

Without Light and Oxygen

Katie Brear

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Lichen grows where the air is not polluted. At home, it is diverse and free. Yellow and silver, even red. Sometimes orange, sometimes grey, sometimes green. Sometimes the purest air smells – when folding clothes brought in from the line. The phone rings. “Hello, I’m the EBSC calling from school”. Emotionally Based School Avoidance. Interfering with time, clothes crease waiting to be folded in the basket. “We believe the symbiotic relationship between school, parent, and pupil is important”. Not a mutual agreement, though disguised as lichen, but a symbiosis that induces harm is parasitic. Maybe there’s benefit in the education that a pupil receives – but the air is not the purest at school.

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Bringing school into the home violates the air. Tackling just two subjects per week only slightly blackens the lungs. Lungwort helps respiratory problems but grows on old oak trees in forests and no longer in urban streets. “Children get angry with homework. Try to sit down with her every evening. Try not to get angry yourself”. The leafy lichen left for trees elsewhere, for distance. To feel sunshine cast over the body, and to water the soul. Maybe there was anger, but there is no mention of this to insinuate – and the longer the clothes are left unfolded in the basket, the creases become deeper.

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The road to recovery, a thirty-minute walk home. “It really won’t be good for her mental health coming home alone on the days that you work”. Little beards of lichen rest on branches but not idly not lazy – and yellow bursts discolour walls. Each step leaves behind twitchy branches, heat from bum wiggles on chairs, and vicious cattle with cruel thick tongues herded around monolithic corridors spruced and cleaned for each generation. Bleach the growth, make it clean, look the same and scold it off. Scold for not wearing the right socks.

Poetry

Section Editors:

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"I'm aware you're a single parent, and time is an issue". Help is not in sight. Spending entire lives living well and owning objects. The prized cow bolts. So now, there's no show of wealth – nothing to own but an orange crustose laden gate. "It's important she doesn't fall behind". Behind the remnants of spawned democracy, seen on holiday, education is marks and chippings of depth. The ruins beside the legs sharing the same grass beneath the feet. Life's lines when reading a hand, not the lines on the column or the detailed frieze. Choke the thallus and deaden the membrane until it becomes unseen. Beautiful and perfect, but a continuation of breathing in dangerous air and derogatory speak.

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