

Waiting on the Wet Season

Short poems from the AIRIE Lab

by

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Gifts

Every morning, the sky plays wind music,
the wind plays tree music,
the trees play bird music.

Thank you, sky.

Thank you, wind.

Thank you, trees.

The Writer

Out on West Lake, plenty of wind
ripples the green water and
fish jump too quickly to see.

I have a sharp pencil
and a notebook,
pages empty.

Appointment

Falling darkness reminds
Chuck-will's-widow
to join the insect song.

Ill-suited Companions

A mud dauber has trapped herself
inside my screened porch.
Neither of us is happy about the situation.

Big Cypress

On the Loop Road,
I'm so used to spotting alligators,
for a minute I wonder what rare creature
that red Ford Mustang is.

Conclusion

Inside the mud dauber's nest,
forty paralyzed spiders twitch and wait
to be eaten alive.
What is it about life that forces itself
toward cruelty? That night,
I crush a tiny black beetle
in half with my knife.
What is one more death
inside this killing machine?

Night in the AIRIE Lab

In the dim studio, lizards dash madly
across the floor, trying not to be seen.
The fan blows scraps of paper, remnants
of what I'm trying not to say.

Battle

Outside the studio,
two birds skirmish
over the smallest palm;
the other palms sit empty.

Lostmans River

The mangroves take everything back—
sugar cane boilers, bark boilers, cisterns
encircled in their labyrinthine grasp.
*Once, says the guide, a tree fell over,
and we found human teeth in the roots.*

State Road 9336

In the chain link fence
outside the taco stand,
a plastic bag mimics the anhinga,
dries its wings in the afternoon wind.

Comforts

The grass has grown and the heat is up.
Tomorrow will be a good day
to go out early,
to come back drenched in sweat,
to sit out the afternoon heat
reading poetry.

Coffee, 9:00 a.m.

Morning birds suggest their numbers,
hidden in the dense scrub and slash pine.

Clouds skate across the sky,
high whole empires
forming and dissolving, they race on,
leaving, for a moment,
thin trailings of milky-white-over-blue,
vapor hieroglyphs, as if to say,
“I was here. I existed.”

So too, for a moment, do we leave
thin echoes of ourselves
behind us—
our work, our words, the way we loved—
everything carried on by the wind,
eventually.

Feeding

A gator plunges to his right,
arcing
from inaction
to ferocity,
jaws snapping
from potential
to energy.

The fish swim on around him,
oblivious,
or simply resigned
to the existence
of one less fish.

Scavenged

A vulture's carcass has lost the war
with a mower's blade.

All that's left now are scattered
clumps of white and gray, a few
suggestions of bone and sinew.

Don't feel bad—

he was already dead, his eye
plucked from his ruby head.

Sunset on Anhinga Trail

Anhinga flaps and chortles—

Grasshopper chomps

on pond apple leaves—

Alligator bellows across the marsh—

once you start to listen,

everyone has something to say.

Short-timer

A red-shouldered hawk

alights in my yard.

Only one week left—

not enough time

to learn the name of every bird.