



Poetry In A Prius

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poetry & photography

by

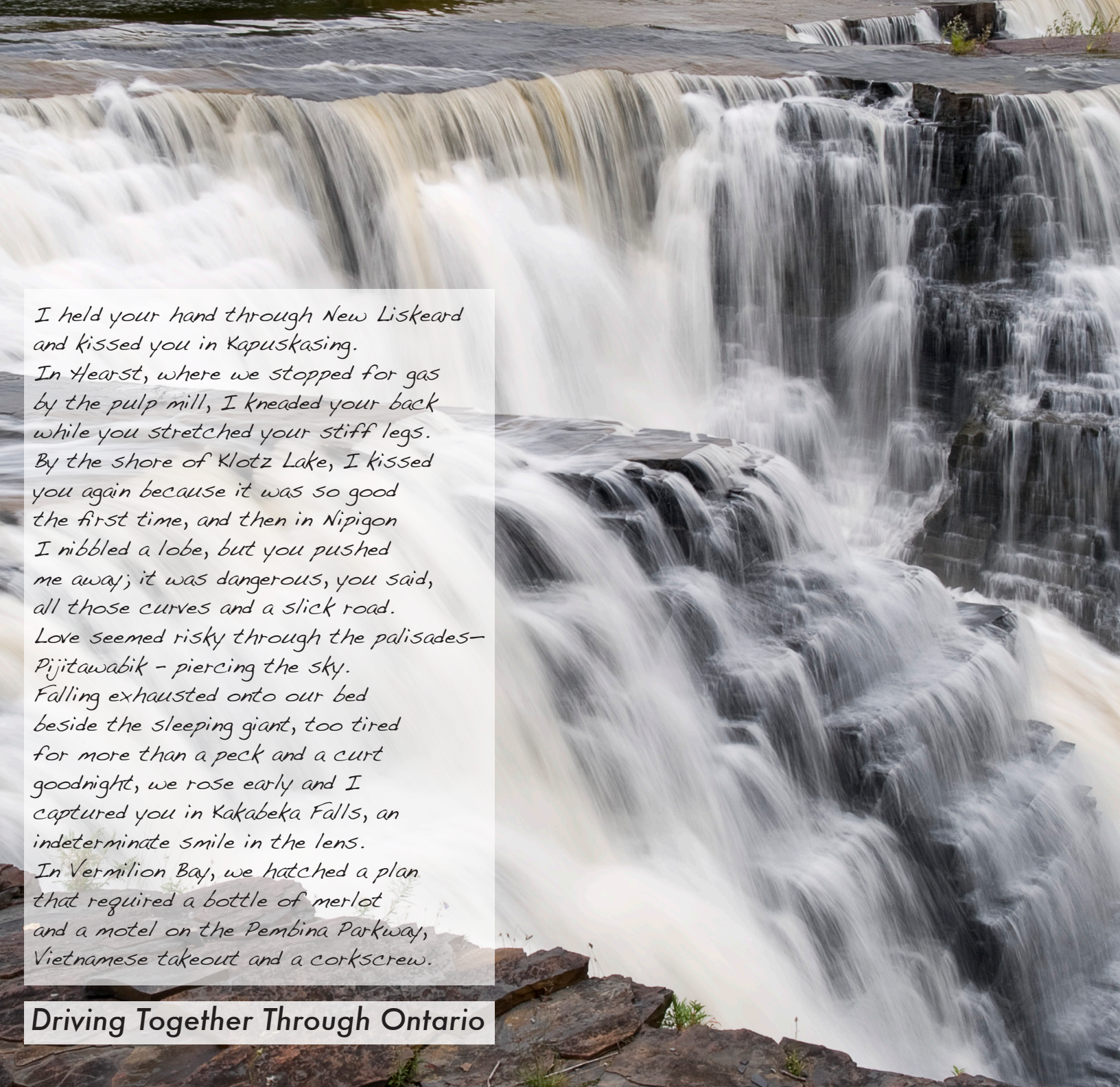
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<http://nouspique.com>



*I held your hand through New Liskeard
and kissed you in Kapuskasing.
In Hearst, where we stopped for gas
by the pulp mill, I kneaded your back
while you stretched your stiff legs.
By the shore of Klotz Lake, I kissed
you again because it was so good
the first time, and then in Nipigon
I nibbled a lobe, but you pushed
me away; it was dangerous, you said,
all those curves and a slick road.
Love seemed risky through the palisades—
Pijitawabik - piercing the sky.
Falling exhausted onto our bed
beside the sleeping giant, too tired
for more than a peck and a curt
goodnight, we rose early and I
captured you in Kakabeka Falls, an
indeterminate smile in the lens.
In Vermilion Bay, we hatched a plan
that required a bottle of merlot
and a motel on the Pembina Parkway,
Vietnamese takeout and a corkscrew.*

Driving Together Through Ontario





I got me an acre of Bad
Land. That shit is mean.

- Mitch Hedberg

*Bad to go through
Bad for wagon wheels
Bad for horse shanks
Bad for settlers
Bad for ice fields
Bad for erosion
Bad for hoodoos
Bad for sediment
Bad for mammoths
Bad for megaf flora
Bad for snaking rivers
Bad for Albertosaurus
And that mounted skull
Leers through razor teeth
And says to me: Probably
Bad for you too.*

Drumheller



Slow while I roll down the window.
-- No, the breeze flaps the maps.
But I want to take a picture.
-- We'll never get there if I slow.
Brilliant scenery don't you think?
-- Like a postcard, a painting, or
wallpaper for my computer:
endless forests of north Ontario,
boring expanses across the prairies,
inconvenient mountains in the west.
The people of British Columbia,
they're a hardy lot, no? The way
they lay down roads through mountain
passes - Rogers, Kicking Horse, Crows Nest,
the way they beat the land into submission.
The people of Alberta - let me write it
in my book - a magical bunch,
the way they turn tar into crude
and natural wonder into money.
As for the people of north Ontario,
don't get me started on that rugged band.
I've never talked to any of them.
I look at the places they live
and imagine what I'd be like
if I lived there too. That's enough for me.

Canada thru the Car Window



L I N C O L N G R A I N .

CHEAP FUS FREE GUS?

Large blue graffiti piece

RBM

GRA

SMITH R.R. CO. ST. LOUIS MO. C. P. 4750

17

LDLWT
LTWT

17
1900



Winding along thirty-one as the moon rises from the mountains, river stalking us beside the highway from New Denver, the town leaps into view like a postcard from the rack, white wood-slat church, quaint cottages, crafty shops, a stern-wheeler moored on the lake, a three-story hotel where we book a room, more than we wanted, but why not? a king-sized bed instead of a frugal queen, and a wrap-around balcony. After we've unpacked and stretched our limbs, stiff from the drive in, we go down to the restaurant for dinner and a bottle of wine. We lie awake in a room where one, maybe two, families lived for three years. You use the word interment, then laugh at your mistake. We listen in the dark for murmurs of buried things.

In the morning, we walk to the United Church. On the opposite corner stands the old Town Hall, cordoned off, in disrepair, a silent bell in the tower and faded Canadian flag. We use these, the church and town hall, as markers to locate the house. Its present owner has tended it well, keeping the stucco painted a fresh ochre, planting flowers in the yard and pruning the trees to a bonsai perfection. Set against the rising hill and blue morning sky, its beauty elicits an involuntary sigh. We hear now from our own lips the words we've heard from others before us: how bad could it be to have lived in the midst of so much beauty?


Close to the hotel, we find a pottery shop and buy a gift, a bowl, from a woman who settled here three years ago because the place is picturesque. The bowl is beautiful. We began like the bowl, or so the old stories tell us. Fashioned by the gods from a lump of clay into something beautiful, turned on the wheel and fired in the kiln. Like the bowl, we can carry both food and poison.

Kaslo



KASLO





*The beach, the south side, Esquimalt,
Dancers come into view, pas de deux.
Our dogs sniff and whiz while the dancers
whirl in the light. Out comes my camera -
snap snap snap - raised to the unexpected
(how often do you stumble upon dancers
on a beach?) Furious waves foam
not from the water below, but from the lookout
above, arms flapping high overhead.
Squinting, we see the movie camera.
"You spoiled our shot." Accusing tones.
"We didn't realize." Our poor defense.
And later: "You took photos of my actors."
"Yes." I scuff my feet on the dirt path.
"We have a permit. We are allowed here.
All the images of my actors belong to me.
Please delete." I push my button, gone.
The unexpected vanishes, leaves behind
only the planned, papered, duly permitted.
The dogs run off on another scent.*

Dancers on the Beach

it rumbled here at four a.m.,
an aftershock; i felt nothing,
but the dog upstairs barked and barked,
sensed something below the threshold
of my feeble cognizance

it's been days without news radio;
i flipped the switch; a flippant bitch
went on and on of politicians
mired in local crises, squandering
the moment with emergencies

our kitchen overlooks a church
(you'd expect it the other way around)
where lunchtime draws a line
for soup, nods hello, and cigarettes,
waiting for the doors to open

across the harbour the empress serves
high tea, scones, and fairy cakes,
while glancing sideways, the legislature
and straight ahead, skimming water,
seaplanes fly in and out

it rumbled here at four a.m.,
and one day this island may sink below
a boiling sea, or be thrust up above
the himalayas, but not today
today we take our lunch

After the Aftershock



where has the graffiti gone?
across the rusted rails
a pale sickly ochre
washes the bricks below
and above, faded corporate
poster art, suffering sun,
fog, unplanned exposure,
scotiabank, investors group
money this and sponsor that
before, the walls below screamed
a tagging riot spray cans
colour explosion eye pop
the shock of blank walls
draws me up short huh!
where has the graffiti gone?
i bow my head, solemn,
like i'm at a funeral or
touring an ancient tomb
from an age when giants played
and even those without a place
knew a measure of freedom
i trudge from the barren walls
resigned to my time - bland,
blank, controlled and uninventive
when, before my eyes in half
degrees, a graffiti apotheosis!
seedlings now - a sidewalk
stencil, fencepost tag,
rooftop face grinning down -
flowering soon (like weeds
through pavement cracks), the bloom
of the unauthorized, the illicit,
the inconvenient, the uncomfortable,
the damning, the prophetic
there has the graffiti gone





where has the graffiti gone?

Can't you snap the cap of the toothpaste tube?
Keep the invader microbes from breeding there?
I admit: I'm supposed to be large-hearted,
above the nit picking details of domestic
living, but this issue grates me so.
How will I make it with you through this journey
if the toothpaste gapes on the countertop
moldering night after night in the open air?
Our lives depend upon the civil give and take
of spouse and spouse, all of it your fault no doubt,
as I hold in high esteem the simple act
of snapping the cap back on the toothpaste tube.

My electric shaver went on the fritz.
Having served well for fifteen years,
it started buzzing in a way that sounds
like a bumble bee in throes of death.
I'll make do (I tell myself) with a blade
and shaving cream from the drug store.
Ha! So many choices! Such advances
in shaving technology! all to render me
smooth and sexy in ways formerly
unthinkable, with my five-blade razor
oozing lubricant, and canister of gel
that hockey players use. I'll wage a war
on my face, wash the hairy casualties
down the drain, hide all evidence
that I might once have been an animal.

In the same aisle, you find tampons
for your feminine hygiene needs,
a polite way to say your ovaries
still go through the motions, lunar
egg-popping with attendant mess.
And for all the uniqueness an ova
suggests (what with DNA etcetera)
a surprising universality
wrought by the global napkin trade.
Absorbency here is the same (I suppose)
as at home, or in Scotland
or Nigeria. Is this solidarity
through free markets? Communing
through the woman's body politic?


The Politics of Hygiene





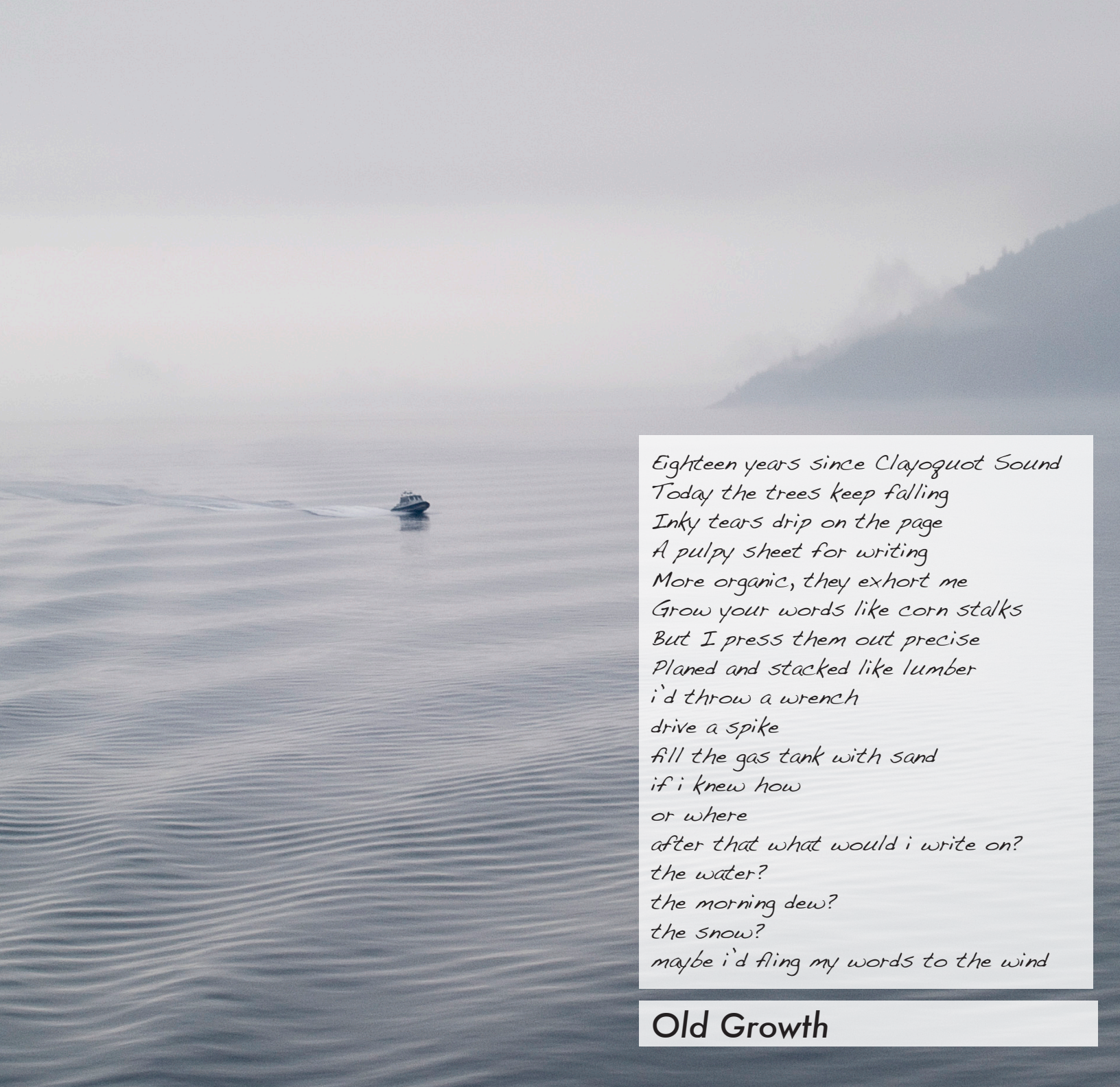
*Wobbly-legged, we rise from lunch
and Chardonnay, the capstone
on a noon-time tasting.
Best to pause, recover
equilibrium, gaze across
the vineyard rows, reminiscent
of corduroy or shopping aisles.
In the middle distance, a farm,
hot-houses where flowers grow,
row on roses, all of it—
grapes and blossoms—handled
by Mexican workers shipped
north for the growing season.
With cool weather on the threshold
they'll be packed back where they belong
year-over-year (eight months here
four there) a rootless life.
I hear the wives of two have left.
What they say of absence is a lie,
a violence done to soldiers
and now to migrant workers.
In the far distance, on a high hill,
an observatory, a keen eye
gazing at ancient suns, honing
the science of avoidance.
Wobbly-legged no longer,
we return to our temporary
home—a rental in the city—
past the church where five or six
smoke crack on the brown grass,
past the skateboard park
where a kid tokes up and grins,
past a mall where we ease our
discomfort with fresh souvenirs.*

Dependencies



*i bear my camera
like a cross
framing good
excluding evil
turning a cool
compassionate eye
on injustice
but mostly conquering
death
with my obsessive
recording
recording
recording
when i return
this will all be gone
through photos
my grief will find
its consolation
but when I'm gone
no trace of me
will remain in my
recording
recording
recording
only a deep hole
an absence in the cave
of my vision*

Camera Aramathea

A small boat is visible on the water, moving from left to right, leaving a white wake. The background shows a misty or foggy landscape with mountains or hills. The overall scene is calm and atmospheric.

*Eighteen years since Clayoquot Sound
Today the trees keep falling
Inky tears drip on the page
A pulpy sheet for writing
More organic, they exhort me
Grow your words like corn stalks
But I press them out precise
Planed and stacked like lumber
i'd throw a wrench
drive a spike
fill the gas tank with sand
if i knew how
or where
after that what would i write on?
the water?
the morning dew?
the snow?
maybe i'd fling my words to the wind*

Old Growth



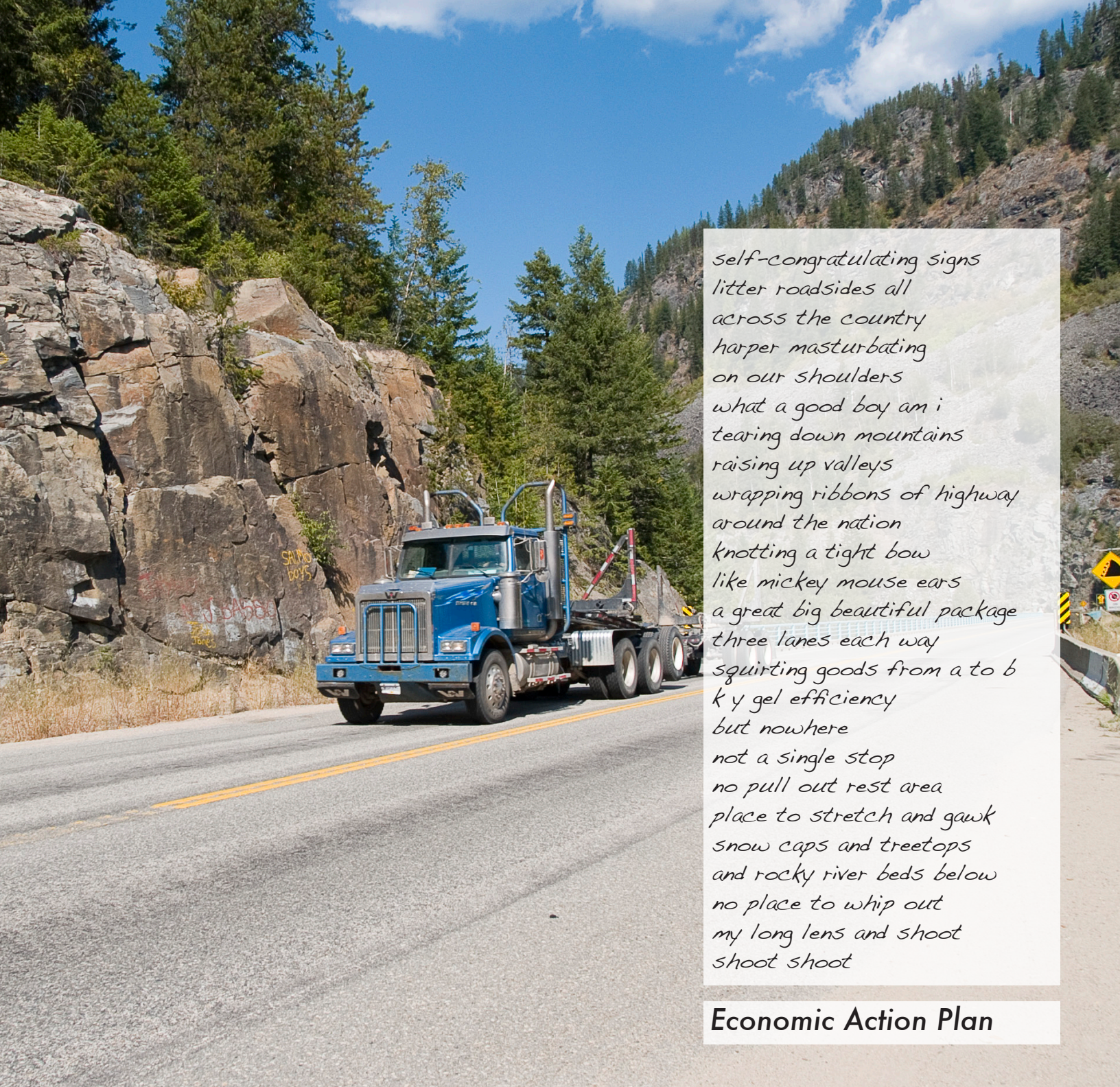


and now it's time to say good-bye
we liked the fantasy of living here
an almost perfect daydream imagining anew
a new house
a new view
a new routine
Paul, who made the leap from fantasy,
gives the grand tour: this is where
I worked my first job
we had our first date
Dillan was born
the drunk driver spilled diesel during the salmon run
you can get great Vietnamese food
we take the dogs for a morning run
I got my tattoos
that Korean guy killed his wife and kids
the woman gave us the evil eye
when the dog pooped on the path
the cruise ships berth in transit to Alaska
my cell phone thought it was in Washington
and cost me ridiculous dineros
I found the body
I get kombuchi
we fell in love
and when the day has faded
and when we've settled into our not-house
and when we've nestled beneath our not-sheets
we remember our own this is wheres
the ones that belong to us
the ones that we belong to

this is where







self-congratulating signs
litter roadsides all
across the country
harper masturbating
on our shoulders
what a good boy am i
tearing down mountains
raising up valleys
wrapping ribbons of highway
around the nation
knotting a tight bow
like mickey mouse ears
a great big beautiful package
three lanes each way
squirting goods from a to b
k y gel efficiency
but nowhere
not a single stop
no pull out rest area
place to stretch and gawk
snow caps and treetops
and rocky river beds below
no place to whip out
my long lens and shoot
shoot shoot

Economic Action Plan



What was the wildest thing you saw in all of wild Canada? Was it the roaring waters of Rearguard Falls? Or the black bear swimming across Mud Lake? Or the pine beetle chewing its way down the North Thompson River Valley? Or the protesters haranguing politicians on the steps of the Victoria Legislature? Or the drivers speeding across Vancouver bridges? Or the junkies hunched around their pipes on Upper Johnson Street? Or the wild style graffiti in the parking lot off Herald? Or the puffed up chest of Robson flaunting his white nipples to the sun? I nod at each suggestion but answer with my own. The wildest thing I saw was Tamiko when she thought I forgot to pack the gift we bought for our daughter.

The Wildest Thing





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Imagine our world is dying.
Imagine survival depends on journeys
to distant suns, settling strange planets,
colonists voyaging for generations,
whirling in cigar-shaped tubes,
tribes of ten thousand adrift between
the stars. Now imagine these crafts
of our salvation are designed by
the Ghermezian brothers: endless
shopping salted by breaks
in the water park, wall-climbing,
water slides, roller coasters, kiddie
rides, bumper boats, pirate ships,
Omnimax, ice rink, mini-golf.
After a thousand years of play and after
settling into orbit around their prospective
home and after opening the hatch
and after stepping onto terra subpono,
how will our progenitors, bloated on fun,
rise to the threats of an alien world?

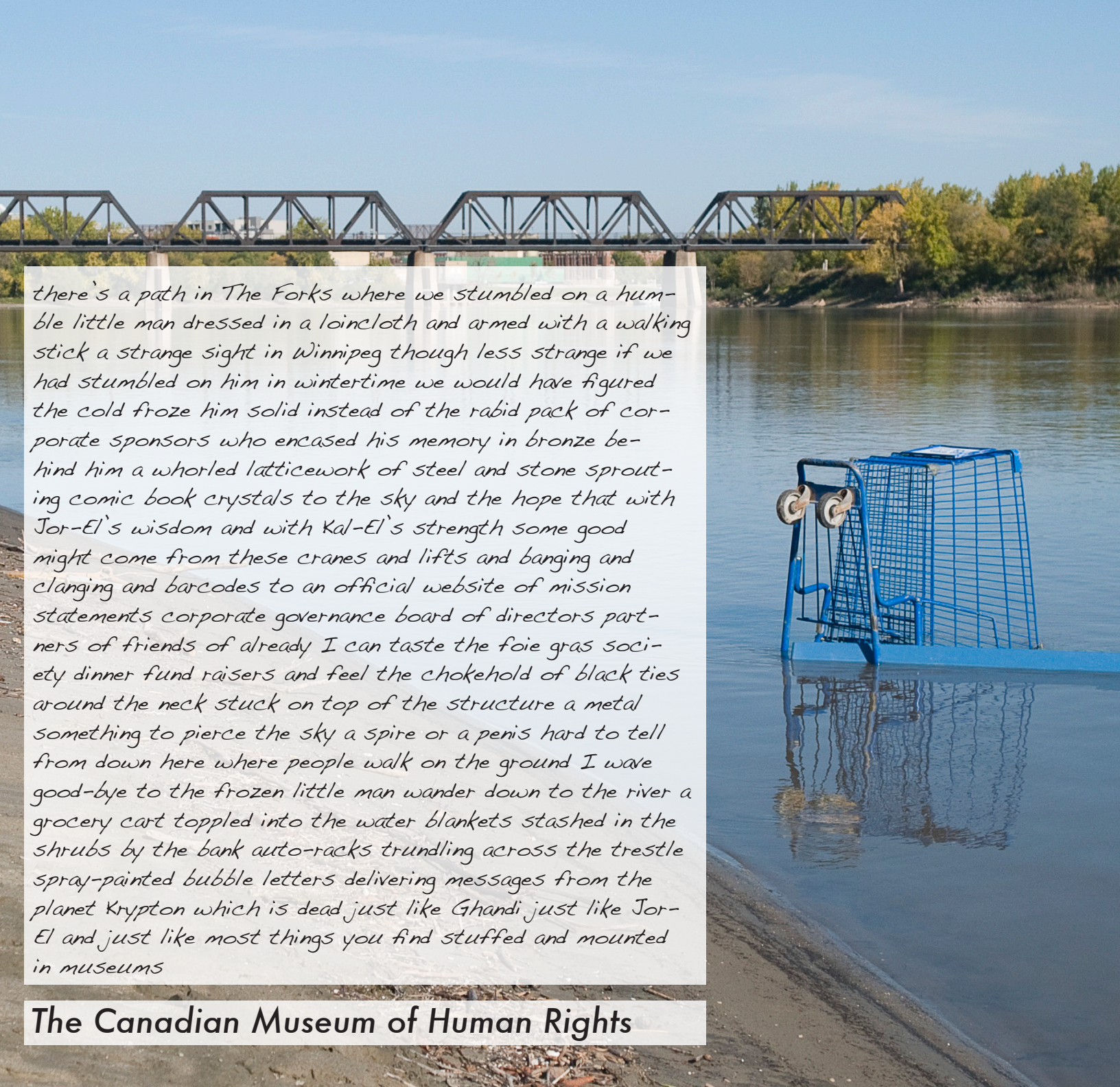
West Edmonton Mall



*I hate to drive through the prairies.
It's boring. It all looks the same.
I love to shop at Wal*Mart.
All across this great country,
Wal*Mart is the place for me.*

*(if performed, this verse should be
repeated at least 300 times, once for
each Wal*Mart in the country)*

Boring

A blue metal shopping cart is partially submerged in a river. The cart is tilted, with its front wheels and handle visible above the water. In the background, a steel truss bridge spans across the river. The sky is clear and blue, and there are trees on the far bank.

there's a path in The Forks where we stumbled on a humble little man dressed in a loincloth and armed with a walking stick a strange sight in Winnipeg though less strange if we had stumbled on him in wintertime we would have figured the cold froze him solid instead of the rabid pack of corporate sponsors who encased his memory in bronze behind him a whorled latticework of steel and stone sprouting comic book crystals to the sky and the hope that with Jor-El's wisdom and with Kal-El's strength some good might come from these cranes and lifts and banging and clanging and barcodes to an official website of mission statements corporate governance board of directors partners of friends of already I can taste the foie gras society dinner fund raisers and feel the chokehold of black ties around the neck stuck on top of the structure a metal something to pierce the sky a spire or a penis hard to tell from down here where people walk on the ground I wave good-bye to the frozen little man wander down to the river a grocery cart toppled into the water blankets stashed in the shrubs by the bank auto-racks trundling across the trestle spray-painted bubble letters delivering messages from the planet Krypton which is dead just like Ghandi just like Jor-El and just like most things you find stuffed and mounted in museums

The Canadian Museum of Human Rights



as we drive into Lanigan
population next to nothing
a pull out a sign
and on the sign a map
and above the map in bold-
faced caps the word LEGEND
I'm not thinking cartography
and imagine a bright marquee
flashing The Legend of Lanigan
like The Legend of Zelda
every place has its legend
here we see its traces
here the dusty gravel roads
here the façades like on a wild
west movie set here the rusted
rolling stock by the railside
legend is what archaeology
destroys and I with my hammer
chip away at Lanigan

The Legend of Lanigan

