I Stumble As I Step
By Susanne

Autumn

The door creaks as it opens, the sound crisp against the soft calling of the birds above. They’re heading South for the winter. Breathing in the air which smells of dried leaves and cut grass, I skip down the front steps. The door shuts behind me with a resounding ‘slam’. It echoes off the trunks of the nearly bare trees surrounding my house while I make my way down the driveway. My footsteps are muffled as they fall onto the soft layer of padding provided by the blanket of fallen leaves. More leaves are floating from the canopy above, intermingling into a rainbow of color. With a crunch, I step onto a large oak leaf that is the same rich brown as the tree from which it came. I turn and start making my way down the empty street. The carpet of leaves changes into a golden layer under a nearby honey locust, then mixes with the brilliant red of a sugar maple. Above me, the sun is shining through the patchy cloud cover. Its warmth never has a chance to reach me, barred by a gust of icy wind that weaves its way through the dense fabric of my hoodie.

Winter

A haze of snow surrounds me, the thick air of the oncoming blizzard obscuring the path ahead. It makes the familiar landmarks seem almost foreign in the blanket of snow that decks the landscape. Ahead I see a cardinal, red feathers stark against the whiteout, as it hops slowly through the snow, searching for a last scrap of food. Behind me, I hear the rush of a car. I turn to see two pinpoints of light, staring like eyes as they race towards me. Looking back, I notice the path I have left: an uneven trail of footprints, the hexagonal pattern of my soles embossed in the snow, contrasting against the collection of patterns left by those that have come before me.

Spring

The air is damp and heavy with a soft drizzle as I quicken my pace. My rain-spattered watch tells me I’m running late, but when I pass a bed of blooming crocuses, I struggle not to stop and admire the radiant purple flowers. My feet skid on the slick surface of the road and my vision becomes blurred as the rain continues to fall like tears draining out of eyes too far away to see. Reaching the crosswalk whose black-and-white stripes are so familiar, I can hear a hum of conversation and the screeching tires of the school buses. Their yellow hues match the blooming
forsythia bush. Its small flowers are a vivid shade of canary yellow that seems to glow, even through the gloom. They point me on my way.

Summer

The sun beats down on me and now I'm walking as fast as I can towards the gates, not sparing a glance for the milkweed and asters which have painted such a beautiful mosaic on the field leading up to my destination. The sky above is bright and clear and its blue expanse seems to span forever, only obstructed by a few lonely clouds that drift somberly above my head. Beside me a butterfly floats by, seemingly weightless on the morning breeze. I recognize the graceful insect as a monarch. My feet move faster still, yet I begin to ponder. This butterfly, so small and insignificant, has undergone a metamorphosis like myself. With a pang of melancholy, I remember that this will be one of the last days that I will walk this path. Suddenly I am grateful for company. Despite the daunting week ahead, I allow myself a smile, and as the insect's orange-and-black wings carry it further down the path, I imagine it smiles back.