

Moonlight Sonata

—for Dorothy Pamela Sarvis, 1895-1995

This how I remember her
I'm sitting under the baby grand
on the hardwood floor
in the Forest Street house
and Nana is playing "Moonlight Sonata"

I see her from the knees down only
she's wearing a simple cotton print housedress
and her favorite cardigan sweater
she's taken off her slippers
so her stockinged feet can better feel
the action of the polished pedals
she works them with a contrapuntal urgency
that supports the swelling arpeggios of her left hand
and sustains the delicate embellishments of her right

I'm underneath all that forte and pianissimo
lost in a vision of sound without end
entranced by the miracle of composition
transported on a dream of overtones
my head vibrating with harmonics and dynamics
safe from the future and the past

and for a time I am not four or five
or forty-six
and for a time she is not
sipping lukewarm tea between music lessons
or covering the kitchen counter-tops
with flour dust and crusts of apple pies
or marching through the lava fields at noon
in search of the perfect glass ball
or showing not a shred of mercy
as she wins eight nine ten games
of canasta all in a row
or lying small and silent in a nursing home

for in that moment under the baby grand
with her feet on the brass
her fingers on the ivories
and her eyes half-closed in reverence
cause she knows this piece by heart
Nana is young and vital and profound
she's pouring all four-foot-ten of her Methodist self
into the massive soul of Beethoven
she's shaking with the intensity of interpretation
she's serene with the joy that comes
from filling a small boy with music

and from my secret place I know
Nana is smiling that shy, determined smile
for she knows the music will outlive her
and she will live forever.

—Wayne Lee

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