

Progress

by Heather Ramsay

Skinny L'il Bitch packed with straps,
a long-handled axe, steel-toed boots, a ladder—
something that could be scaffolding—
chases *Suck My Tailpipe* down the road.

These boys in their duallys were not included
on the mural of progress at Jack's Cafe
in Eastend, Saskatchewan.
But how could the painter have known what was beyond
the buffalo hunts that melded into traders,
who marched towards law and order and settler wagons,
then crescendoed into small towns and cities that
scrape the sky? Would she have foreseen the grain
elevators toppling? Towers of wood made from stacks
of good lumber dragged away and burned?
Emptiness and metal silos; drought and
oil derricks dipping their tongues into dirt?

Over Denver sandwiches and hot hamburgers,
could anyone have dreamed that beehive burners
would become beer-drinking joints.
That children would wear Superman pajamas
inside-out when they came down for breakfast
at the Hampton Court motel?
In what dusty parking lot could we have foreseen
aging hippies gyrating on the roof of their RVs?

We head West like myth says,
away from cracked land and rotting hay,
and see the same loud-mouth trucks
two provinces later. In a mountain town,
roads rutted and torn by the spring flood,
we peer in and see front seats packed
with buckets and shovels.
Naked-lady air fresheners dangling
from rear-view mirrors.
These boys are on a mission,
but to where?

At a refurbished, historic cafe, we learn that 200 fires
are burning nearby. After ice cream and paradise bread,
we stop to look in a store window at two hundred
antique electric toasters and we miss
seeing *Suck My Tailpipe*
and *Skinny L'il Bitch* peel out, burn rubber
and continue their rolling descent towards the sea.