


MOVING
TO
CLIMATE
CHANGE
HOURS

A silhouette of a city skyline with several buildings of varying heights, set against a light, hazy background. The buildings are dark and feature some architectural details like windows and rooflines.

ROSS BELOT



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Other Titles by Ross Belot

Swimming in the Dark

MOVING
TO
CLIMATE
CHANGE
HOURS

ROSS BELOT



JAMES STREET

NORTH BOOKS

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For Sara

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I

FIRST DAY

Gulf Oil refinery Clarkson, Ontario, 1979

Two men blinded by hydrofluoric acid
yesterday. The skin of one
absorbed acid

and it ate his bones.

He died this morning.

The gate's safety sign says
12 hours worked
since the last lost time.

The safety trainer lectures.

Hydrogen sulphide.

At high concentrations it causes olfactory paralysis,
you can't smell it. Then you fall down
unconscious and next you die. If you see a body
on the ground
you must:

check wind direction,
move upwind,
call for help.

Imagine your best friend Bill
on the ground,
how it would feel to leave him.

This is your first day,
wear workboots, learn work rules,
get the paycheque, go home to Shelley
pregnant with Neil, looking after little Heather –
do the right thing, be a good boy,
come home safe
ten thousand more times.

HIGHWAY 6

Sure I see Erv, dressed in blue coveralls, rusted oil refinery boiling behind, warm grip of his hand on my shoulder.

Sure, I drove to work thousands of times
over years, that same route,
the one where I almost died, a slide
on April snow, head-on
into two cars. Not far from
where Erv drove his SUV directly

into a transport truck. Erv's body landed in its cab through the
windshield, the driver wrecked for life. Erv's supporters
at work said he must have been tired, Erv's trial for Erv's
wife's murder wearing him down.

The truck driver said Erv looked right at him as he drove into the
transport's front grill.

RAILWAY STORY

i walked the tracks to high school from high school
taking chances bending
rules those tracks
led to trouble in other ways
the cannabis cemetery parties and ostensible
indifference working in the railway yard summer
i changed kicking up sulphur
on railbeds crossing non-existent mills and fertilizer
plants steel toed re-enforced
to protect feet broken-down
pinto dusty green ford fairlane
my belt line trips watch a man's life sliding
liquor beside him singing over his radio
lying on a flatcar as they roll together
around the corner

subway trains to new life's office
smaller and harder a long way from walking
lines in late night nadir yeasty odour
of Port Colborne flour box
cars the new oily steel's smell
Dofasco sunday still that shriek
steel on steel tunnels bored through earth
likened to dark nights surrounded steel
both sides walking lines

wrote it all before
my friend's suicide his father got me
that railway job helped me survive abandonment
watch dead winter trees torn
from a good friday train ice storm damage
repaired most slowly think of my friend
and death standing water reflecting
trees upside down a wild turkey observing
me train and night ahead
never emerging forever foraging

i come to you by train
i leave you by train most often
though sometimes we leave together
but watch one or the other of us
step off the train to transfer you last night
waiting as i left on a train i knew
i could wait too for a later train but
instead went with the others on the early
train you told me later my next train
came just before or just after your train
i text i'm here when obviously here
can be anywhere and often is
moving from place to place across
the system train by train and then
the movement at MacArthur down steps and on
up the other side one direction doing
that for the Richmond train and the other
to get the Pittsburg/ Bay Point train criss-crossing
recrossing underneath i'm motivated by multiple
desires those living amongst trains all craving
steel rail screech so i think we should
leave together tonight

3 TO 11 SHIFT TH&B RAILWAY, 1977

Critchley ran out of the caboose in Welland, psychotic break or high on something, buck-naked. Ran right down the tracks. The boys weren't sure what to do, No Toes Richards called it in to the dispatcher who was used to dealing with drunks on the road. Back here in Aberdeen yard Steve the radio operator had gone out to hit a bucket of golf balls from our parking lot back onto the golf course across the road. The guys from the Starlite had collected them from the back end of the railyard while waiting to head back to Toronto. We busted a gut imagining someone finding thirty golf balls sitting there. Dirty Bill had some hash oil, dipped his cigarette in it & asked me if I wanted a toke. Never done that before & did it mess with me, I was feeling pretty good. The midnight freight to Brantford was leaving same time as I was, they offered a ride on the train, let me hop off at the tracks by the apartment, never done that either, night of firsts & high besides, might have been a bad idea. They slowed down a bit for me to step off the engine. Wondering if my bad knee would hold. It did.

POEM FOR VANCOUVER

9 cormorants skim English Bay's surface, in
a line stretching. 9 ocean-going freighters parked a mile out, wait
to be summoned past First Narrows to off-load cargo, spread across
English Bay's mouth, weight not just in holds, but in tonnes of carbon
to get here. That harbour seal spinning in the water, then under and
gone. Captain Vancouver landed in 1792, not first, that was José María
Narváez a year before. Back before any Europeans: so good later it had
to be clear-cut.

Sitting on a bench by the Stanley Park Teahouse,
beside a broken clam left by a crow. Its flesh iridescent, open to air. The
Salish met Vancouver's ship with gifts, trade was good they thought, later
came the guns. Crow in the tree above has a problem. Shits on the next
bench, proclaiming his territory. Everything is about sex my therapist told
me, even not-sex is.

stone men, inukshuk,
stare out at a flat ocean
later they will drown
and then not drown and so on
nine cormorants surfacing

THIS IS A TRIBUTE FOR A MAN WHO IS NOT ALREADY DEAD

like a crow who picks
black bits into bits hops over
what he leaves behind others get
he is only forgiving himself or that rain seasons
a place beneath always
and then his reading
of gravel death not feared or so said
his poetry a choice made to stay
an understanding
of a deep well in his yard
where nothing bothers to remain
hidden
tribute his
wife said is a sign of dependence
which gave her pause this man
she has known and not
for many years an instant maybe a day



Ross Belot is a poet, photographer, documentary filmmaker, and an energy and climate change columnist. He previously worked for a major Canadian petroleum company for decades before retiring in 2014. Now he writes eco-poetics and opinion pieces about government climate change inaction. Ross was a finalist for the CBC Poetry Prize in 2016 and longlisted in 2018. In 2017, he completed an MFA at Saint Mary's College of California. Born in Ottawa, Ross has made his home in the Golden Horseshoe since 1970.

From industrial accidents to frozen highways, Belot charts what faces a working man in stripped-down lyric poetry. *Moving to Climate Change Hours* is a solemn ode to the end of oil, filled with poems that have seen it all and can acknowledge the darkness that's coming while still finding beauty in the arched neck of a tundra swan. With a filmmaker's sense of atmosphere and an environmentalist's urgency, Belot's stark lines take the reader deep into the heart of the industrial man.

Praise for *Moving to Climate Change Hours*

"Ross Belot's astonishing poetry steps off a moving train into the unknown. He deftly locates strangeness in the ordinary – in a sagging couch that shifts from one place to another in a room, or in a magpie that walks 'through her body.' We find 'Yesterday / was all chainsaw' in poems that buzz with power, defying expectation. *Moving to Climate Change Hours* is a remarkable book, revealing a poet at the height of his craft."

– Anne Simpson, author of *Strange Attractor*

"It is wonderful to read these confident, wide-ranging poems. Belot takes recognizable subjects – work, marriage, parenting, drinking with co-workers, childhood, new love – and makes them strange again. Shifting between Canadian and American landscapes and locales, and using many different poetic forms, what emerges is a strong yet questioning personality, confronting his own life in middle age, as well as his own complicity in larger catastrophes. It's a beautiful, intimate, ambitious, moving book written by a poet of great skill and deep feeling."

– Matthew Zapruder, author of *Father's Day*

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