

Sanctuary

Leah Hanley

Leah Noel Hanley is currently in pursuit of a Master of Arts degree in English at the University of North Dakota. Her writing focuses on the exploration of deeply human experiences, through which she hopes to inspire empathy across cultural boundaries, and to promote the need to conserve and preserve our Earth. When Leah is not writing (or completing schoolwork), she is likely cross stitching, cooking, or spending quality time with her loved ones.

There are at least four dozen birds
in my yard this morning.
They are plucking seeds and crunching beetles,
flitting from bough to bough in a game of chase, chirping in delight.
Crabapples drop like confetti,
the ground is a bouquet of green and yellow with splashes of red,
the ruffled grass erupting with brown birds.
A single robin perches on the porch railing,
patrolling for bugs in the grassy forest below;
With a cock of its head, it swoops gracefully to snag a plump breakfast from the dirt.
The red-breasted nuthatch rummages at the feeder for shelled peanuts,
his black & white racing stripes a blur as he zips back to the birch.
Chickadees relay back and forth between the shade tree and the feeder,
pausing to chatter over seeds at the trough.
I smile, seeing them take refuge on this patch of land.

Yesterday, the old man next door
was marching backwards in his driveway,
pumping poison onto the concrete
with a steady thrust of his arm,
his shoulders hunched to his task.
He winced when the bushy weeds in my garden
hailed his attention with

fronds extended in salute,
and the spindly vines between my driveway cracks taunted him
with their confident laziness.

His recoiled gaze

swept back over his property

with grim satisfaction;

At least when he closes his weary eyes

his last sight will have been

a yard with no weeds.

When finally he hobbled up his tidy brick stairs,
the dandies in my lawn stretched their necks to see him leave
and beckoned the bumbles to their upturned faces,
clusters of thistles dispersed the black beetles that took shelter
under their thorny canopies.

Across the street is a succession of
Glistening emerald carpets
Freshly swept and shampooed,
Houses cast beveled shadows,
Lawn King paper signs flutter in the breeze
Like cocktail umbrellas in a deli display.
Regiments of hostas, shrubbery, ferns,
Tulips neatly organized behind short retaining walls,
Plastic window boxes cradling new geraniums,
White letters against navy siding:
W-E-L-C-O-M-E

But the bees visit the wild raspberry patch by my garage,
butterflies taste the tangle of tiger lilies by my front door,
a rabbit nests her babies in a patch of tall grass behind my deck,
squirrels travel on power line highways
to bury their winter treasures in my garden,
and birds dance in my unkempt lawn.
My sliver of Earth bursts with life,
and I write my name
in the fog of my breath
on the bay window glass.