

Winter Clutch

I wrap my feet in socks and armor them with shoes. I'm insulated. I have my phone and my keys and I check the mail on my way out. My part of town is the busy crossroads where three towns converge, and keep their distance. I live by the tracks, across from the pawn shop.

I traverse the parking lot in a dance of avoidance around moats of liquid snow and mounds of carved ice. The sidewalk leads up hill to the railroad tracks, and the path that was once tracks and now stretches all the way to the horizon. Asphalt and paint. Last year's pitch patched cracks have begun to deny their repairs and are smiling up through the pavement anticipating next season's havoc. The sides of the path are walled in by transparent nature; naked trees in which crows laugh their way through a game of hopscotch, branch to branch. I can see the buildings of my neighborhood through the trees, but no trees through the buildings.

The industrial fans of the cold storage warehouse whirr away while the idling train emits the occasional chuffing sigh. Trucks performing last duties of the afternoon beep impatiently and intermittent cyclists with no fear and no helmets and no temperature sensitivity pass by, hunched and purposeful. The inside of my nose is cold and I wonder what the nose of a moose feels like. I exhale through my mouth, puffing steam into the collar of my sensible coat, relishing the feeling of warmth as it passes my face by on its way up.

I cross a foot bridge over the still creek and peer down at the tracks in the snow - bunny, dog, human, bike, and plow. The snow here is a plethora of colors. Brown, gray, black, yellow, antique ivory, and original flavor. By the road it greets me shoulder-high where it has been asked to stand aside. The sun has reduced all but the hardest crystals into blackened ice castles, and it sends me a blinding postcard from low in the sky where it pretends to be warm.

My feet kick up cold spray onto the backs of my legs from the shattered puddles on the path, and I head back towards my

apartment where there is a pot of something warm simmering on a low setting, smelling of smoked chipotle and cornbread. My gloved fingers retreat into the cuffs of my coat. I feel like a turtle in my green shell, sucking in my limbs. I am cold.

I walk back past the vegan pizzeria, the halal market and the Chinese grocer. A whole aisle of dried mushrooms. All different kinds. I'm out of camel meat and fresh tamarind, but it's there if I need it. I miss lychee nuts in the winter. It's nearly spring again and they'll be back – big red net bags of lychees that I'll eat all in one sitting, peeling the skins and chewing the flesh off the seed in the middle. I'll have sore sticky fingers and I'll keep walking back for more all summer long.

Jennifer Kovelan lives just outside of Minneapolis, MN with her three imperfect children, four stray cats in various stages of domestication, and a long-dead hamster that is still in the freezer, now buried behind the veggie burgers. Her creative non-fiction has appeared previously on anderbo.com.