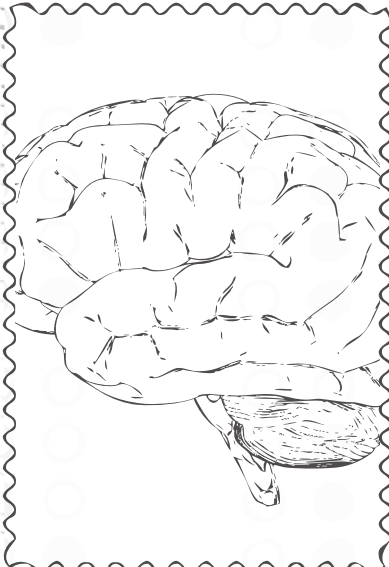


Memory

Neil Aitken



In the past, we wrote things down on cards, made a braille of absence, holes where something should be known or recalled. We constructed stories

out of old addresses, linked numbers together in a chain, assembled a patchwork hovel from whatever was leftover: discarded newspapers,

broken frames, loose bits of hair and clay. Wooden planks and nails. Till it rose, like a large tenement filled with transients and strangers

in tattered clothes with tattered names, the hallways lined with an array of refugee suitcases from the last war, scattered haphazardly,

like shoes along an old rail line that runs into the sea. What is memory? And who is it that slips in at these odd hours, working late

into the night to compile a map through this hoarder's den of detail, this warren of notes woven into a tapestry of cricket song and fire light,

and every moment we've buried in the name of loss and compassion. Who is it that stirs upstairs in my mind, moves through the darkened space

searching the drawers for a key to wind a clock in a house that no longer exists. Here, my father is alive again, once more

driving through the mountain pass, stopping at the place where the road cuts clean through the coal veins and leaves the remnants of trees

in the shale exposed, the imprint of things already gone, turned to a dark line, a scribble in the stone. How a boy in this moment lifts each one to his eye,

then to his ear, as if to hear the still small voice of the wind in the lungs of the earth. When I awake, there is always a silence that slips through the walls at dawn,

lurks in the middle drawer of a small chest in my room where a machine rests unmoved, its tape unheard, though it holds all that remains

of my father's voice, now the sum of mere data. The magnet of the world endlessly inscribes and then lets go.

How the heart orbits each silence like a small moon, revolving around what it cannot leave and what it cannot remember.