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Lao Tzu Meets the Progress Trap

“A tree as great as a human’s embrace springs from a small shoot.”
—Lao Tzu

1 Capitalism, not a person of vital flow or sentience like these breathing trees
Who are you, Lao Tzu?
_Sage fresh-born from the Tao flow_

2 Our neighbor bought an acreage along the Fraser filled with Western Red Cedars
Hemlocks, Douglas Firs rooted like you, and nameless
(though we give them names)
purifiers of the shared air
yet for our neighbor mere obstacles in the way

3 He summons hackers, hewers excavators, trucks, diggers
screaming chainsaws
Elders crack, thud
ground reverberates
Banshee wind moans among falling limbs
Months of beeping silences birdsong
His black truck scuttles up and down the drive full of purpose and design
Are there city covenants?
Some, but seldom enforced
Council turns away

4 When a woman down the street phones the city to challenge his doings
he pulls out his mantra:
“A man can do what he wants on his own private land”

5 One day, landowner out, Lao Tzu climbs his drive to survey the wreckage
stoops to touch ravaged limbs
Is old Lao Tzu trespassing?
“Great harm,” he sighs
The owner drives by

6 Lao Tzu is invisible to the owner deaf to the ancient voice
A woman weeps over the damage
Lao Tzu whispers in her ear:
Descriptors despoil themselves
Nothing abides outside the Tao

7 Yes, the Tao goes on, the woman interjects but what of us stumbling
empathetic ones, who wittingly or not find ourselves caught in the progress trap
despite our gentle mammalian brains manipulated by faceless corporate kings
Greed-ravaged Gala
the only home we know

In time, though time is but a breath
surely there must be some effective resistance
not patterned on the bloodied fields of war

Dear Lao Tzu, how does your wisdom flow
into the arms of a more active yielding?

How does surrender to the Tao
empower the oppressed?

How do we stand
with our brothers and sisters the trees?

Will you dear Lao Tzu, awake in us
the Mysterious Female

who plays in all things
and is at the base of all things

the door from which heaven and earth spring
that which is flowing in us all the time?

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