



ghost landscapes /
a travelogue

Kristy Bowen

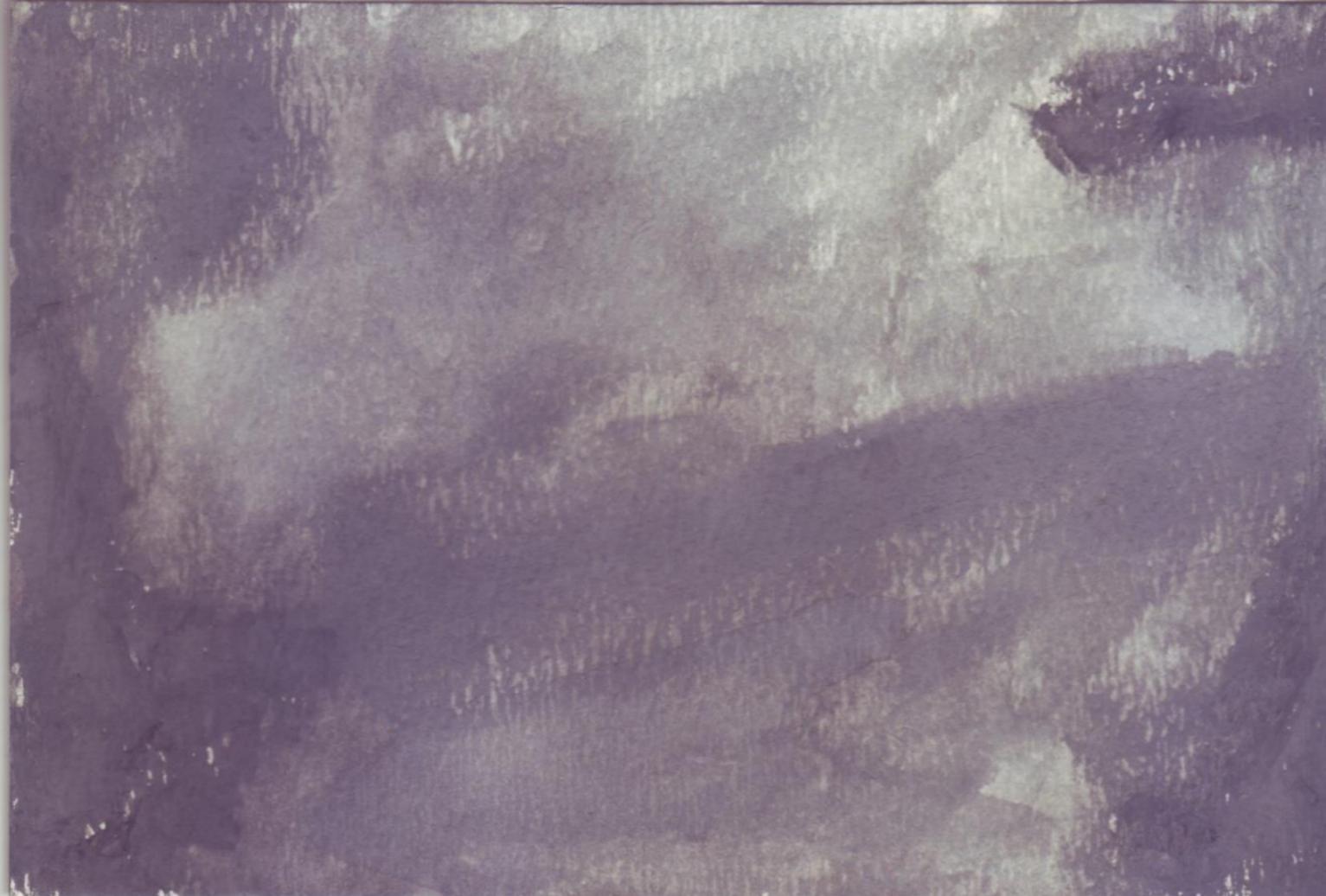
#1

Three a.m. and we are all about the empty house. The burned out tongue of door. Flawed and arranged around this unruly syntax, this circadian dream. This play where I walk backwards into a broken clavicle, the Stradivarius playing madly while my diaphragm lifts toward the ceiling. So much for stray dogs and distant lovers. Even the cars idling in the road seem lonely. The house dissolves into sound into grey light into the tiniest spot on my retina. Opens to become an umbrella closing in and over and unto itself. Deer-soft as the underside of my wrist. This silence that dissolves into the edge of a dish, the cracked platter. The low clatter of bones moving over our beds. Even the cups seem lonely, the open window. I bite my lip and the landscape gives way to a trapdoor that swings open and open and open.



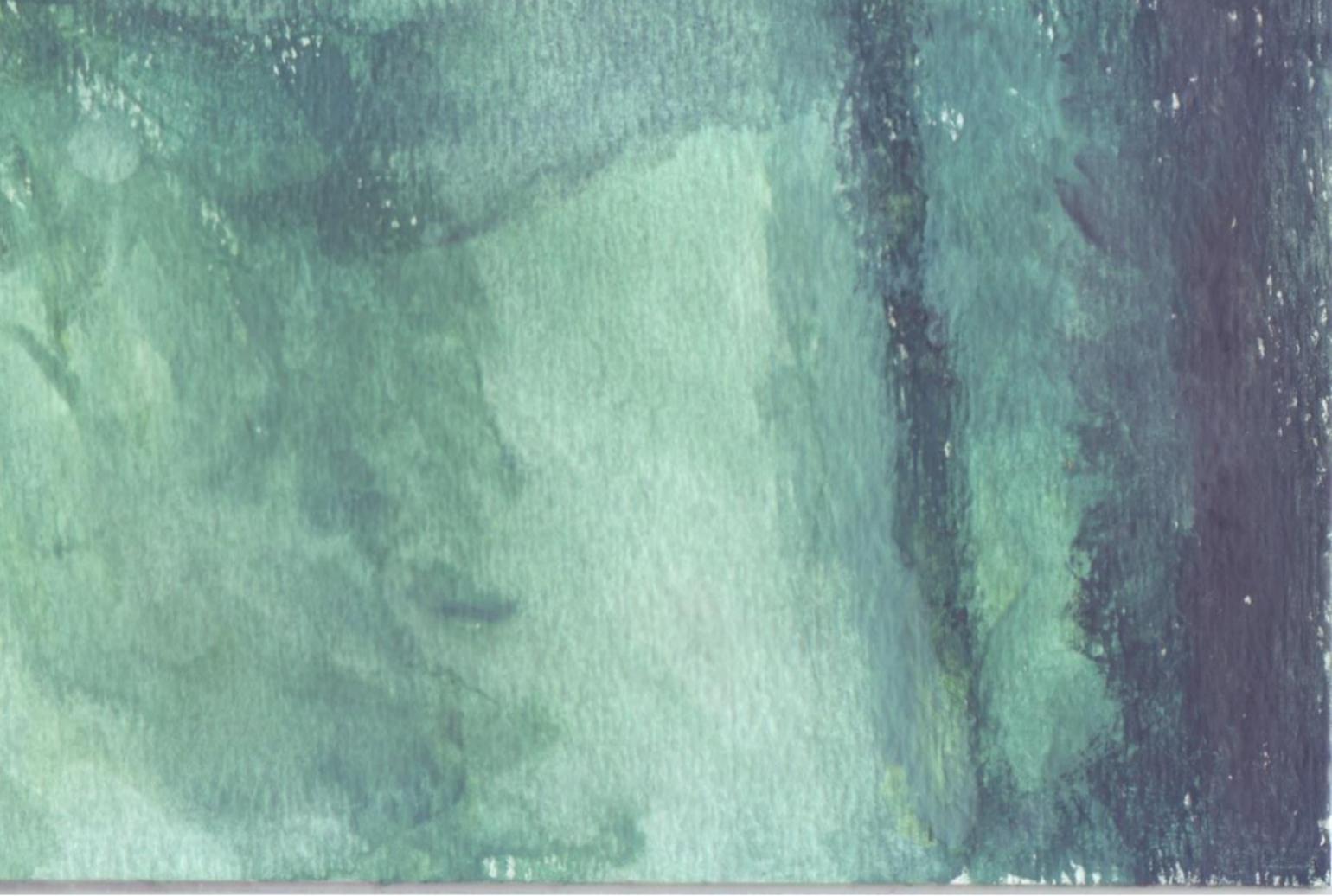
#2

So much of what we see depends on the trains that keep arriving and arriving from around the hill. I was thirsty. I was so thirsty. It was a terrible flatness at the back of my throat and even the rain could not appease it. In my head, a soprano's voice kept spiraling and spiraling, a woman who would one day die at the hands of the train conductor. I was wearing a yellow sundress and carrying a small black suitcase. I was beautiful. It was beautiful, thirst was, and the way I could arrange myself against the landscape for optimal breeze. We loved it, then, we used to swim in it, our limbs strumming the wind's dark heart. I was so thirsty, even the soloist could not stop my crying, even though she kept handing me handkerchiefs to stem the sobbing.



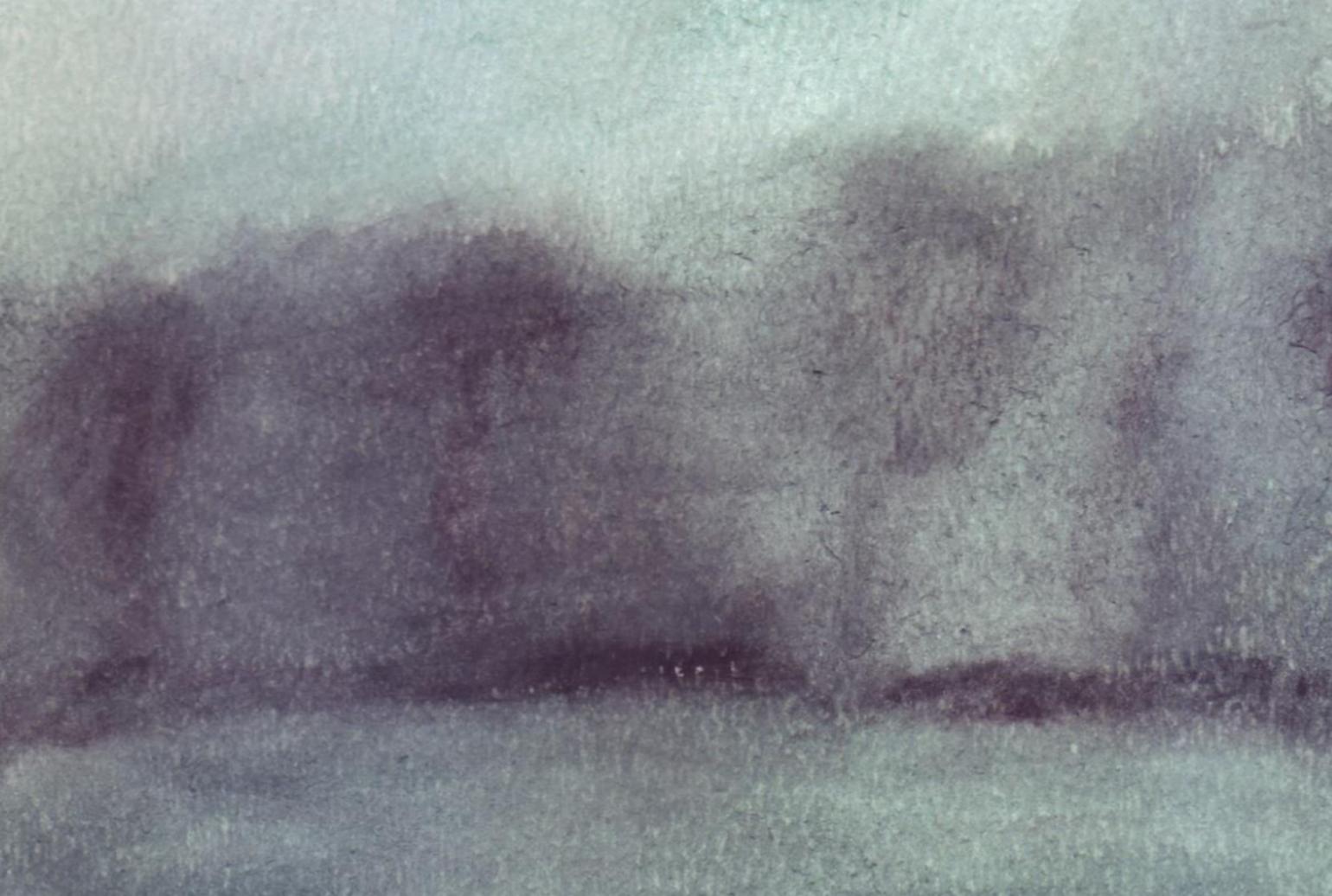
#3

Sometimes, the landscape dissolves into the windowsill, harbors the large feathers of a small bird. Tendon and trip wire. Splintered and spindled. Fever blooms my clavicle and I wait pin-curled and fastened to the bench. Glossed and ready for the soundtrack filled with too much thunder. For the lighting that breaches the sky, then dwindles to sulfur. I can tell the sky's language in three dialogues and back, the tendencies of migrations. The great whirling mass of summer pushing itself through the atmosphere. Oil gleams on the surface of the pond water and I am besotted with dime stores and suicides. Practice walking and holding my tongue at the same time, the tiniest sliver of glass in my foot.



#4

When I was a child, violent things kept happening in the next county over but I was inviolate. My tiny house painted blue and my knees placed primly together on the front steps, As a result. even now, I like hiding things in my purse. Salt shakers, salad forks, tiny matchbooks with forgotten numbers. It's beginning to be absurd-- how much stolen glassware inhabits my cupboards, how many crumpled linen napkins. In this landscape, the greyness of the place where the lake water meets sand is unbearable. I don't know what I miss more, sometimes, the cage or the freedom. Embarrassed by such openness, I place everything I own in small ziplock bags. Carrot sticks, dead batteries. Tiny miniature farm animals. My dress on the conductor's bedroom floor is a beautiful sort of accident. Tiny, impossible knots grow into my hair.



#5

The day is porous and dry and at the same time drowning, populated by strange women existing at the periphery, exiting before their cues. Mouths open, hands open, ropes knotting the slender throats of rabbits. My grandmother turned all the mirrors around to get away from them, every picture frame, every television. The sky as concave as it is flat and static and reaching toward blue. I am bread soaked in milk here, gone spoiled and poured into groundwater. Living in a house I do not own, do not want, and still the crickets won't stop their racket when the bowl goes dark over our roof. If you placed a finger exactly at the center of the horizon, you'd find my skirts and wide and generous as a river, my mouth spewing wildflowers, my sheets folding and flapping on lines as far as you can see.



#6

Each morning, I am sticky and bright with wings, broken with mock orange and overcooked eggs. Sometimes I dream I give birth to a horse in the middle of the train station, all unwieldy legs and dark fur rippling. Once, I could create a space inside me and fill it with curious spindly creatures that called me *mother*. Once, I could create a space even INSIDE the words to hold off the dark. Could bring into being something that pushed along the edges and wove itself into the framework of my architecture. Now, I'm all void and riverbeds, the inside/outside game where I lose every round. Where my molars are aching and useless and as large as a thoroughbreds when I bite down on the conductor's thumb. When I take the bit and fall asleep for days while he slowly strokes my hair.



#7

Sometimes memory folds me down the middle, lands me up river where the sun glistens on bluestem, where I'm waterlogged, a sheet of ice across water, folded and folded into my sweater and shivering like a branch. It's all in the topography, my father once said. The rocks rinsed clean, the highway that winds its way sadly toward town. The tree to my left splinters and a girl levitates above the field for a moment then drops. The mechanics of the land waver sideways and fall open like a book, break open at the center to release a fistful of ashes. The stone in my hand, the stone beneath my hand, the stillness in my fingers. A white hot fever crashing over a mountain, rocks clustered around my head. I fold myself into a story while the elms glisten with ice, the flurry of a hundred black birds escaping from a small catch in my throat.



#8

I am learning to make glass from sand. Sometimes I get a lamp, sometimes a light bulb. Unfortunately never both at the same time. Doubt builds in my belly and I can't help thinking of the narrow room with its broken water heater. The voice in my head that promises that it's darkest on the inside, behind the ribs and a little left of the heart. Sometimes, the empty bed undoes me something awful. The long meadow of sleep unreachable. The women in town leave their lovers one by one, the moon shaped like a scythe. We don't quite know what to do with so much sky. With so much silence closing like a hand over the wheat fields.



#9

When the conductor loves me, he does so with novocain and surgical wire. The dogs in the yard snarl as the field beneath the fir trees trembles. The conductor's wife tells me to *shhh*. I dream of her lovely hips, a jar of sea glass, the tiny fish in my throat that eventually will evolve into wings and teeth and fleshy tether. Together, she and I watch footage of a woman eating wedding cake and crying. She paints my eyelids the deepest azure and smears my lipstick. The conductor keeps drowning cats in the barn and calling me *Sarah*. The gate in the yard swings open, then shut.



__of 25

dancing girl press & studio, 2014