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Eroded Travel

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Eroded Travel

The car pitches west for Devonian
shades while our kids limn drumlins

swelling past windows. We should be
sighting Front Ranges, but Yamnuska's

scalloped mask is swarmed
by a stratus pack. We're bound

for a glacier's toe, more monastic
with each season, which rations out

chatter marks between ice today
and when I last faced the terminus.

~

Stretch-break by a scarp announcing
its anticline. My daughter

grins at potato stones woken
from a bed the stream has ditched.

She heaves refined cobbles.
A scuttling course tucks the lobs

in a duvet of held breath
and her face casts for more.

Taco'd rock in hand, my son
asks why Earth folds itself.

With my boots ruffling water's
zeal, I wonder how to render

the years for bending shale,
when this trip, to him, makes an era.

~

If we took this creek
at its word and braced

for an argument with
the city, we could alight

at a shore to watch high-rises
accumulating

and drape our arms over
a lacquered bench

engraved
with my brother's name.

~

The highway unveils a cement plant,
shoots gnashing a carbonate cache.

Stalks strip the quarry, wad up prey,
and hoard clinkers in a sealed dome.

In lieu of erosion's slow slashing,
these cookers increase nature's speed,

deposit concrete along the trough
and into braided roads.

Continent's ballast is rebalanced
by shells and bones paving our path.

~

A man my children
will never meet.

The date is concretion
in my mind,

a swelling nucleus
that syphons memories

embedded in
hour strata—

exposed by a voice
on the radio

that fractures
an outcrop,

revealing this strange
ball of grief.

Twelve years
since he died.

~

My son begs the disk to skip,
skirt the skin of water's machine,

but he gives up in a sunken galumph.
His arm's young arc can't master

the knuckle-knack needed
to syncopate a flowing ostinato,

while my wife whips stones
that suture across liquid wounds.

~

My brother is

the K-T Boundary

seared through
family seams.

Gaunt line visible
after impact.

Alien elements.
Shocked quartz.

Cross this threshold
from rock to room.

His mute moraine
of clutter.

Empty fridge.
Cigarettes in the freezer.

Signature signifying
he's not coming back.

~

Switchbacking by foot up the ridge,
our soles scuff petrified corals.

Athabasca, outwashing from snout,

rejects our advances.

Son and daughter pose before
a glacier their life will outlast.

Aging will metamorphose them
into forms beyond my recognition.

How should I explain that uniformity
of Earth can be jarred during

their own microscopic span?
We freeze for a photograph,

but the present is ablating.
Our past seeps through a moulin

back into mainstreams.
We are here to see the going.

~

About-face at the Stygian off-ramp
with its Hades-stewed slate,

purple plates scoffing
as our taillights shrink.

We wind back on unwound

ropes of asphalt, my son

cupping a quartzite memento
that magnetizes his return.

Ice remains a retreating burden.
Wind rasp curdles in my ears.

DAVID MARTIN works as a literacy instructor in Calgary. His first collection, *Tar Swan* (NeWest Press, 2018), was a finalist for the Raymond Souster Award and the City of Calgary W. O. Mitchell Book Prize. David's work was awarded the CBC Poetry Prize in 2014.