

A landscape photograph of a train track stretching into the distance under a dramatic, cloudy sky at dusk. The sky is filled with large, textured clouds in shades of grey, green, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The train tracks run straight down the center of the frame, leading the eye towards the horizon. The ground is flat and appears to be a field or plain, with some low vegetation visible. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# breathing at dusk

poems

beth goobie

breathing at dusk

heal yourself, heal the world

at the center of your being there grows a garden.

it is a garden of stories.

tiny blue forget-me-nots, smart aleck marigolds,  
enraptured peonies – each is a tale that tells itself  
petal by petal unfurling into a gift of the possible,  
one complete moment, a poem to perfume your knowing.

gardens can be trampled.

thieves invade, smash what they do not take,  
sometimes, looking for buried treasure, dig so deep  
they tear up entire lifetimes by the roots,  
lifetimes that have not yet lived themselves fully –  
baby's breath, the toddler strut of dandelions,  
handfuls of crushed petunias, a reverberating purple  
wasted and withering atop kicked-around soil.

there are no guarantees.

still, the earth is a believer in romance,  
romance that regularly coaxes roses out of excrement;  
she is on your side, a landscape of narrative  
deep-rooted and waiting to flower –

shy chronicles whispering truths close to the ground;  
with tending, they release wind-wished seeds –  
your heartbeats sent out to blossom  
where others begin.

## landscape

what is landscape – merely  
the horizontal plane bordered by the vertical,  
that highway drive along an endless saskatchewan field  
crooning its single skyline note of long pale blue.  
is it the saskatoon bike path winging its asphalt flight  
high across the river bluffs,  
or the bridges that arc the south saskatchewan,  
concrete overture of one shore greeting its opposite.  
could it be also the memory of one of those bridges,  
a specific sunwarmed moment spent leaned against a guardrail  
and gazing out over water and riverbank ovation of green,  
as the wind comes at you in a scattered commentary,  
speaking your skin alive. so that later, in recall,  
your skin again feels spoken alive,  
quilted with the sensation of come-and-go wind,  
a landscape of memory caressed by mind.

do these landscapes of memory observe the same laws  
as those of the material plane? for instance,  
does a mental recollection hold to form and fact  
like a geographical landmark, a downtown street,  
words printed on a page? take, for example,  
my memory of a 1968 guelph childhood dining room  
in which i sit by a lace-curtained window,  
fitting together puzzle pieces of a huge-eyed gutter puppy.  
in the decades since, that room's furnishings have changed,  
but my memory of it has not.  
can memories then be more permanent  
than their physical sources?  
can they be more reliable when it comes to knowing  
what is most necessary to know –

even when they present in pieces, like a child's puzzle,  
pieces that are moments spent in the same location  
yet in entirely different universes.

in that 1968 dining room, there hung a faux-crystal  
spherical lampshade on a long gold-coloured chain.  
by day, that lampshade occupied its assigned corner,  
simply another bit of the mundane,  
a mundane that awaited metamorphosis –  
metamorphosis that takes place only at night  
and demands the change of everything.  
called out of sleep toward this change,  
i am taken down 2 a.m. stairs,  
the house a confused darkness, my mind  
a realm blurred between sleep and waking,  
dream of whatever drug i've been given  
as i'm led, stumble-footed, into the dining room,  
the sound of a click and the corner lamp coming on,  
radiant sphere suspended above my light-shattered eyes,  
father incandescent beneath it, divine messenger  
from another dimension, kiss-ass lackey  
to the unfamiliar men seated on the couch,  
my perception also a lackey to the drug rippling my brain  
as father's voice begins, quiet monotone of inarguable absolutes:

*now you are on the moon.*  
*the moon is different from the earth.*  
*moon people do different things than earth people.*  
*now we will take off our clothes and do what moon people do.*  
so cavorted the denizens of this after-midnight  
drug-drenched domain,

entirely foreign, a different country, continent, planet,  
a different world than that in which the nine-year-old puzzle-solver  
sat under a faux-crystal hanging lamp,  
trying to fit together the questions of her life.  
though she daily clicked that overhead lamp on and off,  
the puzzle solver lived only within the welcome of its mundane light,  
having no recollection of its celestial properties,  
the moon people it brought to life,  
or the drugged, limbo-land, sad-eyed girl,  
taken to pieces before morning  
and put away in a forget-it-all box.  
which leads to the following fumble  
of grope-in-the dark questions:

was the dining room inhabited by moon people  
doing what moon people do  
the same dining room as the one  
in which the nine-year-old puzzle-solver sat,  
fitting together the forlorn expression of the huge-eyed puppy?  
can one room contain two such different worlds?  
if so, how many worlds can such a room sustain?  
can these worlds be assembled like the pieces of a puzzle  
in order to perceive a greater whole? the whole of what?

and finally, when father clicked off the corner lamp,  
where did the world of the moon people go?

front porch

the front porch cradled beginnings. balustrade a  
white-painted prelude to the rest of the house,  
this porch was a chord of respectability  
that resonated with flower boxes and lawn chairs,  
congenial called-out greetings. fall through spring,  
piano students came and went on the half hour;  
summers, the mail carrier stopped to request  
a glass of water. aproned and apologetic,  
my mother ran to fetch that water, cooled it with ice,  
then descended those eight front-of-the-house stairs, smiling,  
to hand it over. seated on the top step, i watched  
her keep a potentate's eye on the neighborhood  
as she tended her geraniums and hanging ivy,  
her meticulously pruned opinions.  
*sanctions against south africa*, she would murmur,  
shaking her head. *it's bad for business.*  
*but look at what they're doing!* i protested.  
*business!* she snapped, glaring at me sidelong.  
*business, beth – business!*  
and in response to news reports on trials of former nazis,  
her words took on a lullaby singsong:  
*oh, they should let that be. it was so long ago*

*so very long ago...* the tone carefully  
lilted so the opinion sidled out. neutralized,  
unobtrusive, it could have appeared  
on the side of a breakfast cereal box  
or in the second verse of *the old rugged cross*,  
rising out of a sunday morning pew in four-part harmony,

my mother's voice equally melodious –  
a stained-glass window filtering the light  
that spilled down onto me  
throughout childhood and adolescence,  
genesis through revelations –  
revelations that came not with an apocalyptic trumpet,  
but the meting out of mundane tap water  
onto windowbox geraniums, tiny lives potted and secure  
within an obedient blooming silence. as a child

i thought of my mother as a planet  
that contained all possible continents;  
cupping that globe in my hands, i imagined  
travelling its landscapes as she had done.  
*but apartheid? nazis?* where in the long-forgotten  
nerve-scarred moments that formed her  
did she learn to divide then from now,  
what is right from what is true,  
the revealed from the concealed...reality itself –  
a skill she was now attempting to pass on to me,  
mother to sycophant; eldest child trained to set off its parents  
the way a front porch sets off the rest of the house.

the piano teacher's house

i grew up inside beethoven's forehead.  
that bronze bust glowered down from father's music studio mantel,  
hair tossed in f# turbulence,  
eyes narrowed into a d minor frown.  
everywhere i went in that 1903 house,  
gloom preceded me, grumbling up the stairwell,  
crouched and picking its nose in corners,  
cloud-crowded against windows as i burrowed into bed,  
delving into the mysteries of *curious george*,  
*the cat in the hat*.

father taught piano weekdays 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. (saturdays only to 6);  
the days flowed past in preludes and fugues,  
climbed fingerhold to fingerhold in nervous scales,  
catapulted downward in relieved arpeggios.  
each room resonated in constant symphony;  
the opening of a door could trigger an unexpected key change;  
moment to moment you might step from *golliwog's cakewalk*  
to *the moonlight sonata* to *rhapsody in blue*,  
your body floor-level while your heart  
tap-danced across the ceiling,  
reveling in constellations of synaptic exultation.

times like these, the great ones shifted into reach,  
some part of chopin, gershwin, bach  
momentarily transcribing itself out of the world of the dead,  
a murky brain-wave presence like a galleon figurehead  
that rode the musical currents of the house,  
its genius a vast sail that kept reality afloat.  
on sonatas and mazurkas, i glided through childhood and adolescence,  
cherished 1971's tuesdays at 9 p.m.  
because of the ballade a particular student was studying...

curled in my second-storey bed, i would set *nancy drew* aside,  
close my eyes and dissolve into the maelstrom  
rising from father's ground-floor music studio –  
brahms, a century after death reincarnated,  
once more hunched over the keyboard and calling,  
calling to the dark angels that reverberated  
with such longing. in that house, our bones hummed;  
chords and arpeggios, we throbbed, soared,  
hovered through a single hoping note;  
it was a home in which much was not said,  
lives limped onward, unspoken

but a moment of grieg summoned such grief;  
tchaikovsky set the wolf prowling along the baseboards;  
mozart's requiem invoked the heart thunder of the dying –  
an entire city suffocating under the plague,  
everything its inhabitants had ever wished for  
lifting from them, departing like breath. in that house  
breath was like that – a note here and gone,  
a musical phrase whose title and composer i could not name,  
the student downstairs also nameless and pouring herself  
out into the keyboard's sonic cosmos;

life pulsed through me, a sidereal choir  
vibrating my every nerve tip,  
and then the piano lesson concluded,  
the stars fell silent,  
my heart tumbled, end over end,  
back into the flesh,  
the requiem of self.

prayer

the goldberg variations, glenn gould seeking  
luminosity, the entire house listening in, walls  
rising on gently fingertipped notes, sympathetic  
matrix of an acoustic temple, its spire reaching  
toward a particular peak tone that vibrates beyond  
human hearing. above the diningroom table,  
the south window an interval of light veiled by lace,  
intention of the pure called into lower resonance,  
patterns woven to catch and cradle meaning.

sunday afternoons, father slid the sacred  
vinyl from its sleeve, set it onto the turntable,  
lowered the needle and the worship began,  
gould's fingers starting out on their journey, pilgrim  
breath a raw hum in his throat, begging revelation.  
i was four and engaging mystery under the table,  
seven and whispering personal epics to my dolls,  
ten and building lego dreams, fourteen and watching  
unfamiliar faces form like window frost  
under my sketch pencil – all of this surface  
ripples floating over a deeper ache  
that reverberated through the ether,  
from gould to bach to those first ones  
standing on the shores of consciousness and listening  
to star choirs harmonize across the dome of the brain.  
this ache played gould the way a high pitch trembles crystal,  
the whole of human history leaned, taut and intent,  
into the tendons of his hands, the tenderness of his hands  
requesting ascension, the hope of flesh touching spirit,  
civilization vibrating on the cusp of exquisite  
possibility, divining the sonics of god.