

House.

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An introduction.

House. is numerous, but they are not really plural. Actually only one. (My colleague observed.) Cotermious, *à la même fois*. And like diorama or shadow box contain vignettes. People move through its rented oblong room and left shapes like a negative or stains. No accurate order. Another thing: *House.* is urgent. Some celerity of shelter needed, scrap lain uncollected for years or longer couldn't wait. No time for line breaks, repair shifts in pronoun or tense. These disjuncts, as the stray appearance of a supposed person or hypothetical poet, are no greater cause for analysis than car headlights cutting through curtains and moving across a darkened bedroom wall. Finally, *House.* are small temples; all dedicants in Her service. [Looked across the firelight into her teacher's eyes, saw mirrored ten thousand generations, the mindflower, herself. Travels astrally to library or cathedral, gray stone and chakra-colored glass, staircase for angels to float upward. Falls to her knees before the white candle, sneezing and laughing, saying Surrender, saying Okay. Unwitting exhausted geomancer, inadvertent overeducated shaman.] Anyway we are not yet rid of God because we still have faith in grammar. Forgive my dilation, my decades of shiftlessness. Open the icebox, what's inside there.

House of ambiguity.

Or it might be ambivalence, it's too hard to tell. On the one hand, at least he told her now and not after a decade of spoused habituation when he'd been seen in certain bars. On the other hand is her big useless diamond, no North Shore reception, heirloom lace or tea roses, lobsters or engraved champagne flutes, just a chino-wearing crewcut ex-fiancé who's abruptly, inexplicably gay. [Wanted to wear a seersucker suit to the wedding.] Now with her pre-Raphaelite proportions and chestnut hair, weeping and convinced she's unsexy, it's a victimless crime. My old girlfriend's solution won't work, parking me in front of the microphone with Rolling Rock and tequila, promising her shift ends soon. *We must get drunk immediately.* No, we need Greek chorus girls, maidens clad in samite, sweet peas and lilies, we need all the wit we can gather, every lesser undine and sylph to get us through a night when the god himself has spurned your devotion. A Yoruban priestess to galvanize us, baritone, remind us we all come from Mother Africa. Red grapes and toaster waffles, a velvet hot tub, some way to talk you into taking your shirt off so I can revive you, show you the rounded bracelet-like ending of my tattoo so it won't hurt as much. *Doucement*, darling, if you can trust me, I will carry you through this debilitating strange city with its shotgun shacks, lean-tos of flattened cardboard and cans, glass penthouse cathedrals, suburbs of the wildest, most strangely scientific tragedy; carry you widdershins, kicking and screaming, and in the end you will thank me.

House of baths & showers.

Do you need a good reason for terror. To take off layers of clothing, be smalled and shiver, feet cringed against the ceramic tile and porcelain. Scalded in water, come out again, let air frost over wet skin. Somewhere I came to believe the necessity of physical comfort, sane people avoid being tired or cold or in pain. So how come I get sick with happiness stuck to a rock face in blowing spring snow, sucking back snot and feeling fine glassy tuft cut into my numb fingerpads. Why bliss to have the bodyworker pummel me for two hours, whimper when he digs into bruise-sore meridians and gouges ancient abdominal scar tissue. Why go now straight from sauna into cold plunge, immerse myself to the scrawn, unable to inhale until every hair on my body emerges brilliantly erect and fearless. She told me in wonder, I rode 200 miles and I couldn't climb the stairs except by using my hands to pick up my thighs. She had open sores on her vulva. When he said let's go to my bed and lie down, we can keep talking, we don't have to touch, I didn't think about agony, just stood up in the dark and said okay, let's do that.

House of carrier bags.

Pieces, scratches, terminal, tendency, names. He's smart, knows a six-hour house call softens the chaste dictate. Smug arrivals of Pallas and Apollo, their columnar pallor drives Erinyes underground. Defeat brooded centuries, classical over endometrial. *Spare me*. I shake my head to dispel my ongoing dialogue of one, abreact the linguistic breach, smile brightly at my mate. But why not my consort. But why. But why. Rented room, a spray of someone's old body fluids, splatter heroin-brown across the wall and ceiling originally painted robin's-egg blue, I just don't get it, charred nightstand where your thrift-store lamp exploded upward, flakes of black settled and melt, you could've gone up just as gauzily and I'd be finished too. Doesn't it matter more that I have to be there when you die, or the other way around, than that I can't live with you. Some rucked arbitrage, some felix culpa. Dust the blinds idly with my fingers and find a fluorite crystal point hidden, violet for psychic cleansing I tell you, returned to its corner. I'd just gotten you to unpack your suitcases after four years. Closet floor littered with thin plastic sacs, each restraining its mysterious sortings. *Can you launch rockets from here, boy I've done it for years, right over your head*. Not that you're a wastrel. Not that a hovel can't be a free domicile. We reenact Christendom vs. Darwin, utility and indifference curves. In a temple I turned slow deosil around your name in Devanagari script, gild spellbound. Sacrifice meant to make sacred, we have kissed away kingdoms and provinces, I meant to take care of you, I meant to sleep next you every night remaining, I meant to be bridal, I meant to.

House of confession.

It was all his fault. Saying simply, Any bed would be immeasurably improved by having you in it. I thought the degree to which I could be immoral limited by my cowardice, or plainness. And we weren't even original, the tenzo and the Portuguese girl seen afterwards down by the river necking. *This is how they disco on Ibiza.* Inaction can be a decision too. If someone drops the Torah on the floor, everyone in the room has to fast for forty days and nights. In an emergency, you can dress a hemorrhage with a sanitary towel. This is what happens when you try to rusticate the getting of pleasure, polar bears puncture through and feast joyous on the enraged contents of igloos. A walking time bomb. Angry, I threw vocabulary and he caught it with no warning, turned smoothly at the hip to palm it automatically on the downstroke, left hand facing out flat, an invisible catcher's mitt. Hungry, I broiled sugar to a bitter thin cracked amber and he plated it with a drizzle of cream and a mint sprig, stuck two forks in his back pocket, and asked with an eyebrow You're meeting me in five outside the walk-in, right? Ingrate, I put out my raw empty hand and he filled it, interlaced our fingers and with his other extracted and lit a second cigarette, transferring it, damp and warm around the filter, from his mouth to mine.

House of differential equations.

Go on, read *scars* for *stars*, read *help* for *held*. All the rumors are true. I didn't know I was still so in love with her, however crazy she presents. Gray-green, thick lashes, total inability to get me, perverse throat of labile perfection. Should you try to type afterward. If you look at the pictures you can see it. I did, after many swigs straight from the cobalt bottle, because I told myself I could arrange flowers in it later. College girls in cotillion dresses and me in the middle looking seductive and harebrained and like my mouth is full. *As bad as I am, I'm worse than I seem*. I want what I can never have, his hand to mar and demand me, only to blot out what I can't handle, wasn't made for. Jesus taught me one thing, Barbie something else. Copper wiring that can't be ripped out without half the wall coming with it. You get out of the car angry, why can't I come in for just a minute, I don't know why. Because I've got important stuff to do, you know, I have to drive eight miles choking and then start to drink as I unload groceries and look at old photos of my first lesbian, her reddened hair on my pillow, pink camisole in my laundry. And not call anyone, because it gets boring after awhile. That morning you bring buttered toast, an egg to cure my champagne headache; read me cognitive science and evolutionary biology, try to obliterate the previous eve's dispirited sparklers of irritation (he just wants to write, so do I, you and me too stupid and heartbroken for Clue, instantly soused on not nearly enough Freixnet). The last mouthful inadequate. Shaking the bottle, I keep telling myself all about it, reminding me, not believing me, arguing successfully with me if only to, for once, get the last word.

House of discrimination.

One: In the health-food supermarket parking lot, a homeless guy backs me up between two cars, *I really need your help*, his eyes not quite matching. I have to get past, I murmur idiotically, confused; then, unlocking the trunk to get the shopping bags: You shouldn't do that to women, it doesn't help your cause. Inside the store I am hitting myself gently on the head with a plastic bulk liquids container, intended to be refilled with roasted sesame oil, when a girl walks toward her car, parked next to mine. I'll take care of this, eagers the manager, firmly. I talk to myself in produce, misted as I stand blank before Bibb and buttercrunch. Two: Over her steaming bowl of noodles, tells me coyly *I think I need a girlfriend*, I pretend to fish with my hashi for something small and green, submerged in broth. You don't know the difference between masticate and macerate. Some squeaking Cleopatras boy forth my greatness. Three: When I pull out of the driveway, a bunch of kids crossing the street point at my car's paint job. I smile and wave. Hey, one shrieks to the others, totally thrilled, He did a peace sign! Oh my god, I'm a *woman*, I yell out the window, and open the bag of organic salt-and-vinegar potato chips.

House of edge.

Would I, well no, have had anything be different, rare and singular, infernally restrained and wise, knowing exactly which nerve endings to hover above without caressing, where they would discharge too loudly and thus avoided; we set a perimeter fire. Burned back overgrowth carefully with hatchets and asbestos outfits, judicious, cut back as little as necessary, not to disturb wildlife if we could help it, aware of a seething bacterial fertility, biomass under forest crust. Purposed a controlled burn, containment so the whole forest wouldn't consume itself and us with it, leave only bright skeletons to sky, we lay at sunrise half-fainting from comprehending empty, that periphery where form encounters boundlessness, entranced with configuration and unafraid of nothing. Left me discontent to be oblivious again next you, once let out don't want to go back inside, plangent and swollen with hopelessness, glass teacups in an industrial plastic tub, a gentle crash shimmers from the dish shack, the fukaten out back lights Gauloises, talks under the big sign reading *SILENCE*. Mars fumes in the dark, seethes a hole in Scorpio, an ember scorching the northern crotch of the valley. Hits split the han, whole peppercorns pock black morning air, I am not through, I want more, sheer volume, an initial resonance hacks at my thorax and I stagger, we lay together innocent, separated by the incendiary sword, holding on for dear breath, muscles clenched, lying there doing absolutely nothing and feeling the waves of our bare ability not to act on them break over us until I though I would surely incandesce, go up in sheets of light, cells bursting with incompleteness.

House of emergency laparoscopy.

Clinical, eviscerated, about an inevitable slip. Ultrasound probe gouged up my snatch, the bored technician hangs up the receiver, swaps hands, Yeah, you're definitely pregnant. Fails to find, points out absence: no yolk sac, have I eaten this morning. Actually not uncomfortable in a blue-sprigged cotton gown with bias ties, but walk doubled over with swollen wrong, crumple on gurneys. Paint indigo between my brows, anaesthetic unpredictable pungent. Retch out the plastic tube, one drug for the shaking, another for the nausea caused by the first. Therapeutic abortion they call it, like something needful, medically indicated, sanctionable, like there aren't unemployed men out picketing Old Santa Fe Trail. Playing operation with my girl cousin on Grandma's sewing bench, the tiny red glass bulb of her seamripper opened into something female and sexual and nasty. Detect no pneuma, ψυχη means breath so you're not alive, but I sit at the bus stop writing you letters: Little spark, you have a week not to live. Where is my mother to pick henbane and alkanet from the churchyard. During curettage swear like a sailor, appall the nurses, she holds up the hypodermic bewildered, we only gave you half. Gush pour rush slash stab, blood pressure dropping, ineffectual caffeinated sodas and heating pads. The women of the village had no chance to acknowledge and name you, did we fail to answer the challenge correctly, will the thigh pierce be able to heal. Hours later flat in the back seat I give the finger to the old men. Good Christians wave back friendly, large with amnesty and charity.

House of fallible.

Leave the chai on the burner, khaki froth of milk to boil over, the whole place smelt of burnt sugar. Kindle fireplace where a backdraft blows down smoke, you amused through wafts. Set the clothes-drying rack by the gas heater until my knickers toast crispy, scorched cotton, acrimonious. Women in love burn things, they say. Get distracted, flustered, wander off from one half-finished task and half-start another. I live too close to the unconscious, this dwelling place in danger. A spouse or medallion held up with reverence to ward, divert the Gorgon's gaze. Nothing to add in my defense. No escape goat. I woke in a frenzy, I've missed an entire semester of chemistry; my eyes blur, I can't read the examination paper I've been set, it can't be in Sanskrit; turns out I keep dolphins in the backyard pool, neglected to garden-hose in fresh chlorinated water. Now evaporated, they parch and shrink, dwindle to squeaky-dolls, I cradle one and sob reproach. Whenever anything dies it must be my fault. *The body you took such good care of is just bare bones scattered around. You spent so much effort tending it, and all that remains is disconnected bones.* That glad to get to the sheep-pen for once just in time, let out the two spring lambs. Trotted straight to the full trough and drank and drank the icy water. I looked out over the green-black of Iceland and saw you headed toward me with a bucket in your hand.

House of the fifth cervical vertebra.

Perhaps that's where it started, the invisible pebble when I'd shoulder my rucksack. Could his elegant physicist's fingers unpick the tangle in my back, knowing, astute. I lay awake long after shandy and sausages, imagining three children and our unhappy life above the chip shop. He says now astonished What an ego you had. To drag me to another continent on behalf of one arrant spring and summer. Unacquainted with metallurgy, hoping to recast the carcanet, ignorant of how even beaten gold can discandy. Nothing is safe, verily not your wife and son, everything must be well-husbanded against the inert and wicked. Especially spines, upon which all else depends. What is the chiropractic for a mutilated carcass, an osteoporotic exquisite corpse, I hunch barely breathing on my cushion and implore the time drum, *ring the bell ring the bell*. When moving don't notice I'm devious. Things that are past aren't done with me. I haven't been straight. Wake pretzelized and whingeing, betrayed by rest, this knot intricate, rub soothing, murmuring sleepy Don't cry. I just need to know, can you be big about this, casual and jaded or are you the sensitive guy with the dog and pickup truck. If the former then I probably wouldn't have needed to cheat in the first place. And if the latter at some point you'll figure it out, not just be my girlfriend, not just stroke my hair and rest your head in my lap. At some point someone, please, will take my gasping back in his hands and wrench it, fearless, aright.

House of the fractured metatarsal.

After 2000, it quit being exciting for me, just something you put on a check. That winter the giggling students taught me to adopt an identity, enter a chat room, solicit talk. The winter before one bent and hawked deliberate on the carpet. Sidney Bad Moccasin III hesitates before handing over his drum painted with the four directions (red and yellow, black and white); it's ceremonial not a toy I belatedly grasp when he asks am I on my period. Strange Februaries, dreamed a girl with five lovers (a tree, a cat, a horse, a woman, a man) all the same creature and thus all dying at the same time, this is wrong, she will be left with no one. Definitely not angry, stumping across a bitten, ankle-twisting landscape, she asks herself (uneven), was she worth it, always easier to be rejected, plead, something to start in motion the poem's repetitive gesture, stumble through ancient buffalo ruts and wallows in red powder on the walk to work, tearing linen on barbed wire, long bones of cedar limbs huddle heaped beneath live trees, a sacrifice, she feels that poignant, asking *why not? what's wrong with me?* the broken hand derelict at her side uncasted and crass, the poem in all its rich compulsion shudders and dissolves, always easier to turn back onto myself, a furtive itch or hook deep in the puny calcium where healing seals the crack, fills with red blood cells to build reefs and shoals, a dance of cement and filament, suddenly peaked of all this chronology, circadian agony waxing, waning honesty. Unable, she doesn't know her own weakness. Plays at patience till her wrists are sore. Can't just get off to a book of illuminated saints secret beneath the covers.

House of fragile.

In the confrontation, after hours of avoiding can't elude the mirror of one bruise that's been three weeks on one slack white thigh, all that punctured and red under fluorescence, and looked into my own dark eyes and thought viciously, I wish I were dead. To feel a right to breathe air, be on this surface. The scourge myself, doctoral hell of personal device. When a soul breaks, stays just as broken. Haven't burned enough by a late flame. Where might be the means, engine of survival, the ready war. By contrast, still seeking out a drinking partner. Someone to throw me against the wall at the end of the dance. My watch, my tapping satin toe, my wilted stamens. At the end of a continent he sleeps, cocooned and cocoaed, rain dripping, an alarm set before sunup. Thought of me remains cool-eyed, dim and pretty and has nothing to do with this red-haired heart. What things I get into, get access to. For a black-and-white jacket photo, I have to promise to stay out of those cold November rivers. It's not a deal. I cut none with panders and peddlers. Lie on my left side, crossed arms over tripping ballooning heart. When it billows too far out or can't shrink back in again, permanent dilate someday, I'd have to laugh if I were still around. The angels make blue spaces hum, startle, might get lucky. If not, well okay. If so, then so. Don't anyone tell me energy's for outward. Why else drink brandy, eat strong meat. Why else be ingested. Beating myself over the head with my head doesn't hurt enough. Slice the turkey next. Array arms, calves, tongue on a deli platter, be the veal. Now that I broke down in her office she'll never write references for me. Now that I hung up I can't call him back again. Christ have mercy on me a sinner. Left all my pianos out in the rain.

House of genre.

Thought it was them hurting me, diagonal shaped notes bent like fever, thought they were what cut me in half between heart and legs, clutched in the middle, evil catch in the breath, stab beneath the left breast. That we deserved hurt, as we did language and the pained arc of longing. Our fathers the beautiful ones of light. How do you reconcile that tender stringed glimmer heard downstairs with the slam of thin cigarette papers, thousands of them made into one inarguable law, flopping and slipping in small palms, a heavy weight of prophetic and doctrinal code to slap a kid upside the head with. We'd reduce, blanch in summer heat, thickened clots of organ music curdled in shag carpet. Turn out scrawny and limbed, spouting more words than you could shake a stick at. Found one survival: sprawl on the splintered bench, thrust against keyboard all angle and jutting elbows, thrown against an instrument to get enough attack and leverage, heft to make it blurt and chatter out what gets by us when we aren't looking. Another same: vibrate in a compact spot of fury, caress the battered brutalized crook of a scratched tool (dropped flat on concrete, spattered where a metal string popped and cut), grin fit to split with outrage, pour out lies of rich, glutted cities, truths of wasted moving. Without an implement to press to or strain away from, without a formal bit between the teeth, we show up transparent, invisible as air, no color, flavor, shape. Corpseless. Barely able to stand in the passageway between computer room and library, long past midnight in finals week. A mercifully grainy photo candled into a shrine for homesick Russians, spare bones scarcely strung, etiolated or lost in the skip from the end of the line on the right margin to the beginning of the next line commencing on the left.

House of hierogamy.

The whole moon, and my breasts howling after it, and you and you and you. What do we mean when we say *I want you*, what more that we don't already have? I cast myself out invisibly, spun yearning, filaments with faint violet glow like fishing line, can you see the loops and whorls of plain desire shed unwound everywhere, will no one latch on in bewilderment, jerk an answering tug, reciprocation, that spilt rarity. No one else acts lunatic, don't tear their hair or unbutton anything. Again only I'm with pale fire run under her skin, the only one distracted by throats and collarbones; there he lies beside the green pool, shining hair braceleting his forearms. And as he sprawls neatly, full-length in sun, she moves around him, cat-footed, tentative, you can see an ache haunt her thighs; and then there's her. If nothing else, I deserve to asseverate their beauty, his high-pitched voice precise and delicate as his body moving through the dining room, poised, tipped and willowy, glasses glinting, so swift he leaves a suck of air when he slides past, *Behind you*. His busgirl, I dislike scraping spent food into compost, jeweled berries and dandelion greens mix to inexorable sludge. Her eye sockets brimming with his cast-off smile. Alone in my soft blaze I stand for the ceremony, retake precepts to break afresh, blood swelling my labia, gravity and fantasy, not your knock on my door at midnight, *will you*, not your voice hoarse and desperate, not the flash of your wrist shooting out to grasp mine in the dark, *will you*, if no harshness to relieve my turns and bones and songs, *will you really*, then let me decant, let me enclose their faces, palm however fleetingly, let me inscribe and remember and make, let me be the one, let me curate them always, *will you maintain them, will you really maintain them*.

House of incarnation.

As he lifted the shotgun wearily to my face, I thought only, I'm not finished. Last time through the canopic jars, the sun-god's draggy barge, from some species of annelid invertebrate all the way to bipedal tulku, whatever frail concoction of ambition and drive and nerve and stimulation nearly exhausted, I may not have another left in me. Hitting bottom is not a weekend retreat. It requires gumption to submerge. Christ just drives to heaven. Italy, masturbating, sweaty things you like not so much: making a garden, a table, a house. If you had wanted that baby would we have bothered to keep it. Yes, I prefer to manufacture or forge on hands and knees, collecting polish or roughness, dirtiness and splinters, their discarded nature. Also abhor them. Where assertiveness becomes aggression, something toothier, as my grandmother once relished the evildoings of a soap opera character named Tad. Reckon what'll old Tad get up to today, she'd shake her head in disapproval, delight. What turned into an uncertain half of lager and lime, an idle reception, light years from the New Year's you pulled me into the bathroom behind you and kissed the spit out of me, looking up from the corkscrew to say wickedly Why don't we just skip the party and go find a hotel. I'm not done yet, not ready for the return of the lid, spring can still hang you up the most, insectuous turbid screen-porch nights, in Japan they say *Subaru* for *Pleiades*, everyone counts six not seven opaline and clustered fireflies. Of all the ways to tell the future, she omits palmistry. Can we postpone the witchburning another year. Can it be a little more rubato. Can you please. An untouched sister wetness. In, as you say, the mud.

House of ink.

We say so easily images fade/blur/recede with time, is it really, in weeks or months will I stop having to stop mid-action, struck motionless because recollection has hit me, we use those words too, assault/force/a blow/reeling, but what has accosted me so violently isn't there, has come to nothing, dissolves beneath inquiry, permanent or water-soluble, stained, burnished, branded, stamped, we'll never be able to pick up where we left off. We're lost like leaves, like seeds, like skin, like sleep, even though our hands were interlocked for miles, through valleys cloaked in clouds like water, islands pushing up through a thick white sea, only having exchanged last names some hours ago. Lithium and being on the unit and where I should have my tattoo, I want it around my upper arm, a geometrical reptile to encircle or embracelet, but what a sensitive place and should it be somewhere it won't hurt so much, maybe that's why you want it there you said, and took my fingers in yours and placed them on your embossed vertebra, pigment imprinted at the exquisitely painful joint hinging spine to neck, but I never saw it, so there's no image to go out of focus gradually. After a long black exhausted time of arguing about what we should not do we stood up automatically and a complicated moral act broke down into small steps we both knew how to follow, take off socks, pull back the sheet, turn off the light, all without thinking, in the night you found the guitar calluses which have never left, and fretting them gently said I approve; I found yours, tough galled blisters whose origins I couldn't guess: years of hard work, an axe handle, maybe posthole diggers? very close you said appreciatively, a baseball bat, and sure enough, in the gray morning, when I tossed you a light irregularly shaped little thing daringly, giving you no time to prepare, just turned and threw, on twenty minutes of sleep you swiveled without thought and, unerring. Caught it.

House of jewelry & salt.

Twisted earrings together, one silver hoop piercing the air of the other, empty centers, o swear not by the inconstant moon. He's almost as drunk as I am, involuntarily touches my stupefied wrist while my disconsolate spouse pretends to concentrate on and wrestle with his roasted capon. If it be my destiny; if it be not my destiny. My twelfth-tonight half-glass of straw-white wine doesn't count. There's a sense of stand-in, someone else with stubble and fascination spiking his iris, some flash of someone burning in there I'd rather be or know, someone to light matches with and watch them scorch down to your fingernails. The younger swears and drops his on the floor, we bend down attentive and watch it flare out and curl to a black crisp on the charred tile, he instantly twigs why inflict small hurts on ourselves. The secret is not minding. Now we have to clap, when my hands separate they jerk the silver hoops like a magician apart and burst open, it's the aggregate of things like dreams, inebriated conversation, invalids and milktoast, being wankered, totally plastered and wasted. My plastic sword keeps poking ladies in the bustle. I feel more and more like a dick in leather boots and tight buttermilk trousers. Never mind when I drop him off outside a stranger's house with a bag of groceries and a set of sheets and drive away home, blind with saline guilt, the sense of having left a delicate, expensive piece of equipment out in the elements to wear and rust unnecessarily.

House of karma.

She lived alone. She had her own inner schedule, crabbéd Arkansan cottonpicking fieldhand, she got up at 3 a.m. and washed dishes, stood on the back porch looking over dawn-pink winter wheat and chain-smoking menthols, she never had to go pick up All-Bran or Anheuser-Busch for Ed, I'll just run by the church and leave this card for Pastor Hodge. In clean overhauls she is skinny and pretty and grinning fit to bust in front of the basket factory, hair bobbed not to get caught in the machinery of 1925. If she were alive for five minutes I'd ask why did you finally up and leave him, only ever referred to as *the boys' father*. He'd already beat Archie black and blue, raised knots under his hide, something about dried corncobs. So it wasn't that. (Took and put his brand new Montgomery Ward guitar away in the closet.) Nor something she read. Another woman? Another man? When I got left the first time, I cried on the basement payphone and she said grimly, They'll sure run around on you. He must have dreamed into my dream, because he does have a sheep farm now, but with another girl. I crawled to the Carmelite monastery for evensong, broken in a denim jacket. Why did I ever think I could fit into this canister. Because I once turfed an entire soccer field in high heels, black patent pumps for cocktail waitresses furious to puncture the layers, flat plackets of St. Augustine. Is there something wrong with aching to be flung upon a straw tick, shoved out of a doorway, happily. The thought police are coming to take us away, we fall asleep before they get here. I know I should keep a notebook by the bed, to do so would require a hardness not left in her granddaughter.

House of kayak anxiety.

Actually I'm separated, I told my new friend in the dark and started shivering helplessly because it became at that moment true. A stampede shakes the sod croft, a choking mist of peat sifts down onto the dirt floor. In the evening she made lists of things to do for the next day, but when the next day came she did not do them. Some vast impartial room I came across seemingly opened, silence pearling down into it, weeks of such drops could not fill its perfect failure, deeply empty, vast, intangible. I could only take it in, perched light on the breath, a soap bubble wavering on the point of a pencil, shinglers straddling the ridge row looking neither to one side nor the other. Or a plumb line, hypoxic, anaerobic, barely level. In the neighbors' stock tank we turned clumsy together, rudder entangled in weeds and muck, me yelping *no the other way* but how could you have known that in water right pulls left, the mirror reverses, your eyes wrong-handing your brain's direction. The intimate dangers of patronage. Why I always sought to ameliorate you. Petcock or stopcock to some arterial sheerness, denying what at times felt like throwing up or childbirth, unlegitimated nor necessitating imprimatur, plainly an ineluctable conduit. Dying lilies spot the desktop with pollen, maple grain swimming in upheaval. Lexicons prove nets, contain what I'm calling sin but slenderly, but scarcely. Waiting for us both to fall in over our heads, forgiveness irrelevant as devotion or as weight.

House of literalization.

How do you define sex I asked trying to sound casual, making love is having the intention of doing everything you possibly can to each other without inhibition or restraint you replied soberly, oh, I said, faint with the dazzle of, the utter impossibility of being fulfilled. Open presence like a piano dropped from a fourth-story window. I spit in the sink and drip white toothpaste streaks down the front of my kimono, a bug gets flushed down with the rinse water, I'm sorry, I call down after it as though I'd inconvenienced it minorly rather than having just taken its life, I'm sorry, no, no, you whisper into the inner curve of my elbow, my God don't be sorry. Diaphragm taut with anxiety or ache of having you so near I can't answer. If intention so trammled as to be rendered guileless, soaked in the milk of chastity, are we yet to blame for our naked willingness to feel this way next to another person, guilty of flagrant intimacy. When I told you how in the midst of the hell realm I broke my right hand, you said *how wonderful*, that's why I asked for a drag, couldn't inhale without coughing, the part of me which had seized and turned solid began to thaw, alarming because it has no margins, now liquid some few hours begins to scab over again, dismal. I think you should sleep with lots of boys, you said thoughtfully as your fingertips knew the sweetest places, the overlooked, forgotten, ignored, friendly, merely friendly, merely functional places, and scooped into them fearlessly, burrowed until they forged slackness, charged flesh with life. The long muscles on either side of my spine, the delicate flat plane at the base of my wrist where perfume hasn't been in years, the secret folds between fingers into which other fingers can thrust, it is days later and I am still lambent with the symmetry of it. Don't seem to give a shit about impermanence or rectitude.

House of mattresses.

It's a martial purchase, lying on different brands in the showroom, avoiding the salesmen's eyes, consulting *sotto voce*, three hundred each gets you a queen-sized starter with box springs and two free pillows and special coils that do nothing for back spasms or hands that fall asleep all the way from elbow to tingling ring finger or sleepless games of formatting and pagination. Hard-edged plastic corner tabs, scraped and fraying, our old full fitted sheet (trousseau, dowry, floral polyester, scratchy lace from when my mother was a bride) can't conceal. The first two corners are easy, the third requires some manual delicacy, and the fourth yields only to grunting and manhandling, lifting the whole thick thing and folding it brutally. Feeling guilty, cramming a child's foot into his shoe. Like there should have been another, more graceful way to do it.

House of morsel.

My mother did lie abed of a rainy day, no chores possible, a great fat library romance novel pressing down her stomach all afternoon. An avocado pit is like an egg yolk; *delphys* is Greek for *womb*. Who'd've thought with such lessons as these I could become a statistic, Women Who. Lining up, living it up with all their fervent wives. She's not being thought; she's real; she's wearing my long-sleeved blue t-shirt. She's sleeping in my bed and I'm sleeping heroically on the sofa, which has a ridge that hits my waist so torso lifts above legs and my supraspinatus goes to sleep, before this I hadn't realized how my guests suffered. I fed her arugula, portobellas, sautéed garlic clove after clove. Burnt the last of the firewood and sweetgrass, lit handmade tapers and rubbed her back and shook my head, murmur consolingly. She said, Maybe I'll even—you know, not yet; but maybe when I feel better, in a few months...maybe I'll even stop wearing a padded bra. I swallow dryly, not choke. I don't want to do my back exercises or take my B vitamins anymore. Poetry is voting with her feet. She requires screams, scrambles. Chooses an athlete. Take me there, throw me down in the snow. A roughness, lick, snarl, above all bite. There are too many men in my brain, pulling off striped sweaters, sucking on lozenges, checking their watches, doing up their flies. Compelled to describe flesh over and over, each separate mouth a coracle filled with anodyne. May these words unbind the demons, O goddess, from the body of my daughter; may they, as I repeat them, anatomize the buzz.

House of mountain wanderer syndrome.

Much has been forgotten already. Must be clambered upon, clamored after, not yet but directly, quite reorientated until precise. When lightning rattled us, noisy and snowy with stark altitude, I drug her back down to the treeline terrified. She sleeps with two brothers. Can she tell the difference. Some taste, motion, preference. Can you tell a love affair is coming, ten years in the past, before you ever meet. We need to stop not committing it to paper. She tries ashtanga, Pilates, aikido, qi gong, capoeira, Nia, and finally goes right outside into the blasting naked of it (her vitriol, her Samhain). If I want to sleep among the things of the night, what am I taking that belongs to any of you. Even if my heart desired it right now, I'd go as far as I wanted. That message came through urgent and late: *Sanity is Red*. We're moving forward with the op. So what is your most unscathed request. Does one man have enough thoughts for you. And a tangle of awareness eventually divulge into topography, where she can move unfreighted from hunger to salmon, with an appropriate proportion and scale, increment and entire.

House of no fucking way.

Of course my radio croaked, it didn't like me listening to gangsta rap at top volume, had already blown two out of four speakers in thuggish protest. Misdemeanor in the house, automotive posturing, crystalline vodka and glassy crack, lustrous armament, threats, brags, vengeance, squeaked-out epithets and scratch-elided verbs, *who you callin a bitch, if you don't give a damn don't throw it up*. My ears rang when I turn over the engine and finally heard nothing, know for once and for all the blessed damozel will never sleep with the likes of me. When every president elected under Jupiter has died in office, perhaps it's not so paranoid to want central London cordoned off. The conjurer suspends, public and meager in a Lucite box, over the grayed river. A body, like land, waits for weather to move across it; even cold soaking rain. Right now what I'm inquiring is, can lyric kill you, could I actually die from chiasmus, does the lamia still swallow girls whole outside the nineteenth century. If I'm shaky and exigent from days of painkillers, or, *I feel at home in the wheatfield* he lies, tower blocks steaming in the distance, slugs smeared underfoot, Heathrow screaming overhead. *The two of us is not available*. Together we weren't lost, just don't know exactly where we are for a bare half-minute, tangled in what they used to call a coppice, young beech or oak, brambles, new grass, a gloaming seeps through from somewhere recent and breathless, but we can't find the opening, can't even retrace our way out. I gather up a crow feather that won't fly on its own, requires an entirety of wing. What it felt like to suck in air, slapped against the tailgate, the freight of mass as we gathered speed.

House of ovulation.

It's a lot to ask that you should be the straight man. Shins raw with mosquito lumps, bats zipper through the coastal oak. Alternating Tylenol with Aleve all day my brain's pasty and flat, or is that the taste of my mouth. Or can I tell. Or could you. I walk this earth looking for one who'll sass back, not bored or repelled by anything, as lazy and mean and rapacious as I am to blot out his body with that of another. This could dissolve in practice. But what if I don't want it to. Even medicated, I am casual, rooted, armed as a bomb. Getting to know each other in, as Roshi says grandly, Our Extraordinary Way. Which forever chokes me with laughter, like when *rubberize* means *To impregnate with rubber*. Swallow, deranged, jittery, unlovely; sticky like Tar Baby, using vernacular as a net, container for that miscellaneous gypsy ruckus; if at all possible, involve a cow. Thank God I've stopped needing sleep. This house believes life unendurable without desire—can you know for certain this is true? yet if I am not partial to, have a knack for, cupidity, why this blind groping for paper, for the right question. To enter, to escape, to save. The third ordinance the one I most neglected, worst current against surrender—no Dionysiac ecstasy, no scherzo, no northern lights to wash my brain. I am so tired of probity. Yet when you say *non serviam* they fling you down from heaven. This alchemical process of a fallen woman sunk in matter, calling upon a human being of understanding to grub her up. *He which is was wished until he were*. Sulphur's stench, released nightly from hot water into cooling air. As a mere 3 months on, my former sorcery blunted, dampened: *Remember me to our mutual friend*.

House of pair-bonding.

I obviously know the man in these pictures, I'm letting him hold my hand. Is this the time we waste on our roses. Limbic revision meant if I check your face often enough, read for frustration or rage, study the shape your brows and lips make, will there be an explosion or just muted self-loathing—then all is rejointed, made lovely. My poor young groom, slender, limping, one foot held uncertainly off the sidewalk, stone-bruised. Snow on the shady side of the house glows an eggshell violet at twilight, I bungle, can't breathe, try to start the car with my house key. He made a fiddle of her breastbone. Some men offer more than gesture. I'm going to bunt, deny everything. I haven't ever seen you venomous with shame, never watched that spiral savage you, you never took your pillows and slept cold on the floor in the study, there have been no visits to urgent care on the weekends. I don't dream my cat drawn into the woods by the witches' singing, didn't find an inclined stranger for the drive-by body pierce, not at all curious what lay around the next warm bend, not always getting ideas from somewhere like the girl who put beans up her nose, don't keep you awake all night long with the light on, doing this.

House of paralysis.

The text of this book is set in Perpetua. I wanted to make you in stone, so that one of us would never die. This icon represents a disk on your desktop. Curse the freeze-dried raspberry seed lodged in the crevice of a molar, grope for its tiny core, unwrapped drupelet fibrous and stuck. The alias could not be opened, because the original could not be found. That name is already used by a folder. That name is already taken; please use another name. The alias could not be opened, because the original is in the trash. If I don't count out chocolate squares and eat six instead of the allotted five, will I go to hell all winter, the Kore absently placing pomegranate kernels between her teeth to champ one aril at a time, looking idly over the bookcases. Swallow down saliva, they make airsick bags out of plastic now, shiny vinyl, have you noticed, you can't write on them when you most need to. Take care, a theoretical poetess. He said *Merely decorative, marbled endpapers*. She said *You could cut it off by the yard*. He said, *divigatory*. She said, *overwritten*. Double-click to open a document. The text "I" could not be found. My right hand going chickenfoot over the track pad, the alarm clock going off at 5 am whenever tonight ends. Muscles far too starved to unclench. Famished graveyards, empty tigers. What's left, other people asleep elsewhere in other rooms, numbed to the spine by fretful parsing. Still I am staying put until the windowpanes turn blue, if I have to seal off a chamber of my heart to do it.

House of pelvic truth.

A reptilian verity, which the verbal neocortex (vener of civility crumpled wetly into the strongbox of skull) cannot map or even sense: some stroke survivors don't know where their hands are if they're moved out of sight. What is behind my back, only my hackles see. I dreamt of girls for months after you moved in, I wanted it to be a Jungian thing, archetypical goddesses to whose aching skin I made love only so they would introject, come home. Filling the white bowl of bone in the morning, emptied clouds. Can you forgive my being carried down into dark winter, brook my thaw in another's sapient hands. Can a man and a woman swallow one another's wildness. Water simmers in the landlocked eye of a lake; every pure blue gallon weighs down something's skeleton. When he fell off his cycle, minutes before his heart burst, all he said was Put me back on the bike. And when he came out of the coma, his throat ripped open where the tiger had dragged him out of the ring, he said, Don't hurt the cat.

House of polar hysteria.

Is a mixed state, agitation and depression, green eyes gleaming fruitfully from the snow. I cast the circle, invoke the professional lover, where is the topaz man when you need him. She cannot be trusted with a weekend. We dwell with Tyw, Wodin, Thor, Freya, never riddle over who rules our workdays. I think he had a forest not a migraine. And I've seen God and done without, listened to the autobiographical sinew of helices for hexes; maybe blew it. Five hundred lifetimes as a fox—that's one. I let the leaves drop, stood all winter long empty-handed. It takes me, the supposed permuter, an hour to drive home, head hung out the window trying to see past striating snow, prow straight into its oncoming swirl, weirded. Go somewhat nuts, picture knot-headed proto-Europeans in rotted bearskins hurling heavy objects, e.g. boulders, at each other and grunting wrathfully. Is ego really so bad, after all someone has to steer the car, guzzle tea, take the last doughnut, facilitate meetings, or else chaos. Those old Zen masters who greedily reach for sweets. Whack the Calvinist within, it's an action not a piece of work. Who's above his own consequences? Both of us turned involuntary to check her out in tight jeans leaning over a low wall, blue eyes rimmed with black, thirteen and more than a little bit bad. No more sugar for you; I'm taking *no-no* for an answer; *I am not a human being*, after which he led the monks to the other side of the mountain, with his staff picked up the dessicated corpse of an old reynard, and performed the cremation service as if for a priest.

House of post-luteal dismay.

Integument blind, blackened insensate, every inch thick blunt burn scar. Would that flowing patterns of tattoo, words and birds and ribbons of rainbow wash cursive over all, figure beauty out of wound, layer gestural, image over barrier, drape in spangled soft gauzy stuffs, enwrapped and saved. The complex writes lilac, florid paisley rather than flowering rutilation, or do I know the discrepancy. A waning moon whether gibbous or gaunt, time for banishing, being rid of what is unwanted, what is to turn gray and peel away like old rind no longer needed, outlived and shed. Does this alleyway lead to itself, a solitary wont reifying solitude, should I fight my way back to encoupling. Or is the dual a relic. Honestly. Him so elegant and ruthless, probably queer, fluent halfway up fifty meters, centipeded celerity while I go all ungainly, sweat and grab, stuck until a fat brief fumble, then inexorable slip and grunt, indecorous, of a sudden totally underfoot, uneven kneed, chin hitting gravel, a mouthful of loser. And after the skid and pitch, no swift clear slice drawing a seam of brilliant red, not even a clean cut you'd want to draw your tongue across, but only gouge, an unwrap, ripped flap, half ugly yellow bruise half ooze, plum no one wants to pick, wasps ignore, finally slops to ground, dusty gash, covered in grass bits and ants, overripe granules weep uselessly into night soil, guttered, smashed, sweet and sub rosa.

House of quietism.

Perch unsteady on the shower door track, aluminum slicing into slippered footsole, unbleachable dots of lichen coruscate on the ceiling. Condensation gathers, lurk and drip. Someone your height could reach. *I am not a loser* is not an affirmation, she told me firmly. Besides it's festive up there, rust-gray, olive-blue. Once I put out my hand in the throes of passion and, fumbling in the folds of her sheets, came up with the stiffened crust of a half-eaten stale sandwich. Tired undergraduate set pieces. Nothing new has happened to me in a decade, only flaking whitened film on this sliding stall door, splatters of soap and mineral-hard water. What I hear you saying is, you're happy with me; when I hear you say that, it makes me feel like you're a complete idiot. What I hear me saying is, I can't take this any more, even if I have to chip it off with one of our dinner forks and leave long tined gouges in the glass and in the skin of my wrists where I slipped. I stop. I'm going to stop. Empty dribbles out of the toothbrush cup (ceramic handle sharp and jagged from being snapped off some years back and superglued back in shards, a little thin brown blood rinsed off) so it can dry. Spray everything with plain vinegar and hydrogen peroxide. And clean all surfaces in the house of mildew.

House of rainwater & gratitude.

What's your last name. *I want to kiss you.* That's a funny last name. Still, besides your being a smartass, to show up bewildered but game, unaverse, up for awakening an abashed eros until suddenly lambent. Although mummified the thought of a physical body. The former supervisor assaulted my edges [technically, harassed], that digit bluntly to prod my congealing thigh until I went she, turned third person, pierced tin, broken skin if I have to see inadequacy like light seeping in, the rest of me getting even thinner not again, sentences to undress no sense or end. And her body felt used, as if while she slept someone else took it out repeatedly on the town, crept around to carouse, score, got it in fistfights and then dumped it on the bed and left for me to find there in the morning, sore and hung over, mysterious bruises and torn blouses. Now. I didn't know being requited did this, this soft green replenishing thing, like health or a flush when fever washes out through your pores. Some cellular pulse replacing sere, filigree seaweed filling coralled skeletons, succulents plump and bare among cacti and yucca. This happens to drunken hedgehogs too blissful to curl into a ball and thus gently eviscerated by any predator. What a small, happy sacrifice. To be the one so unsheathed, or to quench such minute fire.

House of relief.

I suggest you not even start with me, or go there. Boo-hooing onto the cutting board, I rough-chop yellow onions all wrong, am touchy, rigid, sand-lidded, exhausted, if anyone asked me anything I'd combust into vowels' shriek, what's nailing me to myself just now. Stellar jays' crests flop like cockiness itself, lapis lazuli drag queens eyeing my dry teabag. When beauty's swung in a swift turn, sidestepping feet, flat cork tray at hip height slid skillfully onto the wet countertop, empty glasses barely rattling, and I'm in the way, I'm always in the way, my hands swell and thicken, oh avoid me if you possibly can, avert from my widening clumsiness, the humiliation of stupid, let me stammer and fumble in peace, unpretty, unfunny, plainly without poignancy. Against their elegance in robes, fragile and stern, layers of sharp contrast and folded spare sleeves, black gives way to gray gives way to white like the hidden inner petals. Shaven necks vulnerable, eyes intense whether dreamy or fiery, thin hands folded in petition, or gratitude, or nothing, or something. Carrying no extra than what's lodged in their minds. Night service: *the cracked bell, the broken pine branch of this moment*—becomes briefly adequate to lie in a tangle of dirty sheets and bare skin, listen to crickets, fatigued and letting go as a worn-out toddler finally slackens her hold on some grubby plaything, in half-sleep forgetting I am not what I beheld, the beautiful ones glide by the altar and exit, one by one, in a rustle of loveliness.

House of revision.

The hot water bottle in my lap, *such a little old lady* she mocked me; now it seems tiny or maybe just distant, improbable and fictive: summer flick mostly forgot, makyo straighten into rice-paper screen when you blink your eyes hard. *When you open it to speak, are you smart.* We drank tea made of marigold and corn flowers, competed, decide if we're attracted to or want to be each other, if it matters. One suffered heart attacks when I'd break up with him, stuck his tingling left hand in the waistband of his pants. Manhood cost the second: double mastectomy scars, drugs injected daily, when you sever your mother and throw her in the trash, how you grow to hate breasts. Three dropped her head on my shoulder, overcome, unaware I could hardly stand myself. Six never my business, only sweet to witness. (Saying a bit scornfully, looking too beautiful stirring the slimed pool at dusk, her white long-sleeved shirt, my blue-flowered scarf, Of course it's manageable, you only have three days left. Well I guess I showed her, I can get up to a lot, still constellating Midge.) Seven yet a lad, footie hooligan, lager lout, yob who smiled at me through his mouth guard, a soft white body meant to line trenches, feed snipers. The ninth, supra, elsewhere rendered domestic. And the tenth lover, I can't say, so blunt and wrong once we got out of the truck, some twist of blood chemistry and meds, it's someone else who did those things, I deny it all, I can't recall that information, *au secours*, I did not have intercourse with that woman. Let's wreck my soft tissues, did you know an entire sect of Islam revolves around longing for the beloved. You pilfered the library's only copy of St. John of the Cross under cover of your last night. And what did I thief, or lose: the ability to fatigue into sleep, or trick to believe life bearable, much less worth all this, if emptied of hankering.

House of salvage.

God burst into tears and said Just admit it, you don't love me any more. No, said the world defensively, that's not true, of course I still love you, it's just that—well, lately I've been seeing someone else. Wasp nest, papery damp spitwads; mud dauber, tiny moist black clay lumps held delicately between two dangling thin limbs. Fly through a gauntlet of chicken wire. What if you were in love with the automated-operator woman who won't give out unlisted numbers, and you had to call information just to hear her voice. What if you burnt a coyote fence for firewood, ignorant of its proper function. Contrition paid then, not now, no one wants my old coin. When I came out of lecture the sun shone on a spandrel of cobweb that a spider had built from cycle handlebar to wheel rim while I was sitting (silver) inside, insane. Menacing confinement. Like finally falling in love with your loyal boring best friend after a decade of drunken fooling around with vicious, attractive strangers. What if she'd said yes when I trainwrecked her against the clammy wall on rue Mauvais-Garçons. What if éclairs really were bolts of lightning, bursting forth with liquid creamy ardor. I said I've broken my arm in several places and all they said was Don't go to those places. Scission, avulsion. Those like us live for mitigating circumstantiae. In Egyptian mysteries the brains are considered unimportant and thrown away. Heart is sacred. He treated me colonially, like I'm your refrigerator, yardstick, geologic survey, frontal lobe, kiln, strop, river trout, fish knife, choirloft. But I am: an aerialiste: levitating glass: translucent deer.

House of small ferocity.

Why the nuns punished her in Catholic school, and camp counselors prayed, appalled, all night until she broke into hot guilt. Someone wondered if it was at all like tucking your trouser legs into your socks and dropping in a ferret, and the answer is, kind of; but no. Happened last at the thwack of a hard pass into open palm, sequence of: rim shot, rebound, agile pounce, catch, crouch; twist, squeak, dart, crush; pause; lift in the air neat as a cat, thrust: then: Swoosh. Almost recompense. Leather necklace tight with salt water, black delicate fur braceleting a waist, shirts and skins. Don't cut me any slack, right then I wanted nothing more than to fuck him senseless. Resist. Resistance. Vitiating and adolescent, no possible recourse but verse. Could we have been in Paris in her wrought-iron bed right now. I never wore eyeshadow, the hoods velveteed naturally, unneeded, drugged and stunned, shedding virus, worrying it, did I bite you too hard, tied together with chocolate threats. I seem to want something but not deserve it. Coffee is bitter and it's not for little girls. Falling into a towering angel, I haven't been easy, I've made things hard. Split geodesics to glitter spellbindingly. Those old avid striations. All I am now is desperately sorry. Almost indemnified, always a governess, always in love.

House of solidity.

Fragments of conversation drift up, algae feather through unbroken water like carp not yet turned dragon circling just below the angle of visibility. In the sushi place you didn't look at me. Who knows, maybe it would have been terrible. I smiled without amusement, there was that thing you did once for about ten seconds to my kneecap, absently, while telling me about your high school best friend; there was the thing your thumb did multiple times to the rounded hollow of my palm, indecently. Imagine, *milagro*; finally someone who knows what my kneecaps are for, and I would have thought it was just me but for the time I pretended to sit up with finality and toss off the covers, and your arm immediately shot up in the darkness and threw me back down onto the pillow. You unafraid to use your strength, half-laughing, half-groaning and biting me once, quickly, on the trapezius muscle. No; terrible was an interruption palpable and wrong outside the kaisando. *So how do we do this, I don't know, has it even been done before, of course it has.* In the end we stood too close, confused and bonking our heads together as the night before we'd done half a dozen times, unfamiliar with each other's dimensions in the dark. Abruptly kissed your thumb, pressed it to the left corner of my mouth, inexplicable, then departed leaving me unfairly in the rupture. When we rouse the bodhi mind it brings other things up into the air with it. Sulphur bacteria bubble slowly to the surface of the warm plunge, white ropy strings of spittle, the sutra says water that is too pure has no fish. Taproot sunk in thick mud, white petals aflame with pale fire. Supposed to be cooled by my new mantra. Should such a rip then seam new and unsullied, spume still and settle again to flawlessness.

House of telling.

Discursive and narrate, two baby mice, fringed eyes wide, trapped in the dokusan room the next morning while I tried to explain—frantically everywhere, seeking shelter under our robes and taking refuge beneath the altar. As I chased them with upturned bucket. That's me your honor in a one-room casita, married and single both in the winter of summer with yellow aspen leaves drifted up around my ankles like snow and too many cars going too fast right outside the incongruous jewel stained-glass bathroom windows, ruby and emerald. I boast 99¢ Hispanic saint candles (La Milagrosa, San Martin de Porrés, Nuestra Sra. de Guadalupe), a stuck melody by that Icelandic band who sing in a made-up language, and no recourse for the useless fire, inside which she's so pointlessly, foolishly burning, other than sit up and reach out once again for the goddamned pen. I get to eat out of the carton, monosodium glutamate's heavy hand at my chest, rushing to turn my sternum inside out (a decade ago in Chinatown, my girlfriend dumbfounded over the potstickers, *I think I'm dying*). I am not thinking, your delicate blood chemistry, not gnawing my own skin in feeble imitation of your incisors, not remembering your angular Rinzai bows, no I'm not, shut up, I'm not either, so not envisioning your eye-colored eyes, not that I could see them in the dark, no I will not tell you what I did in the shower, I didn't spend the whole day having to put down the irksome Oprah novel to bring myself off, no you shut up, it just can't be the case that you don't have this in mind, the weight through blue linen, the tendon that rides behind my knee, the soft strap pulling calf to thigh, at all.

House of time.

Alright okay so there was someone. Narration not a story, disembodiment of events strung in line without causality, an enormous big nothing like a jar. *Mama, car, dump truck, backhoe, doughnut, bird, mailman.* Wrestling with angels; back to the wall; every piece of diction I own has to be deployed, unaided by thesaurus. Dear me I'm ornery. Why else would you be restive, rattled. Both loathing the merely delicious. Wrinkled noses at what's grainy and sweet, slaving for a crisp tart assault and finish. Ascerbic acidulous acrid, is it just a question of which Vincent. How dare you think I can't fly. Endow my whole half to an undilute smooth new miscegenation. Buttermilk and mastery, caloric and craft, I object to accusations of crudity, *saleratus is* baking soda. Will have you know I can make a pan of biscuits blindfolded. Just unimaginable, to light on my cheek in the water's face, meet what's fractious and mordant in our common vein, without some degree of carnal bliss. Fear not, quail no more, nothing left to wallop or make a pass at, we are immaterial now, archangelic to say nothing of celestially infatuated. Even thus trammelled or handicapped, I shall take your (metaphysical) breath away with my luminous Apollonian severity. The Russian barked, Don't stare at the page, there's nothing there, look to the heavens for your answer. Go out into the backyard. Gaze at the ground. Or night sky. Make pentacles of agitation. Frame influenza. This is suddenly about everything but what it's supposed to be, what is wrong with me that I don't know the meaning of *husband*, why isn't it 1933 and we're in Montmartre, it's time to close the sluice and be done. If you get lonely, you can find me in the tiniest stanza. If you recognize the hour, the year, or your exigence.

House of turquoise serpents.

Clean forgot I was virgin. Dislimned the crescent, imitated Roman thoughts. Once it is not yours, you can never get it back. *Just keep your eyes on her.* Nearly too late by the time a young priest bit each digit in turn, spark life at each tip, intuit which occult places craved illumination. Each thin spiral a snake. Each dimmed ampersand. Afterward, long kitchen work lay ahead, chewing and transmuting, the body the grit that produces the pearl, the kick the slit that lets the god inside. Christian fathers met in council, consigned mothers to apocryphal oblivion. *There's a chair for the married lady, and there's a little stool for you.* Snaffle, bridle, halter [and what they undid, did]. So the world got skimmed, ripped off, alloy discarded for dross, the chthonic solved as sin, Cynthia's trunkful of grimoire lost to the Burning Times, maenads made magdalene, hetaerae splitted to whores and department chairs. Muse, daemon, duende veiled, dormant. Her thus enclipt, cindered. What of that last moment in each day, the one that Satan cannot find. *Lucie says you are a genius.* I only recollected this speeding on blacktop at midnight when I mangled and burst a young coil, tire tread bisecting his dry glitter, mouth split open in a gobsmacked smile, and I went down into the canyon, in the absence of church, kirk, circle; descended into petroglyphs and shotgun shells, knelt before her stones, and screamed.

House of the ulnar tunnel.

Would you be terribly inconvenienced if I fell somewhat in love with you. The grip, its deafening gravitational field weakens slightly when I overhear two women whispering Punjabi in the next room: his mother, sixty and ill, radiant and chic with cheekbones and short hair coming back in, you can never be too rich or too thin, abnormal protein counts never entirely dwindle; and his cousin, thirty and unmarried, ripe laugh and plum-lined lips, heads turn downtown, the only picture in her bedroom one of her best friend, tall in a silvery dress, their arms snug around each other's waists, their eyes those of bridesmaids in deep trouble. In English I catch *ginger tea* and *all the excitement*; in Hindi *ulti alti hai*, meaning nausea rises. I could have learned to be of use, I could be making the toast, I could in seven years have mastered her rat-a-tat juddering sluice of needs and preferences. Instead crippled wrists in tan elastic and Velcro sheaths, no one's flesh color. Instead no agency or advances. An impassible hallway, the cold startle of where is the toilet. A falling earring, transpersonal. *How much are you willing to sacrifice for your calling, your pleasure, your insidious urge*. Instead this verse paragraph, some shapeless onslaught of prose, an unrhymed sneezing fit. I've got to put a sock in it, journal of the botheringly obvious, got to halt because I love girls and will not betray one, can it before I turn into the wrinkly orange-lipsticked lady in kneehighs who hits on the cute UPS guy. Oh, hell. Instead his jealousy submerged in, instead what sounds familiar, instead the dark sympathy of your voice: old honey, raw silk, muted strings, woodgrain.

House of uncontrol.

Hunted down and snared by a blank stare. Incomprehending fingers close about the throat, you'd thrash and panic too. Still better than it used to be, now whole hours at a stretch (*clockless and uncollected* she wrote) where I want the work, give me the job, I'm not afraid. I can falter to an upright if hunched caryatid position, beg alertly Take me with you, take me far from home and leave me out there, get me all turned around, get me thoroughly lost. Cease questing the ways out. Flatten willing under the knife. She wrote *vertiginous* and I dined there, hard. Held tight onto his elbow, clutched his brown leather jacket (vanilla and buttery pine); tipped headfirst into the snarl of heaven. I'd trust you naked, trust you if things turned apocalyptic. Only give permission; on my own refabricate you as my Cheops, Virgil, astrolabe. An athame gleams blackly extracted for the letting, turn aside slightly to the left and hold your breath. One poet washes her face in cold water every morning to have an unwanted experience. Find me no more worthy of note than a feather or straw, find me rather innocuous, surreptitious, an idle finger passed round the saucer rim, pressing grains of powdered sugar minutely to lips. Intimate means to fearless; put, drive, or press into the inmost; or get close enough to see that there is no inmost, nothing but vandalism and bluster, confrontation and vacancy. I do not dread any dark, that of twelve tones, abstraction, plotlessness, the stochastic. Being foolish, vexatious. Being wrong. Making a mistake perhaps as long as eternity. Never knowing whom the Grail serves.

House of valentines.

A scarlet character firmly basted in place, I fetch and carry now only for the sensual. A little New England schoolteacher with a touch of the Candy Box. She is breath within breath, even invisible, even at new moon. Ancients believed a bleeding woman's touch could blast fruit, sour wine, cloud mirrors, rust iron, blunt the edges of knives. Don't tell anyone I'm only going through the motions, making vain gestures to recall the Muse, *deus absconditus*. Admit I dream of jackals pulling down gaunt giraffes. Notice all that's left in the orchard are withered yellow pears and the nights don't seem to be getting longer. Maybe this will be a short year. The neural rut for pain had just begun to silt up, I only gave him a koan but he took it badly. [*What is the practice of a lifetime? The appropriate response.*] Why would I repatriate, go back to the range. Because there are things I need there, and nobody else knows where I left them. Nameless simples; sequined lamina, discovered molten or shed; primitive gems; some prenatal sympathy. *She calls herself Parena, says that was her name before she was born.* Illume water with a mirror, rose petals, saline; asperge. Then return. Strophe. Sing, enchant. Safe to go limp, lascivious and plastic, smooth a silver brush through lyrics or red willow limbs. My mare could scent and pursue ponds from half-a-day's distance. The long creek—fragrant, creamy. The wind gifted to blow everywhere. First quarter, the crook of her half-smile just visible above the treeline.

House of virus.

Would you recognize, as I did not, an autoinoculation, an infected conjunctiva; by its umbilication, by its hyperkeratotic center. Options depend on age, location, extent and desire. Do you want to manage, or to resolve. Some exhibit little or no response to treatment modalities, fail cryotherapy, fail topical acid; some require sensitization, desquamation. Some are notoriously stubborn and complicated by fissuring and tenderness. And possible oncogenic potential, contagious to others, dysplasia, cosmesis and pain. Don't touch, or it may spread. That's how persistence succeeds: invades crevices, finds weak spots, previous hurt places, antique injuries. (As my playwright casts and again the same weary sentence structures: a comma, a dependent clause. A fragment. Throwing a old die with corners worn round, no new combination possible, inconceivable to incept or spring any newfangledness while adhering to familiar rhythms, unattainable even to reach the cliff's edge wind-scorched and indifferent, much less to topple off it.) Initiate a conservative regimen when in proximity to the matrix, so as not to risk scarring or recurrence. Yet higher doses may upgrade the immune system to recognize dead tissue, attack its own lesions. If that is you are not immunocompromised. When destructive tx are not tolerated (repeat freezing after thawing, curetting, electrodesiccation, chemotherapeutics), in refractory or resistant cases you may abandon mechanical adjustment or immunomodulation to medications, or observation. For most cutaneous papilloma or papules claimed benign; effectively self-limiting, able to clear spontaneously. Be warned that while regressed, they continue to exist in a subclinical state. Viral protein and infectious particles not eradicated, yet any significant change in the epithelial surface is not appreciated. With the naked eye.

House of white fire.

I would have died before hurting you, but for some reason it slipped my mind. I lift everything, you should know; your mother, your nationality. *Oh you mean the Shakespeare-was-a-girl thing*, he said casually, ear stud glinting, his girlfriend looked on agog, *How come everybody has heard of this but me?! I'm not sober yet and don't intend to be.* Skeletal/cadaverous, scant meal consumption = two slices of plastic cheese ornamented with festoons of yellow mustard and two (smallish) bottles of wine. Always been a cheap date. King Richard somewhere pissed at me and I can't take it, being an Aries, spanieled, desperate that you should all love me all the time. God, I didn't mean it, any of it, any of the anorectic, flirtatious, corrigible. When will you get sick of such supplication. *Food is the ingestion of the god* he said didactically but was he aware of garum. There is a muscle called the cremaster, there is an animal called a porpentine. I know too many things. Believe me, what I put in isn't nearly as iniquitous as what I leave out. *I'm not bad I'm just drawn that way.* You've no idea what it's like to sit with it, to crave just a small one, a: slap, sweet, mail, come, rhyme. An addict detonates in pieces on her own. My fingers wake me up still, playing piano. If a man is tired of London, he writes a blog; *art objects*; and now, the shipping report. Would you please just do it, just take me back to Blighty, preserve me, guard the borders, gutter and bank against the night. A mangled shadow rumbled me. Because really, if you really want to know (your considerate stone) he words me too much, and her hair hangs too down, it's too shiny and gathered, I can't stop rhapsodizing or otherwise carrying on, and I would I could be marble-constant, put toast in the rack every morning, love long life better than figs.

House of wounds.

I met a young man with sensible rules: I don't cut myself shaving. I don't fall down, especially when I'm drunk. And I don't throw up. For you and me and our catalogue of hurts: your open-sliced palm, the dented biscuit tin which missed your head, the thick paperback novel which found your fist, the fractures and the lacerations, the insurance claim forms: for people like us. The night we didn't get married, I made a methodical list. I can scream, I can cry; I can rage, I can mourn. I can't get in the car, I can't slap or beat myself, I can't throw anything or cut anything or burn anything. Edicts to guide my infractions, a measuring stick to show the scale of scabs and contusions for the police files. Someone wrote, When I came home as a boy with scraped knees or bruises my mother whipped me. Now I'm grown I never cut myself with tools, and I'm appalled at men who do. I rolled up my trousers to show off my split knee, liquid with yellow lymph; I wanted to repel him; he knelt down to examine it with enthusiasm, *excellent*.

House of XY.

Hyperbolic, hand-wringing, ham-fisted. Do you not like the way I set fire to my hair and then run through your pantry. It's 3:30 am for us both and you're still trying to challenge me; I retrieve my name from your mouth, tongue it over into mine, all in the conditional. The frustration, dear tantalize, lies in having to fit my thoughts like limbs around yours, the tussle, grappling for a better grasp, a preferable angle, sufficient leverage, at first you just seize your lover's shoulders and shift him forcibly under you, it's faster than talking. Don't get nervous, don't start asking for the check and taking your beloved's name in vain, I'll take it outside, go down on it elsewhere, assuredly not in public. Didn't mean to startle you in the stacks, race apprehensive hands over the uneven parquet of spines, you don't know this but I shelf-read by tactility, fingers more than eyes. Having reshelled and made up, I left per a kind of manifesto: I'd just as soon talk. If we can't talk I'll sing. If I'm too bruised and flat to raise the pitch out of my chest I'll write. My old teacher's consolation prize. Didn't know it was still in your power to hurt women, did you; and this neat little trick that lets you get away with it, turn me into a romance novel, drain and gutted, dismantle my sentiment, reduced and parody myself back to me, quoted pastiche, melodrama devoid of solid. So nearly successful at being thus scuttled. Correct silent misspellings. Remind to be mere, be only, Mary over Martha chose the better part; would rather geisha anyway, would rather courtesan. It's like you pulled my soul out and wrung it upended and emptied; it's like my twat's tied to my crooked heart so you can easily yank the string up through my throat; it's like, you don't have to rub my face in it, I'm down with that. A man I don't love wants to take me to the cats and trattoria of Firenze. Haven't said no.

House of yes.

Hecate hollow-eyed in the mirror, half-adulteress half-revenant with a nose piercing and spiky dishevelled hair, wish I had firmer breasts or your parents' phone number, it's hard to be upright when you're lying down. Turning away and touching both wrong for it is like a massive fire, we lay for hours locked and still. To tell and relate the tale in words kills the moon, hollows the stars, light eviscerated by adverbs, familiar curvature of my handwriting pulled back to an old-style clinging, dig my own pit, being romantically destroyed. No longer batter at the separation, attack it with teeth and nails against flesh, say to skin let me in let me in; if I sit motionless not even wrapping myself in sentences, breathe through tangaryo six inches from you without twitching, can I watch it combust to nothingness, will caffeine and nicotine and fast talking blur and dissolve, do I want them to, who's left to people a world without craving, will you vanish with your grime and cheer, your blunt delight in anatomy. You accepting with relief and pleasure my strange offer, when we had become too tired and wronged and I said, if we're talked out and we can't make love, let's sit in silence, because I only was able barely to stand up to it, and not avoid or cover it up in acres of verbiage and cleverness. On a tar rooftop in the middle of the city we sat, you facing inland I the sea, fog arrowed past both sides of my face so swiftly I'm at the ship's prow pitching straight into orange night, your cigarette fumes out, my chamomile chills, we don't even seek each other's eyes, seagulls and car alarms, traffic and whiskers of distant surf, my arms don't believe any of it, either the arrival or the departure, is this what zazen means, to sit inside it, to plunge your hands in, to lie down in its heart and say, yes.

House of zenana.

Under the tongue. Drops of flower essence, wild oat suspended in twenty-proof booze to blame for that unfortunate mishap with the Gewürtztraminer or Riesling. I don't know (if it helps, to answer your question). If it's possible (to marry without turning into a wife). Argued in parking lots and rental cars. Started awake every time you stirred or roll over, or sat up in bed screaming, which in the morning don't remember. [The once your hand, surprisingly strong without its brain attached, seizes my shoulder near the throat—instant I, lizard-lucid, knew: *Don't breathe. Wait. Keep perfectly still.* You muttered, shift and relax your grip and dreamt of other intruders, other invasions to repel, and I could lie awake in the wide-eyed dark in relative peacetime.] So who am I going to be today, depends on who emails. Of all the dryads and hamadryads: blonde cottonwood, brunet pecan, dreadlocked piñon, ironed ponderosa, frizzy juniper. From carpal pain I've craved severance and style myself Lavinia, sport twigs for digits. Gathering the girls inside one high-gloss concert grand, collecting teardrops and orgasms into pixels or ligatures, I contain metonymies, polyphonies. On silken and beaded pillows, content in her soft hours. To watch the epiphenomena of their speakeasy through slitted purpled eyelids.

House of zenith.

This is not forgetting, I am not already losing it after days I can count in single digits, not sliding back into complacency, bed death on an unassuming mortal scale, husk sheathing my recently thinned skin, barnacles aren't adhering insidiously, wake me up, put the shards back, replace the shrapnel, the subcutaneous satanic filings that kept me allured toward some elsewhere lodestone, kept me feeling its substance by the heft of the pull, acute and shooting, tug against restraint, a hook in a duct, keep me hermetic, having returned to cloister and cerements never to wed again, not already being sucked inexorably back, not using the word *if*, not obliterating one night of being sharply reprimanded for infractions by means of a swift bite to the neck (that left me chastened and laughing and shuddering all at once), not squinting from lust's vertical, not tending to sobriety, not resuming daily stinting stuntedness, not shutting down my head, my heart not sealing back up, I'm staying awake if I have to set fire to myself, if I have to take everything I own and tear it up and give it away and put it in a cave and brick it over, I'm not stopping once I've started, I'm not getting in the cart, I'm not going back in the box, if I have to scream it until I'm hoarse and friendless and they cut off the electricity, they can take everyone away but not my egress, don't leave me here with no air shaft through which to crawl back out again, don't delete my singular remaining auspice, my embouchement, no.

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