

Home Is Beyond the Horizon

By Rachel Laverdiere



I wince at the bright sunlight reflecting off freshly fallen snow and focus on my mukluks crunching across my mother's driveway. Each inhalation is sandpaper scratching at the back of my throat. With each exhale, a wheeze rises from my chest and exits as a smoke-signal.

Soon, the landscape sparkles. I am heading north, heading home—as insignificant as the snowflakes blanketing the fields. In all of that clear blue sky not a bird, not a cloud. My mind wanders to the geese flocking the fields last fall on this same stretch of the Number 4. Low guttural sounds escaped as they stretched their necks toward the sky and lifted off just before the weather dipped.

I honk the horn and wave at the lone tree. As I pass it by and head toward the horizon, my heart soars. This journey has become a flyway—each landmark positioned against the horizon points me closer to home.



I've often wondered how my ancestors survived prairie winters without electricity. There were no trees to burn for heat. No trees to break the cold north wind. I wonder if they dreamed of the briny coast of Brittany.

Perhaps it was the palette of prairie hues that kept them here. Most likely, it was because their options were as sparse as the trees. They must have noticed the geese packing up for winter and wished they, too, could fly away to warmer climates.



The summer I was nine, my mother stuffed us and the camping gear into her AMC Spirit, and we sped toward our first camping trip. Tropical suntan lotion, strawberry Twizzlers, my mother's cigarette smoke and the Golden Oldies wafted out the open windows. It was the first time we travelled north of the Trans-Canada, and until then I'd only thought of trees as windbreaks. In the south, our farming ancestors planted trees in parallel lines to tame the raging prairie wind. With windbreaks, the wind transforms golden wheat into oceans and sculpts snow into glittering tidal waves.

That day, we came across a mighty oak standing solo in a green field beneath a blazing blue sky, a yellow ribbon tied around its trunk. That tree left its stamp on me. Since then, solitary signifies strength rather than loneliness.

Every time I pass the lone tree, I know I'm heading in the right direction.



Dear Lone Tree,

Teach me to be stalwart and exposed, to remain upright despite the landscape. Teach me to be graceful and to trust in the season's hoarfrost. Teach me to believe barren fields will emerge resplendent after the fallow, the landscape will morph into buds, and flowering crops will sprout against a backdrop that forever drips azure. Teach me to have faith in autumnal gold, to rise up with wind gusts and stretch out my limbs. Teach me to grasp at white cotton dreams, to be humble and pliant, and to bow in reverence as I harvest my ripening fruit. As I become a fading blur, teach me how my past is my future, and teach me to gaze through the rear-view mirror with pride bidding *bon voyage* to those who pass me by.



My family asks, “When are you coming home again?”



Maybe I've been home all along. Perhaps home is the journey and not the destination. They say home is where the heart is—and my heart is always reaching for the horizon. Then, home must be the urge that pulls me toward the point where the sky caresses the earth. Or home could be somewhere between the push and pull of the wind because each time I think I've sputtered out, it's the wind that comes along to reflate my withered lungs. It's the wind that

inspires me. In French, my mother tongue, the word “inspire” means “to breathe in,” and the thought of breathing in the sky brings me closer to the truth of where home might be.



Saskatchewan—land of the living skies. Look up, and the sky will stamp you with its seal. The ever-changing tapestry is most striking at sunset or sunrise—that’s when the atmosphere really comes to life.

As with all natural beauty, there is science behind our skies. Visible light—the portion of the sun’s radiation our eyes ingest—contains an entire colour spectrum, and each colour has a corresponding wavelength. As light exhales, particles scatter throughout the atmosphere. Blue, green and violet—colours with shorter wavelengths—easily spread in all directions. By the time the distancing sun slips into the horizon, the blue and violet light has scattered, but the reds, oranges and yellows of the sinking sun remain. The fire in the sky is often amplified by the setting sun’s reflection in the cloud cover.

Beware—the beauty of our skies might steal your breath away.



How can I say I am going home, when I’m not sure where that is? When my family asks when I’m coming home, they want to know when I am returning to my place of birth. My family assures me that home is where they are. They want me to call this place I’ve never felt I belonged home.

The closest I've ever been to home was standing in my childhood pasture. When I close my eyes, I can taste home—peppery dust with a subtle twist of sage and crocus. Home is standing beneath an enormous sky in a prairie field. That is where my heart slows and my lung capacity expands. Where, the wind exhales the sunny smell of hay, the earthy aroma of alfalfa, the sky's clear blue perfume of ozone, and with each breath, I inhale the boundless horizon.



I sense the lone tree beyond the bend. It's just past that freshly harvested field where geese are grazing, on the other side of the next row of Caraganas. I smile and honk as I pass the lone tree. It sways its long limbs and propels me onward. I'm almost "home."

Suddenly, everything is as clear as this endless blue sky. They say geese fly in "V" formation for strength—like a flying windbreak. My family feels the gap of my absence, so they feel compelled to root me. I speed toward my family, my V-formation.

Looking up, I wonder how long the geese will stay before they leave for their home away from home. My truck flies down the Number 4—the geese must see a blue-grey dot sailing through this vast ocean of gold.