

i

---

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

a man  
—my father—  
stands

where he  
should not  
be in

the door  
—a sheath  
—a sheet

covering

~

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

he  
—coming—  
in the front

door

not locked  
not safe  
not sane

—memory  
exhumed

~

i wake

the night

screaming

in this house:

a child

—myself—

beside me

*get the poker*

i say

*from the fire*

*go!*

(because i

know because

i know)

~

but she

—an aqualung

unplugged—

does not go

~

i wake

the night

screaming

in this house:

my mother

—a knife

on the stand—

and me

ten pages from *for tea with dolls*

in the bed  
by the wall

—a number  
i should call

i have mown  
this lawn

& set sprinklers  
out—sentinels

stepping off  
each inch

this staccato stich  
—banal bliss

~

sun slants across  
this clean cut

& satisfied  
i sit—cold

concrete blessing

my skin

~

in the kitchen  
—my mother

singing—

though hers  
is not

a fresh wound

the hen  
she fries

still bleeds

~

at the table:

sweet tea  
white bread

crisp    silence

~

is this  
the night

my lungs  
unplugged

her body    hurled  
her head

—a thud

~

& i    awake  
      a witness

unwilling

iii

---

in the kitchen  
by the door

to the den  
blue cabinets

where you keep  
whiskey

—decantered  
in cut crystal

its lid—a ball  
round & cool

in my small hand

~

before you  
come in

my mother  
and i

sometimes singing  
sometimes silence

~

today she is tired  
so i sit having tea

with dolls

(white  
lace—worn

with time

tiny pearls  
holding

fragile folds)

~

the back door  
sucks open

*what will it be  
this time*

~

blue cabinets  
by the door

to the den

—reach in  
swig the brew

take the sip  
that changes

you

november comes

a flush  
of cadmium &

sky

this month  
—you said

i do

the two of you  
certain of love

~

november comes

this sun  
—a low southern

slant  
warming age

spotted skin

& i  
am captive

of this  
stiletto:

the night  
you slammed  
her head

(it was  
something  
she said)

and would not  
stop the cabinets  
—clapboard—

slapped blue

dark brown hair  
—a wad  
in your hand

~

november comes

this scene  
—indelible:

a child's chair  
(for tea with dolls)

split in half  
flat

& i'm  
at your feet

on my knees

*please please*  
*daddy please*

you sit—slumped  
elbows at right  
angles your thick hands  
in folds across your broad chest

sock-hatted  
head nodding

these days you sleep  
in this chair (the nights—  
too long)

*last night i paced  
the floor all night*

you say  
*all night*  
you say

again

as if my ears  
could ease

your pain  
i lean closer

*i'm sorry* i whisper

weak words that break  
in my mouth (*i can't help you  
i wish i could*)

*you don't give a shit about me*  
you say

and though i do i tell you i do  
*i do daddy i love you*

you've snapped

& there is no  
going back