

No One Chooses This

Jordan Tretheway, 2022

I – Homeless and Hopeless

No one chooses homelessness.
Just as no one chooses to be born with,
or acquire, disorders of the mind.

Nor is it a healthy person's choice to be
neglected and abused by those they trust,
people they never knew to fear.

Left one day without essential support
systems we take for granted—family,
jobs, friends. Gone, or never existed at all.

No one chooses to shelter—
if it can be called that—*Shelter*,
in a nylon tent on a riverbank.

Wind Chill minus 40,
possessions one gust away from
flight when occupant rises

on stiffened limbs to empty
irritated bladder which cannot heal
due to inadequate treatment options,

transportation to clinics, and
lack of, or inability to, work,
acquire a meal outside of stringent

community kitchen hours, insufficient
to ward off malnutrition, frostbite, depression.
Self-soothing options are available

for a price, should a day of successful
panhandling provide the choice
between escape, or full stomach.

II - 12 Neighbours

Bureaucratic t's are crossed, i's dotted.
Real social accommodation begins
one tiny house at a time.

Shifting a paradigm requires plenty of torque.
Poor circumstances lead to heavy losses.
When there is nothing left to lose

people don't pull up their bootstraps.
Rocky Balboa is a fiction. After suffering
innumerable defeats, you are defeated.

You find a bottle, a needle, some pills.
You do not get back up. Not without support.
Not without established systems that

understand everyone has value,
that therapeutic hours, and money,
must accompany ideology.

Can we call ourselves a "society,"
if we ignore our most vulnerable?
Look closer. We reflect each other.

We are in the same precarious boat
at the mercy of rolling rent increases, market
fluctuations, and bottom lines rising higher

and higher, locking more of us out
each year. Everyone deserves dignity,
a small, safe place to heal—

call home out of the cold.
We all need neighbours
to lend a hand now and then.