

Love is a Verb

I love you like a telescope loves the touch of an astronomer's eyelid.
I love you like a novel loves the readers' tears, dried onto its crinkled pages.
I love you like a piano loves the stroke of the musician's fingers.
I love you like a teacup loves the pressure of cracked lips.
I love you like a paintbrush loves the promise of an empty canvas.

I will love you when tears drown your eyes and redden your cheeks.
I will love you when your wrong words need understanding.
I will love you when your exhausted fingers can't intertwine with mine.
I will love you when your spine curves and your hair thins.
I will love you when you erupt and fire hateful comments.

I love you despite your empty promises, every secret you couldn't keep.
I love you despite your chaotic thoughts, every hint you couldn't take.
I love you despite your hollow compliments, every word you hid from my ear.
I love you despite your arrogant remarks, every apology you refused utter.
I love you despite your apprehensions, every opportunity you abandoned.

I will love you until the sun forgets to warm, and the moon refuses to emerge.
I will love you until the water in every ocean, storm cloud, and glass is dried up.
I will love you until the entire universe is drawn on a map, and every constellation is named.
I will love you until every fire is extinguished, until every grain of sand is counted.
I will love you until my lungs lie still and my heart wears out.

Hendrick Road

Now, snow spirals through the inky night sky.
The powder piles, weightless on the street lights above.
Icy roads shine, reflecting the faint glimmer of the moon.
I sit in the driver's seat of the car, my father beside me.
He is strong, he is securing, he is steadfast.

Together, we marvel at the stunning landscape.
Pine trees coated with dancing white dust line the pavement.
As our car slices through the dense flurries,
snow billows off the roof of our gray Honda,
sending waves of tiny diamonds across the windshield.

Silence looms in the air, along with something unidentifiable.
It tastes bitter and nips the tip of my nose like frostbite:
memories.
The very pavement we drive across resonates with my childhood.
The corporeal memory lane - Hendrick Road.

Then, a brick ranch, belonging to my grandparents, stands across from Hendrick Road.
I can hear the rain pounding against the roof, over the chatter of my cousins.
We rest on the oak floors of the kitchen, propped against the refrigerator.
Devouring our vanilla ice cream cones, we play I Spy and 20 Questions.
Their house is now filled with strangers, and my grandfather rests six feet underground.

The timid kindergartener who wept everyday before school
and stayed inside alone for recess to sort homework for her teacher
made her first friendship with the girl who lived on Hendrick Road.
The last time we spoke was a summer eight years ago.
Today we are merely tied together by a fraying string of memories.

Later, the route is familiar, although my friends and I are only sixth graders.
The wind whips our tangled hairs, as our parents' quarters jingle in our pockets.
We pedal our bicycles down Hendrick Road, attempting to outride the sweltering summer heat.
Anxiously, we await the relief of the corner gas station's blue raspberry slushies.
But the sweet flavor leaves an aftertaste of demands, change, and loss.

Later still, we blast Disney music over the humming of ancient vacuum cleaners,
drowning out the high-pitched customer service voices cemented in our brains
after two hours of "Can I get you some mashed potatoes?" "Any gravy with that?"
My first job - the camp off of Hendrick Road that served bottled eggs and paid under minimum wage.
On my first day, I caught a glimpse of adulthood and was already homesick.

Soon, I will drive down Hendrick Road, my car packed full of suitcases and textbooks.

I will observe my parents cry silent tears, as my empty siblings force cheerful smiles.
I will argue for the last time over who gets to play music during the car ride.
I will make a final case to my parents for a drive-through lunch.
I will whisper a choked goodbye before boarding the plane, a one way ticket in hand.