Miranda Peery

Lungs

There are lungs on the mountain across from my house. I can feel them – breathe in, breathe out. I sometimes breathe with them so I can remember what it felt like to be alive with the world, but now they seem to have acquired my smoker’s cough. Their breath is ragged and sometimes they wheeze like a tired old dog climbing stairs. The track that runs past them used to carry tourists who paid for the privilege of breathing their air, but now it runs ten times a day, sand and water for pouring into the ground the only passengers, and they don’t breathe at all. Each day I check to make sure the lungs are still breathing like a new mother with her child or a hospice caregiver when the time is near. So far they are fine but I know that it is only a matter of time.
Road Trip to the Interior

Driving west in the global north, 
endlessly heading downhill. 
Down, down to the flat bottomlands, 
rich with place names designed to be aspirational – 
Elyria, Avalon – 
where trailers sprout like chickweed 
among the corn. 
Overland barges cruise asphalt rivers 
as wide and flat as the Mississippi, 
past landscapes that skip like ruined vinyl – 
white house, 
red barn, 
white house, 
red barn – 
carrying carbon in carbon, to carbon, with carbon, 
while the governor runs for president. 
As a child of the forest, I wonder 
if it is hard to grow an imagination here, 
with soil this rich and deep. 
Do you ever have to wonder, 
when you can see everything, 
and it all looks the same? 
I am an outsider here 
in the great wide open, 
where they never use turn signals, 
but always let you in. 
A gravel-voiced man at the TA 
keeps talking about northeastern insiders. 
Maybe we are both right. 
More likely, we are both left behind.
Ray Gutiérrez stands at the corner of the plaza
selling beef jerky in front of the meanest car
I’ve ever seen.
A ’39 Chevy, dropped low and chrome-bright
the same blue as the
neon
electric
sky.

He says the proceeds go to kids in need
all over the world and smiles like a child when I reach into my pocket.
“God bless you” he says “red or green?
The red is local spicy, but the green is mild”

I can feel his approval as I take the red and
it grows when I mention
the car; he smooths it absently while he talks about it
an old, easy knowledge in the touch.

Later, as I smoke on the wrought iron bench
in the plaza where iron once planted a graveyard,
he walks up and asks where I come from, my name
if there’s work there, the weather, when he should visit.

He tells me he picks chiles to freeze so he can send them to his boy who
works in Iowa, where chiles won’t grow.
“The wrong kind of soil” he tells me and
he seems like he knows.

His bright gleaming car reflects the crowds as they
shop in the storefronts surrounding the square
walking over the dead unaware,
while his blinding smile outshines them all.