

# A Highland Space

The road wound as a bold ribbon through the lush moorland. Flecks of grass line this path as a straw skirt, while countless trees ominously loom in the distance. Suddenly active, softly moving into the great canvas of the sky, the sun extends its gaze towards the sparse landscape.

Overhead swirls a wild mass of clouds. Some straggle behind, whereas others race ahead. They fight across the sky in a unified crowd, chasing each other around the world with the seasons, countries, birds and planes. They hike these miles with splendid ease, choreographing their movements in unison.

Below the clouds the blanket appears to have been shaken; towns are tossed with a great distance between them; roads are a network in a giant spider's web; hills are valleys and folds in the crust's fibres; and lakes adorn the land as pools of cream.

This cream is not of the water, but of the voluminous clouds racing around the track of the sky. It spreads itself thickly around the undulations of the land, wrapping itself to the exact form of all below it. Some specks of red and blue fly from hulls, which glide around the elongated puddle.

Quaint castles perch on the brink of the pools, digging in their heels to the steady march of time. They fight the onslaught of ruin by holding onto their heritage and loyal families that they devotedly once protected all those years ago. Now they are protecting it from the wide wrath of time, at the front line of their medieval history.

Within the harsh withholdings of the stone clad walls, there lies velvet as embellished as the lining of a giant king's coat, that ripples and glimmers in the morning light. Ornaments scatter tables, becoming reminiscent of a past feast, perhaps by the royalist lodgers. Paintings of famous artists are arranged to the tune of delicate tailored cloaks.

From the grand tapestries, to the old-age servants, these castles are truly set in the past. Their cultural heritage maintained as a living constant, their skin never changing, the view unfaltering, the lives in rhythmic continuum. The castle truly is a deep embodiment of chivalrous spirit, set on a medieval stage.

Towns lie beyond with homely Bed and Breakfasts, dormant alongside the typical sport of sticky beer. Hops spill out over the cobbled roads, wool out of sheep's packs and the sounds emanating from the thatched pubs. A community feel is present from the dear grocery worker to the weather-beaten old men on their pub stools. They all greet each other in cheerful ways, treating each other as old friends. The Highlands, a social space.

Through the village goes what the locals consider to be a road; but to the untrained eye, the path is a flattened length of grass, rocks, mud, dust and gravel with not a scrap of tarmac in sight. These prehistoric routes are not

# A Highland Space

designed for the humble motorcar, but as a homely comfort to horse, foot and paw. The network is neither small or reliable, but instead, like all else in this land, is only what is needed for survival and not what is excessive and unnecessary. The roads snake, strangling the hills, lying still in valleys, pouncing on tyres.

The old horse and cart still travel amongst the sparsely spaced villages, stopping now and again, in the rhythm of yesterday. Inside, their rich enslavers sit in a varnished cabin – with plumped up cushions and embraided details. The view flashes by, a blur of pastel and vibrant hues. From the dulled bleak grey-green landscape that underpins the region, to the vibrant accents of heather that adorn the country lines; to the pastel hued sky with the racing clouds, juxtaposed by the lakes (unfathomable at night; yet smooth and sweet by day) that sit in the cupped hands of the land's arms.

These lakes carry no bottom, no base to their history, no cap to their potential, no barrier to prevent their glossed surface from stretching to the beckon of eternity. The local women still speak of the potential beast beneath, a legend, a warning, a secret of nature.

The myths remain, a baseline to the mentality of the people; an explanation to the lakes that hold many secrets; reason to the entire highland world. They add the mystery that is primitively desired by every one of us, fulfilling that deepest passion; something to work towards, a problem to solve.

The highlands are full of mystery, something that captures the imagination – giving an undefinable sense of wonder and awe.

Mists curl now, reaching between the boughs of land that rise on each side of the rifts, stretching out, embracing the highlands – spreading a sense of comfort and community that permeates through each door, and each burrow hole.

The sun tilts, the hour close to sunset. The pastel hues grow, becoming greater and more accentuated than before. Orange flares across the horizon, purple streaking up towards the sky. The blues and stark grey-whites of the clouds fade away, succumbing to the steady onset of the evening's progression. Concentrating from all over the sky, the purples turn to pinks, the oranges to red, the whites to blacks.

The sun soon winks over the horizon, towing Day with it, the wildlife bowing over with respect to the Night's new reign. Life stills. Night's kingdom has captured the highlands.

Soon the landscape becomes at one with Night, entwined with the deep fabric of mysterious time. Trees soon become the soldiers of Night's realm, guardians being the stars ever watchful, the moon surveying the land. And what a land there is.

# A Highland Space

Lakes become unfathomable, immeasurable by even the moon itself. The dim light of the stars fail to penetrate the deep recesses of the pools, as if they are dark holes, swallowing up all light in the Night. The contents hidden, enigmatic, unknown.

The hills soon loom over the villages, threatening with their now sharp peaks blocking out all sense of space – capturing the highlands in their shrouded cold embrace.

Night seems to last for eternity, with all light blocked out by the broad hills, or absorbed by the incomprehensible depths of the lakes. The mind struggles to comprehend the sheer eternity that darkness and time induce, a concept that is indefinite, undefinable.

A hint of light begins to glisten at the tip of the eclipsing peaks. Day soon begins its decent over the Night captured land, basking the cold land in heat, warmth, compassion and light once more. Magentas, reds and oranges expand from this singularity, heading to encompass the entirety of the land's roof. They emanate out from this point, splaying their ribbons of colour throughout the solar fabric.

These ripples spread outwards, dispersing amongst the jet-black sky. A pastel blue is the result from this cacophony of colour. Life stirs. Birds begin their flutters, sheep begin their stumbles, nature is alive once again.

The trees begin to sway gently in the crisp morning breeze, backs ever-slightly arching, their heads proud, the leaves somewhat bowing. They are the only points in the landscape that maintain an essence of Night in Day, their dark mysterious eminence solely defying the openness of Day. And what a beauty Day's kingdom had brought with its cascade of colour, a torrent of life, a display of the supreme beauty that nature gives.

Beyond the trees penetrating the bleak vast highlands, the ground rises sharply up towards indistinct peaks. The ground is never flat or still, always moving and shifting beneath the eye. Hills are bent over, bearing their shoulders in the heavy morning light. Spreading on for miles beyond the conceivable horizon...

This space, a space, a poetic space, a mythical space, a natural space. The space; the one that underpins the very nature of human life, forming civilisations; bleeding into thoughts and perspectives; the giver of all the Earth's wonders. Space is everything condensed into a single, fine concept.

Zachary Elliott