

BEVERLEY BIE BRAHIC

Going Back to Saskatchewan

Mother grew up in Saskatchewan.
She moved to Vancouver at the end of the war,
To a blue wall of mountains
Hanging over the barnacle city
Ready to scrape it back into the sea.
Mother couldn't get used to the mountains.
'There's no sky here,' she would say,
Watching waves breaking.

She missed the Prairies, missed the wide angle
Of vision. When people said there was nothing to see,
Not a bump or wrinkle, barely a tree
Unless some farmer'd stuck in a row
To stop the storms hurtling like curling stones
Down from the Arctic Circle, Mother said
She liked to see weather coming: thunderheads mounding
Like soft ice cream in August, a first blizzard riding in.

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Summers Mother went back to Saskatchewan:
Drove us inland through shadows
Of mountain ranges
Folding behind us like a stack of pressed sheets.
Revelstoke, Golden—the road on a ledge
Above an abyss, Bridal Falls plunging
To rock chaos—Medicine Hat, Swift Current
And Moose Jaw

where the telephone poles repeated
 Like bar lines, the same three clouds
 Drifted over the same weathered
 Clapboard cabin whose pitched roof notched
 The same faded sky

where the grain elevators kept rising,
 Rising with a name in lights, then nothing
 Again, except the highway unreeling.

Sometimes Mother made us get out
 On the shoulder to feast on a section of ripening wheat
 Waving in an invisible wind—*the reapers*,
 The gleaners, the burning of stubble
Before the earth could be turned again—
 World flat as a dial with us in the middle
 Marking time, and only our shadows
 Inching towards the horizon.