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Elms at Night and Outside the Museum (for George F. Ledingham)

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Elms at Night

Bright night sky, elm branches

dark against light-reflecting clouds.

A single streetlight burning.

Summer nights, the elms catch

that light, shining silver, susurrating

in the wind. I want to take

their photograph. I want to breathe

their exhalations, take them

into my body, myself.

I want to burn those trees

into my memory. I want that light,

that texture, sound, in my mind,

carry it all with me. Forgive me

my trespasses, I am partly elm now.

My fingers reach upwards,

my feet stretch into the warm earth,

my skin thickens into corky bark, my children are
the samaras you sweep from your porch,

my flesh is cellulose, capillaries xylem and phloem,
my hair photosynthesizes, I stand
proudly in the rain, in the dark.

Outside the Museum

(for George F. Ledingham)

Outside the museum, the April air is warm.

Gulls and geese call for mates.

This park is a savannah—elm and ash and lawn.

Inside, on the boardroom wall, framed
specimens of native plants found miles from
the nearest fragment of grassland.

Ghostly, bleached, flattened under glass,
elegantly positioned on archival paper
with an artist's sense of how things go.

A touch of blue in the flax, the beardtongue,
some purple in the nodding thistle,
but otherwise pale. Almost transparent.

The fluorescent lights, I tell myself,
have leached away the chlorophyll,
leaving only cellulose. Like skeletons.

The man who gathered these
a quarter century ago, identified
them, recorded where they were found,

made these plants his life's work,
spent decades getting to know them.
I write in my notebook, *There's love in this.*

He was eighty-five when he found them,
walking the city with a green tin vasculum,
discovering wonder along Wascana Creek

or growing in its water, beside the railway tracks,
next to the highway, in alleys and front gardens.

I imagine him shuffling, slowly, pausing

to collect one more, touching its leaves,
gently placing it with the others.

There's love in this, I write. There's love.

KEN WILSON is a settler who lives on Treaty 4 territory in oskana kâ-asastêki (Regina, Saskatchewan), where he teaches English courses at the University of Regina. He has published academic essays in scholarly journals, and his creative nonfiction essay “Populus” was shortlisted for *The Malahat Review’s* 2021 Constance Rooke Creative Nonfiction Prize. He holds an MFA from the University of Regina and is an alumnus of the Sage Hill Writing Experience. His current writing project is a book-length manuscript on walking, which won the 2022 City of Regina Writing Award.