February 2022

Grazing in the Grass

Roshan Sivarajah
rsivaraj@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/budding_writers_contest_2021

Citation of this paper:
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/budding_writers_contest_2021/1
The ‘69 Firebird pierces through the horizon. From a distance its glory is undeniable. A summer haze masks the years of burdening neglect. The rubber meets the road with a fleeting grip as gears churn forward in anguish. Lumbering down the interstate, it wheezes in thirst, finally pulling off the nearest exit for fuel. Sputtering to a halt, the settling cloud of dust can no longer hide its withering demeanour.

Henry creaks open the door and plants his feet on the concrete, his broad frame struggling to lift himself from the sunken seat. His thighs buckle, numb from the long drive. Prying open the hatch; he plugs it in. The pump squeezes tightly until he can feel the hum of the gas coursing through. He hasn’t felt this type of resurgence in years.

Settling back into the car, the sun beats down on him with an overloaded emphasis, as if his windshield were a magnifying glass. He hastily jams his key into the ignition, bracing himself for the series of incoming false starts. Amazingly, the engine roars awake. Dials surge up and flicker to their steady level like pupils constricting from a burst of sunlight, trying to make sense of the pulsing energy.

The radio turns on automatically. Static at first, but soon engulfed by the staccato trumpets penetrating through. His head reclines into his seat as his foot glides onto the gas propelling him forward, pressing up on both ends as if breaking out of a shell. This moment of acceleration overwhelms him. His fingers grip the wheel with purpose as if each hand is gripping a bar of the cage that he’s breaking through. He is a force to be reckoned with, like a bullet splitting through the oldest tree in the forest.
This familiar voice lulls him into a trance as flutes, violas, and congas burst onto the scene. Beads of sweat rise from his smooth ebony skin, feeding off the sun and giving him a youthful glow. He pulls the pick out of his shirt pocket and digs into his afro, removing the turmoil from his head with every flick. Living out the past few years in captivity, he was trapped and unable to sort out the heavy blackness weighing on him.

With every passing dashed line his anticipation grows. He hasn’t seen his family since being put away. Perhaps they looked down on him because he wasn’t the man they once knew. If they could only see him now, free as a bird.

These worries flow through the cross-breeze, unable to linger too long as the joys of the song are overwhelming. In this moment he feels complete, like a jigsaw puzzle with all its pieces in place. The cracks between them so faint you could hardly remember they were in complete disarray just moments ago.
There are so many groovy things to see
While grazin’ in the grass

Out of muscle memory, he exits onto the winding road leading home. The lush greenery engulfs him, branches reaching out to welcome him back. It feels like he’s a passenger in his own car. The foliage providing the first sign of shade, as the blue sky remains cloudless and immaculate.

The sun beamin’ down between the leaves
And the birds dartin’ in and out of the trees

He remembers biking down this road as a boy, waving down the relatives that had come from out of state for his mom’s Thanksgiving feast. His overalls flapping against the bike tires with the smell of sizzling turkey to guide him home.

Nearing his house, he can almost smell that turkey again. The dirt path draws up a swarm of dust that blocks his rear view. Upon pulling into the driveway, Henry steps out of the car with the key still in the ignition.

Everything here is so clear, you can see it
And everything here is so real, you can feel it
Climbing up the steps to his porch seems more arduous of a task than he remembers. As he walks in the music can still be heard from his car, now slowed to the beat of an IV drip. Dust carpets the crooked floorboards and weigh down on the cobwebs channeling through the corridor. It’s as if he’s entered a snow globe that’s finally stopped shaking.

🎶 I can dig it he can dig it she can dig it we can d-

The caretaker unplugs his headphones. She wheels him through networks of hallways, past a series of never-ending doors. Abruptly stopping, she opens a door seemingly at random to reveal an empty darkness. The crackling fluorescence of the hallway casts an odd shadow on his stump of a body against the chipping linoleum tiles. Upon seeing the tip of his shadow, his trembling hands unclasp the handles, labouring up towards his scalp. Expecting to be welcomed by the warm cushion of his afro, he is harshly mistaken. He palms nothing more than his barren shell of a cranium. She flicks on the light and the room groans awake. A bed with the imprint of a stranger lines the wall to his left. Pills litter the bedside table. Above it is a calendar with all the columns left blank except for Sunday. “5-6 pm – Music Therapy”. His finger still taps to a beat that can only exist in his head now, trying to hold on to the song before it fades away. He’s been tucked back into his little box like an afterthought. No one remembers Henry. Henry doesn’t remember Henry.

🎶 Can you dig it? 🎶