market caught a fever,
turns out it's contagious.

Fiona's heat hasn't worked since
November. Her landlord doesn't
seem to mind. Only a problem
if frost is on the inside of the window.
Snowstorms pummel London for days. She spends
a dollar-fifty every night drying tea towels
pressed into cracks.

My last night in Windsor, I fall in love
with the idea of returning as an astronaut.
I want to appreciate the smallness.
These days, Windsor grows faster than trees.
With the cost of lumber, I can never return home.

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Title of poem taken from article in Huffington Post by Bruce Moncur titled "The Myriad Crises Facing Windsor, Ontario" published May 11, 2016.

Empty Nest

Tires nestle in crooks of concrete.
Every year or two I find new places.
They keep getting further and further.

I am the product of a nest
that couldn't bear to be empty.
I left to build my own.
Collect every stick and twig
in sight. Wait. For eggs. For hatching.
Feed every beak before me.

I never learned how not to
keep all my eggs in the same basket.
Like popcorn kernels bursting on an open flame,
beaks broke shells into shards.
And I was there with worms on.

I can only hope
they had a good meal.

Commute (II)

I lean over the highway.
Cars hit the same pothole.
Suspensions bouncing.

This city, unlike others
is so trusting.

These aren't the overpasses
I know. No fence to seal
in jumpers. As if there aren't
other ways to go.

Rolling Tires, Willie Nelson

Rumble strips crumble to gravel
cascades down deep ditch banks.
Narrow shoulders barely keep
the county road contained.

Pylons pimple the wayside.
An omen of a detour. Construction is
knowing that every new road
will one day need repair.

Maybe the men who paved
the roads will be the ones to fix them.
More often than not, though,
they are somewhere else.

They should be at home
or on the lake fishing.
But there is no shortage of work
now that everything has finished collapsing.

Another job. Another day
of mending endless seams.
Another pair of jeans for summer
that won't last until winter.

Another drive along this weary road.
I have left here so many times
there are ruts from my driveway
all the way up the 401.