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Vacation Days - What I Did This Summer

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My summer
It began in a marble room
Surrounded by marble men
And bronze explorers
And oil painted relics of a bygone time.
Hearing the tales of the bronze worker
And the word smiths
And covering my hands in paint to mark the world
With some sense of what we were doing there.
It was then to the metropolis
Seeing the darker underbelly of the shining streets
The cries of those less fortunate that hid
Beneath the twang of guitar in music city.
A mission of compassion with my compatriots
Working with words and numbers and books
Sharing our stories with the children of an
Almost-other world, and hearing theirs in return.
And then I was alone
But closer to home
Doing similar tasks but with an all-together different group
Maps of the world, finding rivers and lakes and saying
“Super Man Saves Every One!” to remember their order
And once more onward unto the breach
The hordes of ravening beasts known as fifth graders
For the third week so far,
The forest is quiet except when we’re singing
Songs of praise for the religion we all follow
Or yelling as water splashes onto skin
And mixes with the dirt to form mud that

We have to shower off before we can eat dinner
“Aren’t you a minister?” one of the kids ask,
And I laugh, because I am 16, for one, and
For another, unworthy of this belief. Flattered, though.

From one set of woods to another
There are 21 of us now, all high-school aged,
Not one fifth grader in sight.
We walk among the trees now and learn their names,
And I remember learning some of these before
As the burst of blackberry juice in my mouth rouses
Older memories, of a different camp and a very different camper.
We go with a group of grad students to capture wild mice
Taking their measurements as though we meant to
Cobble shoes for their long back feet,
Hoping in the way of all workers to not be bitten by
Our little clients. Assuring ourselves that these are, in fact,
Deer mice, and thus adding 5 to the number logged thus far
We want to know how many of them there are.
We learn about the woods, and about the waters, and
About the wrath we wreak on them with our thoughtlessness
How there won’t be woods eventually if something doesn’t change.
And with these sobering thoughts in mind we leave
The classroom, heading instead to an open pavilion
Where music from 30 years ago plays and we dance
For hours on end to remember we are people and not trees.
And then it’s out of the forest
And into the skies
Across the sea, across the pond to a different city than before

The remnants of the empire we learn about in history classes.
The marble shell of Buckingham Palace like the bones
Of some ancient, looming beast.
And we talk and we act and we read and
Was Shakespeare one person or twenty?
I write a response to a poem from three hundred years ago
That rhymes far better than this does
Remind me to show it to you later, and I'll remind myself
That I've done it before, and I can do it again.
We walk the moors and call ourselves modern Brontë's
We see the plays within the plays within the plays at the Globe
And learn in class just how scandalous that sonnet truly was.
Then the summer will be over
And I'll age another year. 16, 17, 18, counting down until
I'm not a child anymore, but still recognizable as that Fifth grader
Who ran through these woods seven years ago.
Who wrote some poem, some story, something epic to her mind
Of a room filled with marble men
And bronze explorers
And her. Standing among them.