

# To Live with a Landscape

By Constance Urdang

1

Take your boulevards, your Locust Street,  
Your Chestnut, Pine, your Olive,  
Take your Forest Park and Shaw's Garden,  
Your avenues that lead past street-corner violence,  
Past your West End, past your Limit,  
To shabby suburban crime,  
Vandalism in the parking-lot,  
Abductions from the shopping mall—  
Like making the same mistake over and over  
On the piano or typewriter keys,  
Always hitting the wrong note—  
How "very alive, very American"  
They are, how chockful of metaphysics,  
Hellbent to obliterate the wilderness.

2

Learn to live with sycamores,  
Their sad, peeling trunks, scabbed all over  
With shabby patches, their enormous leaves  
In dingy shades of ochre and dun  
Rattling like castanets, their roots  
Thick as a man's leg, crawling  
Like enormous worms out of the broken pavements,  
Continually thrusting themselves up  
From pools of shade they make,  
Sculpturing the street  
With dappled dark and light  
As glaucoma, a disease of the eye,  
Makes the world more beautiful  
With its mysterious rainbows.

3

Already in Iowa the monarchs are emerging,  
Signaling with their tawny wings;  
In regalia of burnt orange and umber  
The spangled imperial procession  
Meanders along the democratic roadsides,  
Across straight state lines,  
Over rivers and artificial lakes  
And the loneliness of middle America  
On the way to Mexico.  
The tiny wind of their passing  
Is not even recorded  
As a disturbance in the atmosphere.

4

Driving back into the American past,  
Homesick for forests, flowers without names, vast savannahs,  
Lowlands or mountains teeming with game,  
Bluffs crowned with cottonwoods, mudbanks  
Where crocodiles might sun themselves;  
Finding instead the remains of strange picnics,  
Replications of old selves, a cacophony of changes  
Like a room crowded with chairs  
In which no one can sit, as if history were furniture  
Grown splintered and shabby;  
Studying a picturesque rustic architecture  
To master its splendid abstractions,  
Shady verandas and porches,  
Or the republican simplicity of a cow.

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