Beyond This Point Are Monsters

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BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS

A Dissertation Presented to
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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Advisor: Selah Saterstrom
ABSTRACT

Beyond This Point Are Monsters is a creative work which establishes a fluid, unstable space between the mediated image and the written word. It addresses issues of repetition and difference in the TV melodrama and the inscribed surface of the house in the Gothic novel, performing the romantic and sensational tropes of the Gothic formula in order to subvert them.

The project investigates and inhabits the soap opera Dark Shadows which aired daily on ABC from 1966 to 1971, and examines the manner in which the show defies its own genre conventions. I chose Dark Shadows as the foundational source for my text because it is a program which incessantly crosses its own boundaries. Conventionally, soap opera is a form of fictional realism, but the digressive concerns of Dark Shadows stray far from the everyday, while its necessarily fast production pace lacerates the program with constant failure and mistakes. Dark Shadows is flawed, but in a way which troubles the rules of genre and the viewer’s relationship to the screen. My investigation is manifested in the form of fictional writings and photographs which borrow the conceptual metaphors and visual gestures of the show. Each “episode” of Beyond This Point Are Monsters mirrors a plot that is anterior to the show’s own official plot, leaking language and images that are withheld and effaced in the original.

This dissertation is accompanied by an extended, critical preface which addresses the creative work’s theoretical underpinnings, engaging in close readings of modern and postmodern Gothic texts—literary, televisual, and filmic—in an attempt to open a space for renewed feminist analysis and appropriation in which female characters are positioned as embodiments and constructions of the textual process.
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A door way. What is a door way. A door way is a photograph. A photograph is a sight. And a sight is always a sight of something.

GERTRUDE STEIN
the scene is prepared. the crescent moon stakes a nest of stars in the sky, tossing a soft, mysterious shadow over the house, which sleeps, alive with dread.

nowhere does the moonlight fall softer than into the wood paneled drawing room where the women often gather; into no bodies does its influence sink more deeply than those of darling and duchess, who stand at the storm window side by side. they do not speak; perhaps they cannot, for the only sounds which break the hour, the waves bellowing on the sand, the wind tampering with the trees, are alike unheeded by them.

there is a striking contrast between the pair, as their forms are clearly revealed by the light against a backdrop of unopened rooms and sinister staircases.
**EPISODE ONE / The After House**

1.1
darling's arrival has been traumatic.

there's nothing to indicate darling knows what is happening. she wasn't ashamed to be early, but she can't really tell the difference, either. she knows she's not supposed to talk about what she'd heard. she'd been in the dark, waiting, and no one had bothered to come find her. after hours, when there wasn't patience in her anymore, she started up the hill. they'd called it a pleasurable state of passivity and expectation but darling can't be forced back to the city.

Television has brought her here, raging with menace. her debut; a name, never mentioned.
you are so tall, duchess says. duchess takes in darling, takes her into the drawing room, safe, and
certain, warm and lit with mellow light. a girl running in the woods, framed by plaster leafed in
gold. duchess takes darling and withholds her. from the window their interactions are benign. the
house revolves around them, repeatedly enclosing, duchess and darling close enough to touch.
duchess lifts her hand as if to caress darling's face and the telephone rings. duchess is shocked,
but quickly recovers, smoothing her hand over the glacier of her white hair. in the moonlight, the
sweat layered over her forehead and cheeks is apparent.

what difference does it make where you were while you waited? duchess says. you're here now. around
them, portraits witness everything: darling's neat, straight dress hanging off her thin shoulders,
dropping off the edge of her knees; the slight untidiness of the house makes architecture seem
real. a letter left on the dresser, the key in her pocket. the harmless key, roaring in her pocket.
she wants to talk about it tomorrow. darling can wait till morning, she'll leave the key glittering
on the dresser with her gloves.

duchess has never done this before. this is a real thing that's happened that she can respond to,
while continuing to say her lines. it is like dropping the keys. that has nothing - that has nothing,
nothing to do with this, darling says. this and that? duchess says. is that all you have? darling says. that
i'm—well, maybe i am.

1.2

darling has prepared herself. i've prepared her myself. darling is clutching onto a shoelace like it
will take her somewhere. the shoelace knotted to a ball chain dangling from a switch; an exposed
light bulb popped, sparkling. she's trying; she looks as if she's trying, darling might knock
something over but she's trying and she's shifted light from dark: frosted glass makes all the
difference. darling wonders what's so sacred about the basement. i do what i can; wherever i can.
darling minds her own meter. i know it is here somewhere. the blunders i make can't be had back. darling hits the fuse and slips. she's stayed down here ever since. her original error has been preserved and alters everything that happens. she picks up the telephone and cites a gracious air. i'm often prevented from realizing the moment by an absence of light. i've assumed failure as a method. on-air she can't be stopped. everything darling does is inevitable and must be exhausted. the telephone has no service but she completes the act of dialing. by this point it is too late to stop her. she goes between the set and the dressing room, lingering as a threat, the cord connecting her to a phantom's vast division; a fragile and tenuous loop. she looks as if she's really having fun, now that she can talk; all girls love to talk. she'll ask you to accept her call--she has a lot to talk about. she needs to talk the most, now that she's traded in her pigtails for lipstick.

duchess has ten words and an appetite forged by living in a lonely way through long years. the house hustling her, or the scenery. i haven't mentioned a name but i'll find one before the dial tone. i'm not sure i should even be saying this. i came here to play patty-cake with a woman.

darling is anxious; she releases the bulk of the telephone onto a stack of yesterday's news. a black disturbance flutters over the watch at her wrist, her shrewd wrist. a black error broadcast must be read. i look closely to see what has changed. standing at the window, holding the curtain aside as i would lift my skirt, waiting for the spectre of white winged ships rolling towards the front door. a hundred feet from here and darling forcibly removed from the window. everything darling has or might have is resting in the moist, dank basement. she has ten cardboard boxes and no idea who brought her here. i'm always wearing the same dress. i'm afraid i haven't come from anywhere; the place i left submerged by storm, a crumpled tissue soaked by fluid in the street. a protoplasm or a hand knitted through her dark, plain hair. the sea stops where the house begins. the house starts up and darling welcomes home.

now that she can't leave darling looks for a letter. it is communication she is after. she's been
foreclosed. darling has been recommended and she demands to know why. in the absence of a letter she looks for too intensely she demands the answer she has been asking for. she has regular hours, a house that is wrong, the burden to recognize faults and no ability to do anything. she can do nothing. she can wait here. i am obliged while the very means to do so are withheld from me. i never should have brought myself here. i call myself an idiot. i recognize things here which i can't call out or name. what frightens darling is upstairs and down. what holds her is the house and she makes it very difficult. she slips. the lights go out, she shifts her weight. the house leans into her, moves into her. darling gets prettier every moment. darling has a habit of looking at the door. darling will be back next week. darling, take one.

1.3

duchess is not afraid of video disturbances. she inhales the dusty, cloying smell of a closed house, licks condensation from the window pane. she is often looking out at something, her face peering between door and jamb; a wind comes and she uses her whole body to hold the door in its frame, set the lock in place. i've no intention of messing up my hair. waves break on scattered rocks like blood on broken teeth. she is still wearing the same dress. she has not changed. real time has passed but at the house on the hill it is still today.

there's no reason she should be afraid. darling's wholesome, sitting with her ankles crossed, drinking ginger ale in a cocktail glass, clutching her pocket book. she's not often roaming the beach looking for empty bottles. all her sailboats are anchored to the paneled oak wall. the danger of one drink and she's pacing across the oriental rug, wearing down a pattern of diamonds and arteries. tipping over the teacup to access the last remaining drops. a swift and graceful movement of her mouth, moist and splayed, her tongue exploring, an echo, a grotesque reproduction of other kisses.
duchess is adjusting her body against the door when the bell rings. she will say she is not at home. she is not around when she is wanted. her tongue nimbly seeking out the corner of her mouth, a paraphrase for not at home, the dry socket of her jaw. a bouquet of oyster pearls pinned to her breast. the door stops knocking and she forgets what it sounds like. the house unpeopled but for the duchess. the ghosts have all gone.

darling stands above the cliffs with the wind lifting her hair. she makes a sight. she could be quickly spoiled but she stands sutured to the pine trees, her camel-colored trench coat belted tightly at the waist. she makes a figure. she says, *i made a mistake*, and the music soars on the word mistake, receding into the waves. a daughter on duty, strutting over the sea.

darling changes her dress for the first time.

1.4

*oh darling.*

a car crashing through girls gathered closely, like trees. it might have been an accident but darling’s convinced it’s been done deliberately. someone tampering with machinery, carcasses and wrecks. darling pauses in the hallway to listen at the door.

duchess decided to let it happen. she could have stopped it but she chose not to. duchess never leaves the house, not even for strawberries or steaks. she simply refuses to go. the receiver of her telephone filthy with fingerprints, unquiet eyes. she may have been careless and pulled the cord from the socket; she may have been beyond. wild waves brake against the twilight. she talked too much; no dial tone, no possibility of repair.

darling’s across the room in no time, unbidden. she raises her voice, rewinds, and stands in front of the grandfather clock, looking up devotedly. duchess has been waiting. duchess lets her face
relax into forthright disapproval. no one has called. what do you expect to see? darling says, smoothing down the spotlight field of her hair, parted neatly at the center like a leaf. the coat rack lifts its arms for an embrace but her raincoat’s in the closet. a sudden step on the stairs startles them.

she’ll never change her dress. she knows when to take it off. what is this all about? what is happening here? duchess says. darling lifts the edge of the bandage on her forehead and pulls. she pulls out a nice save. one hundred miles! duchess says. oh, it felt like one hundred miles, darling says. it was one hundred feet from the house. ten feet from the sea, duchess says. all you can do is roll down the hill.

there may be direct evidence that she couldn’t make the last curve. it would look like the wild shadow of a toy horse drifting along the wood paneled wall. duchess would have hated her had she known the withered pines and wild stars, the phrase that found its way into her mouth. the awful phrase, a wolf finding refuge.

i’m not dressed, darling says. she’s always emerging from behind the davenport, or crawling out from underneath the credenza. i don’t want to see her getting all weird, peering in keyholes. maybe she’s not sorry at all. she was holding a wrench in her hand. she was speaking of the direction of the sound. she’d better get dressed.

duchess adjusts the focus, pulls back her sleeve to check the time, pushes a matchbox car across the faded carpet with her toe. her concern is only for herself, the unspeakable sight of blood crusted around her nostrils. she can feel the impulse but she won’t leave, won’t go where her eye can’t follow. her first impulse is to displace the sound: the weather’s pastime, rifling bird nests from the trees. she’s been like this for awhile.

duchess said i’d ruin everything but that was just a lie.
1.5

the way darling can come to a conclusion is to avoid saying it at first. and then, to avoid any misunderstanding. and finally the answer will not satisfy her. she’s waited too long.

she set out to describe the sea spreading below the house, loathsome and infinite. she’s been carrying those qualities around with her. darling lifts her skirt to have something to do. she slows down and lifts her arms. her white arms lifted over her streaming hair; her hair falling forward over her face. properly undressed and attempting to pull her nightgown over her head. dropping her hands, the nightgown drifting over her, the peignoir belted at the waist. she goes through the door and enters the same room each time.

innumerable clusters of light on the sea. dim at first, then radiant. duchess could float like a lobster boat if the mechanics of the universe let her out the front door. if she could get beyond her overwhelming nausea, the forest blooming out of control. she makes the dangerous motion of lingering by the window, observing the slow descent of luminous blue. stars, like insect silhouettes cut from black cardboard, refusing to emerge. duchess standing at the window, tearing at her dress, the cloth’s odd resistance to her body. ghost light dancing on the glassy surface of the sea. the house can’t stop her from breaking a pane with her elbow.

darling’s tongue like a slug emerging from her mouth, gliding across her pale lips. she lifts her eyes and drops them: nobody blames her. duchess pulling darling’s tongue until it gives and unravels onto the floor, a slop of tentacle and her mouth a tureen of blood. that would be mean. duchess cannot go overboard, cannot think of darling without becoming nauseated.

duchess doesn’t want me near you! goose bumps raising on her arms and legs, a constellated wilderness of flesh. she doesn’t smell of lavender or cake. what girl is this? where is her dress?
duchess says. she makes it clear: darling must have mistaken the darkness, the strange voice that said *follow, follow*.

darling would say a name. she made the name her obsession and she is here, now, saying a name i haven't heard before. she's been making trouble, asking about the name. writing the name on her hand and making it speak by moving her fingers. darling divides the letters and leaves the remainder behind. a name milder, softer, neater. darling opens her mouth again and cries.

she couldn't believe it wasn't only the wind that reformed her dress. the horrible form of a matron in disarray, duchess plucking cat hair from her skirt, shaking dust from her limbs and hair. there she stands, urging little clouds into her handbag, exhaling violets and broken hearts. she troubles herself to claim possession; she calls it borrowing. darling doesn't understand why.
the noise of girls rising; two girls, one dark and one fair. they stand before their implements—a percolator, and a toaster with two slots. each stares despondently into her machine, as if a look carries a charge of electricity. already in their false eyelashes, difficult to believe.

darling’s beginning to hate this place. getting up early and *i don’t want this tea*. she ties a ribbon around the weight of her hair and makes a wish. darling goes over the details. if she can recite each step from memory, she might discover a blueprint that means nothing. she could be wrong.

*this has nothing to do with that*, duchess says. i thought darling was finished with that. *if she is guilty*, duchess says, *then so am i*. if darling could make a map duchess could get over it; she would say
the name, every part of the name, and brush the house with light like dust. she lies to protect herself. about to say what she has not said, the dark aura of the percolator interrupts her. it is enough to make her change her mind. she is surprised by her own inability and the soundtrack is also struck dumb. easy to make the connections, but she leaves the last hole unbuttoned.

darling waits at her mark then moves across the room, folding her hair behind her. the evidence is compelling; the surface, calm and serene. the waves hold back, attempt to swallow themselves. she’s already taken the form she wants, lent her ear to the keyhole. she has to know. darling can’t help but shudder, thinking of investing the stone in her robe’s pocket. she wants a threat, but everyone is nice to her. she expects she can’t stay here.

darling can’t touch a wrench wrapped in a thin handkerchief. if she had, she may have been quite ordinary. otherwise, her bedroom occupied by robot dolls, board games and embroidery hoops. connections between gadgets and glamour that weren’t there before. she’d certainly never lie. she didn’t do what duchess suspects her of, but she did do something. difficult to sort this from that, an essential part of the engine closed in her hand.

the only item out of place is darling’s nonsense. she knows she won’t be believed so she takes her accusations apart, makes new freaks.

a fly revolves around the beehive of duchess’ hair, honoring her. why do you say it is a story, duchess says, as if it is not the truth? duchess does not intend to wait for an answer, but she cannot forget the creaking hinge on the door at the end of the hallway, the shadows caught by ordinary objects. she cannot forget her broom. she cannot forget her body for one moment; her back to the door, her hand closed around the knob. how could you know? darling says. she had locked the drawer and then secreted the key inside her bra. the key slides down duchess’ body
and drops out of her kick-pleat skirt, striking the floor next to her heels. she has to stop and pick it up, the way girls save rocks. the keys are all the same, duchess says. no one can claim originality, but there are locked rooms neither knows about.

2.2

darling could be coveted in velveteen. her eyebrows arrive in order between her hairline and her cold, colorless eyes.

she leaves a stack of books where someone might trip over them. the books proceed vertically in terms of weight. over them darling sets her glass tumbler. the danger is half-calculated, half-circumstantial; what’s left is all she has.

darling’s decided to take a look around. she’s a way of moving through settled furniture that has nothing to do with translation. sometimes the room alters itself to accommodate her; the house disguised by the beauty of where the ceiling meets the wall. another kind of quickness strikes her impulse, makes her yield; she feels the clock and is compelled to turn.

a black fingerprint on the back of her hand. the placidity of her mouth holding these materials. duchess arrives at the foot of the stairs and shouts. her bellow is part bird.

the smallest sound she makes strays. nothing but the echo, the whine.

darling can’t imagine herself in any room with a window or a mirror. without either, she wouldn’t want for a thing, for my—for her. darling is always talking about duchess. always parting her hair at the side and shutting the two sides over her face—the same way she closes the curtains to keep out the thunder that’s chased her home.

i asked you now please go now please, duchess says. duchess accidentally opened a book and some
words dropped down. darling is always talking about duchess. duchess has to keep the curtains closed with clothespins, shadows rising on the fabric as if onscreen. you wouldn’t deliberately, duchess says, knitting her fingers through darling’s hair and pulling. the line is dead. the dress is kept from death and lightening is peeling back the sky. darling belongs to the house and i want to believe i will. the fire rattles a few last sparks and darling drops onto a footstool, arms folded on her knobby knees, elbows thrust. she’d rather be wandering the house carrying a candlestick but she can’t leave yet. duchess struggles for her line, go now please. darling says, when i’ve lost my place it’s difficult to find it again. it’s better to be home.

go now please go, duchess says. i think i left something out. i think i left something there. she will never know the monsters she has made; a lost kitten, drenched. take it apart and put it back together, duchess says. her dress inhales the hallway, spits out a few nails, some bolts and a harmonica. it was her not me, darling says.

duchess loves what submits to her, the quick and delicate feeling of diminishing, the pleasure beyond intimacy too strong.

2.3

an object captured by her palm, a prison for the miniature. it could be an artifact, a loose screw or something like an insect, a bougainvillea bud’s petals and stamen imitating thorax, wings. where did you get that? duchess says. no matter, says darling, moving her hand behind her back. i’d never have found it if it hadn’t been for the cat.

darling has a habit of lying. her behavior disfigured by a tempest, her dress puffing up around her. the insurance of her dress’ disfigurement of her body, allowing her to move her hand behind her back as a form of resistance past ridiculousness; a gesture so noticeable so as to be quite normal.

the room closes over darling like a hand: here’s the steeple.
she folds her coat over her arm and slips the object into the pocket. This is how a transfer is made; she couldn’t have done it alone.

when darling's lost her place it’s difficult to find her way back. Every lamp lit makes it better to be home, undeterred by mellow moonlight. She wanders the perimeters of the property, taking apart each step and putting it back together again. By the sea a long arm reaches and swipes the sand clean. She has to do the whole thing over and over again.

i didn’t have anything else to do, darling says. I wasn’t sure what to do next. She's been caught standing outside the light, making movements the scenery wasn’t prepared for: the ocean roars and can’t quite stop. It isn’t easy to be thought of as a liar, duchess often demanding some form of explanation. Darling isn’t sure what brings in the tide, but when she left her room, duchess was at the window, calling.

i wish she'd come back, duchess says. Darling will be coming back, the wind conveniently at the back of her neck, raising her hair like a gorgon’s. With a black rotary phone rankling every room darling isn’t easy to catch, but she can be heard. The wail of machinery, requiring an answer. A thousand ghosts crowd in duchess’ throat and wither. No fresh flowers today.

i ought to be a little more wicked, less discrete. Darling hangs her coat in the closet where it can’t do any more damage. She pushes the door in until she hears it snap and then draws gently away.

2.4

She looks each time and nothing has changed. It’s unclear if i am looking for the first time or merely remembering, calling to vision these armchairs decked with antimacassars, these gilt edge frames, this sour clock. Darling has a sense of disorientation and familiarity every time she enters a room, every time she begins at once. She fixes her glance on the fireplace mantle as a way of
marking the past. there is nothing there to dissuade her, nothing to call her to regret, and nothing
to help.

*how could you have done this?* duchess says. what she needs is an implement. *it would have been
very easy if i had done that,* darling says, *but i didn’t do anything.* why ask me. should i stand in the
window this time, will it make a difference? will the air rush in and smother me like a quilt? i’m
always being accused, asked to provide a symptom. duchess cannot cough, cannot disturb these
phantoms. *it does not matter,* duchess says. *there is not a reason to tell anyone anything,* is there.

duchess will not admit it but every refusal to take a subject and address it implicates her. makes
her a liar; preventing evacuation of the house. if it were on fire, she would echo and light.
fashioning darling a mistaken girl, making mistakes: always choosing the wrong door. choosing a
door is too easy a solution. choosing a door is certainly not a way out.

shadows rooted in the paneled walls roll like red carpets; duchess paces, a cluster of bright
windowpanes fracturing her figure. she shudders at the intrusion of light, an incantation that
wrings daggers from innocent shapes.

the house for her is the wrong place to be looking. *there’s nothing here,* duchess says. darling
hasn’t tried very hard, only slung fistfuls of cream into fine china, spilt sugar into wastelands of
lace doilies. swallowed too soon, the whole ocean settling in her knees, keeling her. darling flops
back into the davenport, rolling the cameo pendant around her neck along its delicate chain. she
wouldn’t speak except of pleasantry and says, *why don’t i make us some tea?* a difficulty of thirst
she can make her own: the whistle of the kettle doesn’t change like weather.

what happened up on the hill, the first time, what has happened, the last time. duchess ought to
sit down, make a budget. everything can be explained or described as blame or failure. duchess
provides the scenery. darling straddles the background as an outrageous thief, pushing and pulling
with her eyes: a close-up of darling’s face reveals a short distance, a devil that’s traveled farther than she’s noticed. darling came to duchess first, her costume half-dismantled, wig topsy-turvy, make-up out of line. a glamorous impersonation of an ordinary girl, quiet normal and unaccustomed to a percolating atmosphere of horror.

2.5

duchess holds the front door closed, insulted by the wind, her appetite for ironed pleats ruined. a shape all rumpled, unlike herself, demands admission.

darling can’t stop, rises like a shadow between duchess and the house. even now on her way home from the shore, crimson clouds wailing in her eyes. darling has not been left out; she is looking forward and beyond. darling can admit an inquiry and only wants to be allowed. she only wants to know why. why me, in particular. she has something duchess can consider and no way to give it to her: she can stop off, make a speech, find a way to say nothing duchess does not already know. darling is not sure what she thinks of patience, her secret slights and wants. darling can’t stop and she’s in a hurry to get things done.

it is only the appearance of difference, a method of containment, thrown on with all possible haste. darling has her hair unbound, threaded with fresh leaves. someone knows what darling has been up to, all the damage and dessert, her constant mewling at prisoned flames, the exhale of her gentle breath causing shimmering light to vault, an undeserving blush. darling cries kiss me and inflates her cheeks. duchess’s delight flies, and her stocking crumples about her ankle like an earthworm cauterized by sunlight.
no sound in the house but hollow, smoothed over; an orphan emptiness. why a woman would start no closer than where she began? a tangle of meaning from which darling flees, amazed.
darling turns down the wrong hallway in a misled attempt to divert the camera from how little she knows, all she has to consider; her forgotten queues. every motion she makes produces a party: balloons, birthday cakes and novelties start to appear, favors gathering slowly and inconsumably; broken beauty everywhere. a chill arrives through the image of a landscape she catches out a passing window. i can’t say a word, not a syllable. darling lies flat on her bed with her arms spread out; if only she could locate a foundling home for all these odds and ends, for this and that. she’d have an easier time finding what she’s looking for.

at least she can blame the mess on darling. darling has made a magnificent mass, unable to refuse old clothes, broken zippers and misplaced buttons.

how did i start and why? darling’d left her shears in the parlour, caught between desire and shame. she could just as easily used her teeth. duchess had wanted to know why but darling knew she would go to the room she needed to go to. rooms call out in that way; they make the shape that is needed, and receive. why make such a big deal about trampling the garden, the glimmering outline of a name traced in wet soil, floating and unable to sink in. darling had held out her hands with the fingers curled into the palms and asked duchess to choose.

duchess had spoken of daggers, but used none.

darling skips over a door and tries the knob, finding it locked. unvarying days of locked doors and drawers and cabinets milk the terror out of uninhabited rooms. darling refers to herself, her hands clasped. she’s not taking any devotions, right or left. darling presses her folded hands into her waist to still them, looks up directly, backs out the long hallway. everything is always going
wrong.

darling calls a break, a place to hang her offering.

the pale ocean throws down its delight, vulnerable to nothing. so far.
of lace. a watch locks her wrist to the moment, lofting text, the quickly vanishing halo of smoke wallowing from her cigarette. an overpowering scent that sinks into the walls, naming her.

darling curls on the last step, cradling the phone to her ear, a sea shell. the sea is too close to be sure. she wants to know what is meant by a low tide, a sudden suffusion of slime. the telephone's not in a mood to tell her. she mashes the headset into the receiver and splits open the door to the drawing room, drawing in her breath. girls going against each other use the glance as a wound and the gaze as a signal to start something. i said alright, darling says. duchess's face is blown open and darling speaks for a mouth that won't move. everything i say is. will be… darling says. i've to go out.

the best thing is black, duchess says, lifting her head. she has been waiting for darling to leave. duchess has a million cures; she cannot wait to see darling in a black dress, a little black dress. duchess retreats to her writing desk and writes the word black to save darling the trouble. both beauty and intimacy are difficult to achieve.

now i intend to go, darling says.

darling is not sure what to do. she is sure to knock. knock first and then wait. a willing and quiet yielding, cut with electrical rage. if i am called in, i can say she had to get away. i can go out. i can go out so that i can continue, although it is very uncomfortable. darling opens the door to the drawing room and says, i'm going out. duchess turns to look at her. darling isn't quite real yet. don't cry anymore, duchess says, and kisses darling's cheek.

duchess will give what she can. she has not much that has not already been collected. duchess
withdraws a letter from her writing desk and writes the word black on it and sets it roasting on the fire.

darling turns back her head as she runs down towards the beach. scrub roses break against her and bloody her knees as she moves towards the sand. she arrives worn and aching, lips lifting over her teeth as she draws breath, her heart moving on its own, her dress moving on its own, her dress changing. she thought she might have been home but now she isn’t sure; a girl left among ghosts. the sea makes itself her mistress, withholding distance, images returning and withdrawing before she can pass or transform them. darling wants to call out to the last ship *return to me* but a payment must be made. she makes a stagnant wail—she’s been fooled, or foolish. how can she stand against the waves, unable to find her white horse?

darling can come back. darling can pull open. she is full grown, grappling with what is planned and what is accident. *darling, go back*, duchess says. darling’s swollen, rose flushed face peels off the horizon, lands and spits, *i don’t want your blood*. but i can’t leave without anything at all; i need to see what is my own to claim. a harvest of light and salt, tended very carefully. to have been welcomed here is darling’s only real mistake.

duchess can see that something is wrong. darling’s pounding on the door and duchess cannot imagine what for. everything she does she will do slowly, preceding each shadow. darling takes hold of duchess’ elbow and leads her up the stairs, in a hurry to move to a different room. in the drawing room the furniture is switched around. *there is no way off this cliff*, darling says. duchess listens from behind the wall, rubbing the nacre of a pearl against her teeth. *you must listen*, duchess says to darling, *and you will know.*
days have passed. lifting herself on her toes darling marks a disturbance, burning a hole on her bedspread. afraid she’ll be caught, she gathers all the water sunk into her body and spits upon the velvet coverlet. something stops and darling decides she won’t apologize. she won’t say one word.

duchess has a tendency to deny, collapsing the furniture in her house into small portions. her enraptured, glowing pleasure persists, split beyond any seam; her complacency made possible by the beast’s feeble manipulations. she has lingered, caught by longing too long over a highboy or an ottoman. time spent between wet, wasted afternoons polishing and interrogating the looking-glass. an intensity and aberrant quality in her progress, working against the pull of disorder, attempting to inhibit and control the house’s difficult plotting, her gestures marked by familiarity, stranded by disgust; her dress shuddering with insects and dust. given something else to do, she would do what she is supposed to be doing, she would go over the house. she would rehearse to fit into the scenery: elaborate candelabras, tchotchkes, houseplants, matching china. as well a few things she knows shouldn’t be in the house: this and that.

duchess knows the way with eyes closed. she needs to get to the coat closet but it seems to have moved since she last singled it out. duchess doesn’t want to know why but she can’t make herself stop looking. the focal point of the wall is where the closet used to be. duchess runs her hands over this impossible place and frowns. she has never been unreasonable but the expanse of wall emphasizes a loss. it is easier for me to see by feeling--the house can be deceptive and misleading, move without me. what duchess values is order and demand. she is concerned about fixing her place, not actually looking explicitly. she ought to say, hello, and keep going.

darling is left behind and not included. perpetually lost, but at least she has the desire to actively
look, the ability to employ her eye. darling can overhear without the aid of machinery. where has she gotten to. that undesirable fat yellow, subtle summer dainty. on the other hand, darkness:

handsome and civilized. darling corrects herself, completely out from under spreading light. dark reaches a glimmer in the sky and extinguishes it. goodbye, darling says. she captured the word she wanted--darling could be anything or beautiful. unable or willing. she might even cheat a little.

darling will be played by a girl who’s forgotten how small she really is. she is neatly arrayed, and her body has been replaced by a smaller, less ornamentally disfigured body: not as lopsided and irregular as before. her voice has altered and her method and manners are skewed. darling is disinterested in whatever is required of her.

duchess would rather sit in the window and watch the sea all day. the accident has been accounted for and covered up and she’s gunning for a gull to rupture the sky. truth is something darling can trouble; she has a way of wondering, fiercely flipping pages until they’re torn apart. she has to grab at anything. leaping up the stairs two by two darling says you’ll be sorry. duchess hasn’t much to say but she will be sorry; i will be sorry; i am sorry. the house holds.

3.3

darling strolls around the room until it’s impossible to continue. she moves forward to pull aside the drapery, the sea greeting her sooner then she expected: wild ridges carelessly heaving against the shore. it isn’t easy, duchess says. you know i’m afraid for you, not of you.

the house isn’t what darling imagined it to be. too many shadows shake and collapse over her, obliterating her sight. i want you to stay, duchess says, reaching out and pushing a lock of hair behind darling’s ear, almost a caress, a keepsake. i want you to chose to stay. it’s the house that needs me. duchess needs to be convincing. duchess says a name and i can’t hear you, darling says. duchess can’t recognize the voice. hello hello? duchess says. please keep trying. duchess said a name
but she had never said anything about the accident. darling creeps along the wall like a mouse slithering towards some crumb. she mentioned my name, my name perfectly clear. i'm free to leave, darling says. duchess can handle darling, darling scamming a piece of cake from the pantry and sorry for it, her lips laced with strawberry frosting. remember what i said, duchess says, cake crumbs floundering on darling's pinafore. throw her out, kiss her, i don't care.

darling must cooperate, listen and do as she is told. she can do things and undo what she has done; forget the clutter of abandoned card games, model horses, train sets, gum wrappers and filthy tea cups. darling'll stay where she belongs and do what she's supposed to do. she came in the middle and that's the trouble. the lights all left on but one, switches set, fuses ready to blow, clouds rising close and unattainable. what have i done but what i have been asked to do? i haven't done otherwise. mercy! turn that off, duchess had said.

how long has she been standing here, poised on the threshold. time is quite clear, quite clear enough. darling's nightgown hits the floor and time is told by a change of fabric. darling wears her worry like it's something she's been instructed to do. i'll keep asking until i can see for myself. i've seen strange things.

you did hear her, didn't you? darling says. duchess will have to say yes, unable to say which ghost made the threat. such girls have little to do but play dress up and fasten on evening gowns with wooden clothes pins. the helpless eyes of helpless daughters cold blooded, smooth-faced and placid. darling knows the alphabet and yet to her words are still a problem.

3.4

duchess will take care of darling and the house as well. if she listens carefully she can hear a bright revision of sunlight lifting out of the waves, the wary footsteps of darling turning and turning through passageways, thwarted by each joint rising from the foundations. why is she here.
find her here. found darling here, fitting herself in, sifting dark from light. no longer necessary to
look for darling; darling casting her glance, turning to the sea for comfort. where is this anyway?
what am i doing here? says darling, a cry wrenched from her depth.

duchess wouldn’t dare react like that; she’s not often running out of lipstick, pressing her lips
tightly, why should duchess show how much she doesn’t know.

duchess can take care of careless girls whose chose to stay, who chose to go wherever. stepping
from her bedclothes to domestic quarrels rising from the sea. hit exceedingly hard by a change in
circumstance; a sudden storm, romances abandoned here and there like nothing matters. a
boundless girth of forest holding her in check: a voice in all the wind reminds her of her hour,
the rashly forgotten name. darling trampling the shore, thinking of her own strength,
unconsciously leaning towards the house’s warm embrace. in darling there is a likeness not quite
the same.

the distraction of her hair and then i can’t go on. the names of all the witnesses, darling’s dress
offered in exchange. a dress she can’t return. she follows you everywhere. a doubled sweetness
now that the original is dust. the seal of sunlight on the window beacons long lost ships. a
portion of her uncertainty extended to the sea; she makes an ominous, wild and desperate
sound; a wretch in her belly railing against the smooth tongue of sand spread below the house. a
disconnection between thought and action: darling gets caught in explanations and forgets the
strange convulsions of the night, shipwrecks showered on the shore, thankless shadows looming
in the forest.

duchess writes the word black, an involuntary release, black, black, the dark spot in the center of
her eye, rising to the level of heat, disgorging every memory beyond the happenings of the house.
fluttering her eyelashes as a deliberately abortive gesture, reminded that she’s nearly caught.
what she has to say won’t save her: the door will close, shut something out.

a scar on darling’s forehead like a house centipede or a an extra lash. she’d gone and gotten herself pretty for nothing, stuck her sweater with a pin and pouted. her face cleansed and plucked, back straight as a corn stalk, her hands neatly propped on her knees like teacups. she’ll do whatever she can to stop the threat of light. she’s something to tell and a name to mention. darling says what she has to and stops. she wants to be both near and hot.

crestless waves fold into themselves, a restless movement struggling within the house. darling eavesdrops on everything, observing duchess make her futile gesture towards water: crying and calling, a wail draining away. duchess had not time to comb her hair. darling looks often, keeps track and says nothing; she makes no effort that isn’t easy. if darling hadn’t been looking nothing would have been there for her to see. to close her eyes and do the whole thing over would bring her to despair.

i don’t want you to see, duchess says. yes ma’am, darling says; she certainly will try not to look. she’s often had the privilege of looking and denied herself the pleasure. a stubborn girl like darling can’t be stopped from looking, from parting her fingers. duchess isn’t certain whether it matters if darling really sees or not, but she can’t have anyone going around taking pictures of everything in the house. duchess stands between darling and a sentence, tightly holding her fervor back.

darling isn’t sure whether she’s really imagining things or not. moving from window to window she threatens to exceed her own endurance: she’s been up all night, knowing that whatever happens will happen in the dark.

3.5

darling swallows the plot and then addresses duchess. don’t trouble yourself, she says; i’ve made arrangements. a thin, sleeveless dress hung from a wooden hanger resting against a nail in the wall
is prepared to take my place. the beauty of order and efficiency is a sheer dress, uninhabited.
soon i’ll be carefully arranged.

the telephone rings and after a moment she holds out the receiver to darling. long-distance. every telephone is black and stout, a hideous toad with numbers for warts. that is all; that is all--the line dead and darling finds herself again, finds her beauty altered. it means nothing to duchess and rather puzzled her instead.

darling started from the center and found her way back. a hallway of broken doors and a wildness that can’t be released. duchess keeps watch, calm and breathing against glass. it is within her and for her alone; she must necessarily be severe. nothing can prepare darling, not the house and not her perception. i can never let anything emerge clearly, distinctly; i harbour secret habits of self-control, a simple and familiar language of distraction. darling has little impulse toward explicit material; what matters to her is that she wants to be told. the countless surges and temperature of the ocean hold no significance for her. duchess explains the sea, the isolation of the house bounded by rocks feathering the shore. the dazzling, transcendent restraint of the sound stage. the splendor of stairs that don’t go anywhere but up, a height she must advance. the suitable properties of exact reproductions. but duchess can’t numerate the secret rooms, the unforgettable rooms that have vanished; the hostility of a sea that has been emptied out--a depth that hasn’t far to go.

hard to give up the spectacle of the house, half-shut, more closed than open. duchess has a problem beyond her attachment to the window casement, the crown moldings shading the walls. no one will know, duchess says; know the forest and the house as i know the sea, the real beginning of the sea shuddering to crash over the chimneys, the balustrades. i'd hoped you would come.
darling starts, starts the same way each time, converting the magnitude and frequency of her voice over the invasion of salt water. her voice clear, taut, and alone except for the phantasm of a widow eavesdropping, trying out new tricks. everyone knows, darling says, everyone knows everything i know. duchess cannot be persuaded to answer: she has a reason to be always at home; she could have left and gone but she has no intention of discussing why. the scar on darling’s forehead has sunk in, looks less like mascara and more like a weight that rested for awhile on her stern, high forehead. darling pulls the scarf from her head and tucks it into her dress pocket, asking why did you stop me?

i was trying to put it back together, duchess says, gesturing to the photograph spread on the coffee table. the image has been torn into three long strips. and what did you see? darling asks. nothing, duchess says. the light allowed in, the room beautiful, centered on this image. a girl with her hands lifted, spread open, as if she will receive a burden or give one away. i talk too much, duchess says. i recite everything i know.

duchess and darling stand together, matched head to head. darling delivers and duchess says, stay out of this, that’s none of your business, swinging herself around and sliding the bolt in place. darling takes the hit and takes another—any other number and she might raise her hand. i almost raised my hand. neither can do anything but darling will think of something to do.
EPISODE FOUR / Behind the Door

4.1

an exhalation on the hearth, a black aura below the mantelpiece. darling leaves a message next to the telephone squatting on the sideboard and starts out. she checks her wardrobe at the door and dusts a last layer of translucent powder on her nose before striding out, clumsily jostling a piece of machinery on her way. she hesitates but recovers quickly, making no effort to correct herself. no trouble can be as serious as the name she wants to save.

i don’t want to hear any gossip, duchess says, and drops the receiver into its black cradle. she has everything she needs to know and cannot go much further into detail. she is ready to move on the name and she expects to be accompanied. the trouble is her simplicity. she has the chance to see and she stands at the window without altering her position in relation to the passage of
vessels over water. she has to see. she is always looking out to sea. she can hear clearly from her
casement everything she came for but offers no reaction; it is ridiculous to think that she doesn’t
see, that she can’t hear. she smiles and keeps too long to herself, only to be interrupted.

perhaps darling had some shopping today. perhaps darling has had a diary since the day she
learned to write. perhaps darling never does anything in fun. perhaps darling writes down
everything that happens. don’t even suggest it, duchess says, turning to the omnipresent fire. there
is more than i can see. the flames leap and stagger, and duchess is sure. her time is bound to
living and looking. she cannot be feeding sheets of carbon paper to a typewriter or getting
anything done. cannot be getting in trouble. cannot be getting a girl stoned.

duchess will not say a word. she has not said the word at all. maybe she was doing it first; maybe i
was doing it over. she has to find out for herself. she has not mentioned darling’s reflection in
polished chrome, her estimation of the opportunities for loss. she has never seen the sea so
troubled and moody. how long has she been in the whale? she had been taught the stars and yet
cannot find her way. a darkness has developed and settled over her, like a veil. she has not exactly
said that she is afraid, but she has walked right by darling without looking; she could have looked
right at her and not seen her. darling is both outside and in. duchess can think only of her own
trouble; what matters is not what is the matter with her. she pulls back her sleeve to check the
time and lifts the phone. keep trying please, duchess says.

she has never asked to leave. certainly the phone will ring and she’ll be connected through a
reversal of frames. it is not clear who she could be talking to. is anybody on the line? duchess has
never wanted her portrait painted; the idea is too gruesome. she rearranges the stripped
photograph on the coffee table and wonders if she should be trembling. a woman like her is
different--she is always unsatisfied, even with the right order. she wants to be in the belly, slotted;
she will wait to be revealed.
open up, duchess says. i know you're in there. duchess has a habit of walking in, walking into the
dark with her eyes on. enough light left to see that darling is not trying to do anything.

hello kitten, duchess says. i noticed you're becoming a woman. she'd said not to worry but i'm
worried. stepping aside, duchess makes a difference. she picks up darling's dresses from where
they dropped, pleated and puckered, on the carpet and hangs them. here the house is everything,
for she's ceased to hold it. duchess is too often in solitude, possessed by the unceasing certainty
of the sea, leasing out forever. she's suffered by remaining, having reached the very end and
returned. recalling the familiar hill, the cluttered wood through which there is no path.

darling will not bother to do anything; she would prefer to hide in a book rather than her body.
in every move darling makes, she is being darling. are you talking to yourself, darling? duchess says.
she doesn't need to stop her; darling has come to no conclusion, allowing the comforting
warmth of her bedroom to roll over her. i think i left a photograph in here, duchess says, walking
to the bedside table where the torn strips are stacked. a few things might be answered, duchess
says. a breeze reaches in and disturbs her; she turns to shut the window and darling's eyes dart
to the photo next to her bed. i had been waiting to tear it to shreds; there is not any reason why
i should have waited. duchess gathers up the pieces and works it out for herself.

forget what i said, says duchess, keep your mouth. in the distance, the sea slides through the
uncurtained window, vanishes under darling's bed. i have no idea what you are talking about, says
darling. words have no meaning for her although she loves to listen. many things have not been
named but darling hears her own name doubled: to talk about her is to betray her.

she could wipe this whole mess into the sea and still keep her hands clean. all this fuss is
ridiculous. darling has been thinking only of her own nonsense, assuming that she is involved. she
did not say anything about going but she was not there. it is so cold in here. *why don’t you go downstairs?* says darling, *because i made this tea and you're going to drink it,* duchess says. her collar closes tightly around her throat, the last button sealed. *it is endless, endless,* duchess cries, and exits.

darling goes, leaving the door open. she’s headed for the small, secluded fringe of forest lifting over the sea. the cat also crept out the front door and sits on the steps, listening. maybe she’ll get lost. darling has to be prepared to control, to bound. she’ll be made to choose what i want for her. she’ll try again tomorrow once she’s got her story straight.

4.3

a breeze slips through the window, waits behind the curtains. *i think i left a drawing in here,* darling says; she’ll capture it before the wind catches time. darling stands there listening, walks over to the curtains and whispers, her lips brushing against velvet, leaving a waxy red residue, *open up i know you're there.* the breeze hesitates, then releases, leaking around darling’s feet. *are you serious,* darling says. the wind has nowhere to settle in the house; darling’s heels smother the last small gust.

darling rolls her drawing into a tube and puts her eye to one end, lifting it to the window. she can’t see too far; she can’t see the wind curdling headlong over the sea, the wind pausing around the corner. she can’t help but hear the grasping of the waves for the shore. darling loves to listen. duchess has been startled to find darling doing nothing but listening, rising from her seat before the telephone even rings. some electric disturbance alerting her, an instinctive grasp of proximity. some things can be taken, and kept. duchess used to do things in order; she is done with harmony. duchess had been distraught to find darling walking around in the dark. darling walking along the wall, feeling for a hidden door. darling following a curved line, an extravagant gesture.
darling moving through the house, unable to move in any other way.

duchess had raised the shadows. she can still remember that words had no meaning for her then. words when they were not her own. she had deliberately chosen darling. there is enough light left to see the fringe of forest smiling at the edge. duchess could leave but she cannot leave her habit. duchess stands by the door looking out then reaches down to lift the cat. the slow sweet cat, too lavish in her arms. it all depends on darling. the sea strays straight ahead, gulls retreating from the water, the forest walking until it is forcibly stopped by the cliffs. duchess will have to be prepared. darling can’t make it through the dark alone.

_go and get your beauty_, duchess says. she calls for her darling, angry and disturbed. _i own this home_, duchess says, _and i don’t care what i have to do_. darling had left a paper in the drawing room, and she goes back to get it. she has ways of wasting time. the wind is well out of sight. darling lifts the window and the wind moves as requested, secretly pleased to be asked.

_Alright, it is over?_ darling says. _i’ll look and tell you what i see_. darling stands at the window and harvests the sight. she recounts the movement of water very carefully. she isn’t there on the beach but she’s on her way. the stars are brittle, breaking the stark horizon. _i want to see what is going to happen_, duchess says, following darling to the window. at that moment darling turns, her eyes magnified in colour, her lips pale. i haven’t seen or heard anything; i don’t have to see, i can feel. darling pulls away from the casement, placing her hands on her hips. _maybe she rode a bicycle_, darling says. _girls like her don’t get lost. she knows her way_. duchess had said an hour and it is tomorrow. they are wearing the same make-up, a cast of spiders drifting on their eyes, different dresses. _i thought i would be lonely_, duchess says. it has been one long afternoon punctuated by frequent and repetitive phone calls. duchess repeats the story over and over, pacing to fit the rhythm of the ironing.
darling has been reversed, left inside out. she’s never the same girl; she is allowed to move back
and forth, between the house and the sea. the wind or the waves carry her. she’s been waiting
and listening but she’ll never get used to the sound; a long, lean wailing gorging the atmosphere. a
sound is a thing there that she can’t see, a vibration feathering against her face. she rubs it off
with the back of her hand. duchess is disappointed that darling has not heard. duchess asked her
to come back hours ago and now it is tomorrow and the fire on the hearth is beginning to pass.
it hasn’t happened yet, darling says.

the phone cracks and duchess lifts. hi kitten, duchess says. of course you can. darling rolls over and
rises from below. she’d been lying face down in the sand, blowing bubbles through her nose. her
body half-in, half-out of the water, mesmerized by the tide’s restless pull. she rises unsteadily,
altered by the salt she’s swallowed, her features distorted, floating on her bones. you did see what
i saw, darling says. did you hear something? did you hear me? duchess hasn’t seen or heard anything.
show me what you saw, duchess says.

oh, i’m sorry. there is no need to go and look, darling says. she is satisfied. you will see, i am not.

darling runs upstairs and shoves her dresser against the door. she could hardly see--it hadn’t
been and couldn’t be. had something chased her down the hill? if it wasn’t duchess, then who?
the tide brings in the dead and decaying and the tide carries out. i know what i saw; i saw the
waves delivering the wrong lines, backtracking. i saw a deliberate lie pushed back into gloaming
water. darling had heard her on the telephone. duchess had said she wasn’t but she was. darling
pulls the blankets up over her head, holds her pillow tightly. she will stay inside and make this
everything.

4.4

darling knows very little about the secret, but she is very interested in the phone cords, pencil
shavings and fingernail clippings that remain. she is very interested in the disappearance of a mystery, the curious alteration that occurs when a thing dies away by blending with something else. darling is now done with quiet obedience; she has kept nothing. she has run into the house with her dress streaming behind her. she doesn’t answer the extended wail of the phone but continues up the stairs, shadows struggling in the loosed coil of her hair, the puckered scar on her forehead like a pinked seam. she wishes it was for her.

duchess moves a pen aimlessly across paper as she talks. _i don’t want to see anyone_, duchess says. _you will see, i am not._ she will not be spoken to like this. duchess depends on the body. duchess is careful to keep the silverware polished, to count each piece, ignoring the dining chairs slipping to the floor, legs breaking. she continues as if she had something to do. she used to have something to do; she is now done with the familiar. she offers silver and gets it straight.

the body has nothing to do with the way i feel. darling turns away and presses her hands to her lips, as if to hold a thing tenderly. _i can’t tell you_, darling says. she continues up the stairs, lifting her skirt to keep it out of her way. she’s ready to start tearing out her hair.

duchess catches a gray dress disappearing up the stairs. _you’re pulling too hard_, duchess says. she would never do that to herself. _you should have been a poet_, duchess says. darling could be finished at any time, could be hoping to make a mistake, could put her face down in the water and forget to turn her head.

i stood there and studied the sky, the clouds, rarely of movement. a careful woman will show her back to the water. she will forgive the disorder of my dress, repair a hem with tape and staples. in the house, the light has been brought up. _look what happened_, duchess says. the fingerprints tacked to the wall have all fallen like soot. duchess will have to start over. duchess depends on the body running into the sea. she figures in the tide, the wind currents. if you drowned, no one
pushed you: you simply fell. duchess can fish a girl out of the water, pry pearls from her mouth, hear the treading and murmuring of salt in her blood. duchess is in a position to see you are not the one.

4.5

this important, darling says, and looks directly at the camera. what am i supposed to see? she has done all of this to herself, compared herself to melting silver light spreading over the sea, gathered every glamour on the way to a coincidence, a connection that can’t be erased. she has taken care of the shore, the footprints in the sand left exactly where she drifted into the water.

darling’ll be accused of collecting all the pens in the house in a coffee cup. she’ll do something about it-- choose a pen and write a memo, call out when trouble starts whaling against her door. darling hastens along the hallway, the cat following closely behind. darling frequently turns to gauge the distance. she takes off her dress and hangs it on the back of her bedroom door. the dove grey colour of her dress gleams in the dust like a rain cloud, a mouse fur. the cat slips upon the bed and you gave me a start, darling says. the name doesn’t matter; does it mean anything to you? she couldn’t just fall into the water. she couldn’t be thrown into the water. she can’t be prevented from warbling, leaning out the window and looking. darling can see it all.

i can watch, darling says. because i am responsible, darling says. darling is looking and listening, involved and detached, swept along by her impatience to return, not trying to deny the evidence of what she witnesses. the cleared path through the forest is familiar; though cast with unusual darkness. darling crosses and recrosses the trail; the landscape is too abundant. the sound of distant waves stir the trees; the wind rising, running dreadfully alongside her. she shoves her numb hands into her pockets, rubs the fragment of rock not to be swallowed. the wind hasn’t been present and can be blamed for every misfortune. turning around, darling says, it is you.
I deliver the messages, darling says. What kind of girl are you? she says. There is no excuse for absence.

darling has seen the secret in the open air, living from the blue, everywhere. darling fights against the waves that send her reeling into the house, the sinister and unsettling clash of salt water with wood. that swollen, intruding throb, waiting to uncurl and answer her with a scream, a senseless falling, a female voice breathing, unable to move.

you gave me a story, darling says. she doesn't know the difference.

you gave me a start, duchess says. duchess takes an earring off before she sets the receiver against her ear. hello?

she observes a door that wasn't there before.
darling won’t cry, won’t toss back her head, her long throat gleaming like water streaming into her breast. she snaps her fingers, holds her eyes still so they won’t release one weight, one teaspoon of salt. there are no marks on her other than her own; her anxious mouth, the stiffness of her fingers. she’ll hound the wind, push the window out and scream for a gust, anything to disarrange the set order of the script. darling won’t bring in a calm, a silence; she’ll pester until everything is altered, the fireplace flinging shadows where they shouldn’t be. she has no reason but the irrevocable desire to sit smiling, smoothing her skirt down neatly behind her knees as she takes her seat, takes her place, sets her mark. she’s ready for an unwinding, a thing before her, momentous: the house shuddering, troubled by her will.
why did you ever come back? duchess says. what did you want?

maybe nothing. the flat palette of her hair, sweating under the hot lights; the unreasonable demand of her height, altering the frame. i am pleased to see her keeping time.

i will, i won’t, she says. what do you want with me?

darling stands aside to let duchess pass, attempts to frighten her up the stairs faster by saying her name carefully, each part deliberately sent. duchess. perhaps i did go too far, opening every drawer, every window, every precipice. i haven’t done a thing but i can and i will. darling watches duchess ascend the stairs and holds her. darling decides for herself: a blush pulses on her cheeks, flames her. i should have known she’d try and stop me, darling says. she can say horrible things; she can lie.

duchess tosses the name, pushes darling out of the way. stay away, keep away; go back to your room and stay there. duchess ascends the stairs, her body propelled along the banister. she keeps hold, ready to fall. darling is an object that shouldn’t be here, an unwarranted shadow. darling will have to wait but the ghosts can have whatever they want. duchess can fast forward, she may need to.

can duchess love the sea that much? is she condensing her flesh into a home? is she taking it all with her? the sea distracts her, unsettling violence, that smooth carapace of sand. the unfortunate beauty of girls so often mistaken, so often found waiting, at home in the evening wondering about success.

darling says she is happy, darling turns again towards the forest, recovering her breath. darling looks carefully around and fixes her eyes upon a ship. the ship drifts and she turns slowly to focus, her body encountering misplaced objects and doors not entirely closed on descent. the moon goes out and waves rise, calling, and she stumbles, confused and wild. her eyes fixed and convicted: the sea swallows, reminding her of distance, direction. the adjacent forest, too dark to
please. darling would like to leave the sea alone but she can’t stop calling, feeling the pull of water in her belly, an ache in her with no expression but engulfing every evidence, every piece of junk mail and denial that says she has to open the door. open the door. duchess pushes it closed and takes darling dearly, tenderly. you write a great many letters, duchess says.

it is like keeping a diary, a diary of everything that has ever happened to me, everything i have ever seen, particularly what i am shown, what i watch when no one else is looking. i’ve already gone over it, disrupted the entire house attempting to set the description in order. i like to know how the furniture is arranged and whether the wax is authentic or not. i’m afraid i might miss something. i know what loneliness is like and how simple it is to miss something that has become familiar.

what is it you want me to say? darling says. she is not impressed by the name. she is cold and bitter, steeped too strong.

5.2

she sifts the sugar through a slotted spoon, fills up the bowl. all out of cups, darling says, drawing a soaked cube from her mouth. she doesn’t know how all the cups went missing. sometimes i stop to look at clouds; they part and pull back, slipping out the sun. darling looks through the window, seen from outside. space wilting around her, the grandeur of the house withdrawing into itself, coiling to strike. throwing away every dirty cup rather than rinsing it in the sink is something she would do. it all goes back to the day everything started, to duchess saying, don’t be fresh, darling. i don’t know anymore than you. knocking over the sugar bowl in her haste, sugar spilling by the draught. i don’t believe you, darling had said.

darling reads too quickly, slips her ship under a jar to stop it. gathers up her alibi, her pancake makeup, puts the book back where it belongs. can’t you forget all about it? this is the way it has to
be. she wouldn’t do it accidentally or any other way.

a girl beached, deserted by the sea. well darling! come in, duchess says.

if i really wanted to hide, you would never find me, darling says.

everything starts at the same time. the sea in the background over her shoulder; the sea drawing away, draining the glittering sand. broken bottles on the beach, and on her palm shattered china. a young girl can succeed. the camera falls on her purse and gloves to remind her to hide them. they shouldn’t be there; some secrets are not safe. she can change her dress, kick her old clothes across the room, though breaking and throwing things is not much use.

don’t argue, darling. come in and close the door, duchess says.

i’m tired of waiting—for anything, darling says.

darling moves efficiently, powerfully. you can’t tell me where i can go and where i can’t go, darling says, but her blocking is already determined. she’s aware of where she should be, when it’s the best time to see a ghost. there is a need to consider the camera, revolving about an axis. i didn’t realize it would be so far, darling says.

darling moves mechanically, listening halfheartedly as she crosses the room. nothing concerns her; she wants the lost night, the hallway unspooling into the belly of the house, the sea thumping against the rocky shore, and the indifference in duchess’ eyes as she looks out her window.

darling is beginning to feel secure in her movements, though nothing is new but agony, tormented by reviewing the order as if things might fall out of place. sorting her apples, ships crossing every canvas. take me to the beach where i can sit and listen to the waves. the ordinary distraction of gulls whipping in the air, lifting and ducking, unable to dispel the daylight. darling is the first to see the wave.
the sea at her side gathering into a pulse, rejecting worn teeth, sea glass. she strides through the sand, a silk scarf in her pocket, hair gleaming in the sun. i didn’t realize it’d be so far. she hadn’t mentioned where she was going. the sand rolling beneath her, the tide pushing her into place. her sweet stare reserved for the cold, throttled waves. she’ll walk out as far as she can once she no longer wants an answer; once she suddenly has nothing to do.

she’d spent the morning hanging her dresses in the pines, leaving them there to hover like moths, fabric left in shambles; she’d been in a hurry to get away. damp, dirty dresses flapping in the air, sheer and filmy on needled limbs. they resemble her because she once wore them, unable to sit down.

where’ll you be, later? darling had said.

i will be here, waiting, duchess had said.

salt sticking like glitter to her lips, the grandfather clock chiming. you’ll get the answer soon enough, duchess had said.

from the house duchess can see it all, carry the panorama with her, feel that enormous surge, the pent up flood. this is my house, my very own, yet there is no place where she feels herself needed. a house settled on whale fat, a woman sucking sardines through a vacuum tube. vases tilt over, chairs split open, the wallpaper peels like eucalyptus. such an emptiness, almost like being a wife.

duchess turns to look back and then moves out of the way. lousy in her wrinkled slip, dowdy in her laddered stockings, spitting out small grains of sand. duchess tosses a washcloth over the back of a chair and pulls a fresh dress from the wardrobe: today i am going to hem this dress. today i might as well. she has become malicious, upstairs making a hem.
darling has never seen this side of the door before. *i didn’t have a name*, duchess says, snapping the thread with her teeth. *i feel as though i were buried, as if there was nowhere else but this house.*

darling starts forward and recedes, feeling the stone wrapped in silk in her pocket, the stone lumped on her hip. the devil didn’t have to come, but how fond she’s become of this luckless weight.

5.4

darling has a lot to do. she shouldn’t have to try. the ocean and sky are always here--savage enough to sing herself to sleep. the ocean fingering the forest, the forest battering the house, the sky pressing on the roof. darling saves space and makes time, charging through a rain puddle, slipped hair and a snarl. she got here first, claimed the floor; her heels smeared with mud.

*do i have time to change my dress?* darlings says. she’s not even warm. she leans into the mirror, pressing her face flush to the glass, a distortion that isn’t sweet, and peels off one eyelash, dangling it like a fly. *better here than in a whale,* darling says. she’s really thinking about murder, talking lightly about waiting. sitting in a corner isn’t much for a girl to do.

a girl who never was. tearing apart the furniture, searching for a key, a key that’s slipped away, slipped over her skin. she will be amused. here in the house somewhere, a key never to be seen, a key she can’t ask for but looking for it anyhow, turning over everything, reading hallmarks under the china, faded stamps on the backs of chairs. she knows the plot will slip, put a stop to it, dress her up in diamante, a draping fastened with bones, script in one hand.

*i might go down along the beach,* darling says. she has nothing else to do. comb for filigree, tattered seaweed, kittens crying under the waves. stand there throwing pebbles at gulls. shells and stones filling up her pockets, small stones one by one tossed into the water. messages, never to be seen
again. *i really do want to wait*, darling says.

*i can imagine*, duchess says. it takes more than a house to shelter a secret. duchess rises and quickly shuts the door. *there is no need to get dressed up*, duchess says. duchess will have to take out her alterations. duchess will have to help her unbutton the back of her dress. it is wonderful to get rid of things you don't need. it is orderly to listen and hear, to learn from the questions that are asked.

*i'll take care of things*, darling says. she was going to give it back, return it. she'd only borrowed the key, to see what it could do. she did not think darling would notice it was missing, but of course it wasn't where it should have been and that makes a difference. *you wanted to see me*, darling says, a demand not to look elsewhere: *look at me*. insisting that an absence should be abandoned, erased. there isn't much else to do but act as directed; she can defend herself here.

5.5

a mist rising on the window. a nest of sweaters on the bed. she can't hear the clock over the rushing air. even the locked windows can't stop the whine from whinnying; an unseemly noise. this noise, the clatter of hooves, small cups of clouds clanging. laying out her tongue and then drawing it back, crunching raindrops between her teeth. if she cut it off duchess wouldn't know the difference. she'd notice it was missing--the difference would be hard to identify. clutching a white handkerchief to her mouth, bleeding through the cloth. it can't look planned, like she suffocated the cat deliberately, left its body lying by a broken vase.

she'd made that noise trying to find her way out.

she'd turned out the lights and headed to the door. *i have flowers to water*. darling has gone into the garden and over the wall; darling has broken down the door, making her way to the shore. a pigeon left by the doormat--duchess will pass this over, gloss the ghost. darling is always dropping...
things as a way to make a map.

duchess does not interfere very much. waking up in the morning stuffing feathers down her
throat, her head stone sunk into the pillow. she pushes up her lip and takes a drink from the
carafe on the bedside table, blowing off the thin film of dust that settled during the night. time
set loosely, or too literally. she wouldn’t change her dress to get ready for bed.

the raking lines of the stair are difficult to manage. no one saw me return, dragging seaweed in
my wake.
the telephone receiver sticking to her ear, polishing her ear. she will always be blamed for calling, for breaking the line. let me in, she says. a message isn’t much good without any ink. inhaling the atmosphere through the phone, describing things like furniture, speaking about a position. she will not repeat a word heard in the home.

darling could be honest, could slide the bolt in the lock and check every room, saying she saw nothing at all. oh look at my hair, she’ll say instead, curls revolving as she spins around silently, gliding down the hallway. she refuses strategic lighting, adjusts the volume and then the frame. i borrowed it to look at it, that was all. i meant for you to have it, she says. she reaches into her coat, going through her pockets, turning the lining inside out. still nothing, receipts and seashells.

be a lamb and let her in, duchess says. darling walks the worn path two steps at a time. oh kitten, you can’t be ordinary, duchess says.

darling has other things to do. once the dishes are washed, the meals are planned, the beds are made, the rooms are dusted, the plants are watered, she will look after her make-up, dress her hair, put on a skirt, sweater and shoes. still there is the ironing, the cleaning, the mending and the polishing left to be done. lines to memorize. at the beginning, she dawdles in the background, rolling her script, her telescope.

at the beginning, she could see the dark coming up the hill.

6.2

darling is an idle girl. she never really knows what to do. she takes her chances with garlands of sentences, draping them around her neck: about the length that makes it work, that starts to bring everything together. duchess despaired and told darling to destroy it, but darling found that lists can be useful, and interesting. she is useful herself. she never stops watching, looking excessively for nonsense. the crumbles of red-worn vermilion torn into shreds and abandoned
on the windowsill delight her. darling doesn’t care how it looks; it is the little vanities, both simple and innocent, that matter.

darling gradually rises. the water is boiling, a whistle won’t stop. she cries, shut it, shut it off! it is too beautiful, too beautiful...

*walking to the edge of the sea is not worth doing*, duchess says. she could have destroyed it; she does not really admire the view. she sees herself as the lady of the house. the vast majority of the sea and forest threaten her. she is often busy cultivating tea sets, observing the waves arrive one by one from her window. the gulls circling round and round, following without being called. scorning their fame, they repeat a gruesome, ordinary path, tracking crustaceans gliding secretly under the sea. duchess wants the day to be quick, to be over. all the horrors she is able to see happen naturally.

darling is not anywhere in the house. she has learned her accidents.

duchess goes out one door and comes in another. she had gone through a slightly snaky, undulating hallway.

darling plays dead, pulling the curtains closed to cover her room from daylight. a punch bowl sun, striations of gold, pink and white, gilded hot and flashing. she’d walked at sea wondering whether she’ll stay where she is, blundering through the wonderful stupidity of her lengthening dress. her skirt dragging in melted salt, her deep breath, her fingertips going numb.

i am too familiar to be visible; observing indifferently, like a camera. women love to be haunted. i can see anything i want to see: lobsters rolling up in a tight wave, screaming as a curl is set.

darling has said more than she ought. she has located the silver filigree, the sailboat hanging from the doorknob. it won’t be long before she’ll see what she can do.
she lost the strain along the way. she’d like to forget about this misunderstanding. *i have nothing else to say*, darling says.

6.3

under every rock a worm glides through the loam, laboring in vain. under a rock something small she misplaced; which rock, every rock is like another. things do not disappear while you still love them; they do not disappear while you are looking. duchess said she could be wrong; she is never sure. she must look in uncertainty and necessity. duchess pulls a lock of hair through a keyhole and hears a scream on the other side of the door. duchess whispers, *do not let her hear you say that.*

darling stands and leaves the table--a sweet drowsiness has closed her mouth. girls that never speak roam the woods unaccompanied; they can hardly be ladies. the limbs of trees join the bodies of young girls as they collapse into the sea. darling has been too hasty, delighting in the blind alley, the interminable hallway. duchess said *it will not hurt, it will not be terrible.* darling wondered whether anyone else was in the house; *is anyone else home?* she called. i know she didn’t mean to make a noise, a clatter and clang. duchess produced a key she was not supposed to have, a key she had kept in a clamshell. duchess smiled. darling’d rather look by daylight but it is already too late.

darling’s robe trailing down the staircase all afternoon. she deserves a boat of her own, a whistle. she could survive on nacre, tin; opening her embrace to the salt air, her belly full of ink. she likes to roam around, open every cabinet and fill it with flowers, with pitchers of mud. some girls don’t come back. you can scream and scream and scream. your shadow will stain the wall. darling sits and looks, looks at these walls, clouds flapping against the high window, cold hearted girls perched in trees in the wood beyond, draped in seaweed. darling stands and pushes in her chair.
i’ve never seen her like this, combing the static out of her hair. there is a long way to go before she’ll leave this room. if she didn’t stay, didn’t turn over every piece of furniture, every rock, didn’t disturb the stacks of newspapers tied up with twine, the loose soil—if she didn’t she wouldn’t be here, then she wouldn’t be here. she’d like to be thought of as she thinks of desire, she’d like a haloed flashlight to arc over her face, to be lit up by longing.

duchess is careful not to tap her heel against the floor. this broadcast will not be interrupted.

6.4

the door shut and she was alone. it’s dark, darling said, and looked through the uncurtained window. she will be here soon.

something was going to happen and she was powerless. a shadow on the wall, a mark i didn’t make. a dream leftover, left behind.

darling waiting, utterly passive. she shouldn’t turn her back in despair, sigh to acknowledge the evidence: every crevice aching with spiders. the house has a reputation for widows. there is nothing unusual about miles of corridor, about a girl recoiling from limitless black. she was brought here deliberately, in spite of everything. nobody noticed her eyes wide and strained. when she first came here there was nothing negative, the house utterly passive. the house waiting for something to happen. she didn’t look very closely but she saw the seaweed pulsing through the floor, the damp spot she couldn’t account for.

darling’s body, restless, will never stop daring to move. she won’t stop, won’t stand, won’t sit here waiting, holding a place, sucking on a lock of hair. she rises and pulls herself to the window, lifts herself. it is entirely up to her. she can’t get through; spoilers lurk nearby.

she turns. the window arches over her, moaning. the horrible sight of an unmade bed. the phone
cord looped around her neck like a slender, black snake. darling is glad that nobody will knock at her door.

the sea has always been there, and the forest stretching to the cliff’s edge. duchess saw the dark knot of trees and the grey, listless grass. why shouldn’t i stop here, crush my fist against my mouth. if she slowed down it wouldn’t matter; the house dark, she would keep looking, turning her head to listen to the waves smoothing sand like a sheet pulled taught against a mattress. she holds her breath, duchess moans, and suddenly released, she makes an effort not to run.

she wants everything to stop, to be very still. there isn’t a long way to arrive; there wasn’t a way past the hedge. from the dark trees she catches her breath, flickering whitely within her.

as duchess watches, a shadow moves beside her. when does that ever happen? the grey dusk and the wind tears at her. i do understand, she says. i don’t understand, she says. she doesn’t want to but she will, she will see the small, bright beacon of the oil rigs offshore.

darling leaves the path, heading sideways through the gathered trees. her heart rises, wrenching her. i don’t want to find the flowers, she says. too many flowers restless and yawning. a little below her, at the side of the path, something wails. darling knows where the wolf is. she hadn’t fed it last night or this morning; how could she if waiting is the only power she has?

while darling was waiting something happened. she began to draw a map. she’d been following a bird through the trees. remembering this, she drew a line in the dirt. she will go this way if she had a choice, if there wasn’t grief, the faint memory of the bird cowered low to the ground.

6.5

how could a name tell her who she is? she might be persuaded, she might notice the slight movement of light in the polished surface of the rocking chair. she might notice the microphone
orbiting her head. she might keep track of her own pouting and stomping. she will get her way.

darling has nothing besides a cold weather gown, a voice drifting into hollow, her room a gourd
she echoes. the bird of her jaw sweeping out dust. plenty of space elsewhere, endless hallways
stroked in black. she claims she saw a shadow, nervous as a cat. she marveled, lifting herself. easy
to be misled by stone.

where is she? sell this monster, get rid of that girl. clouds of cat hair erupt from the vents. she
spits her cold, flossy tea into a plant.

something a little wrong about mist clinging to a beehive. she can’t help over the phone; she
regrets palming the key, pulling back her shoulders and shouting. pretending she hasn’t noticed
the absence, pretending she has nothing. soon there will be nothing, what she has is exactly like
nothing; a key that is emptied out.

rolling her drink, sliding it across the waxed tablecloth. i had to realize the problems of adapting
to an unconstrained space. i had a shrill, squandered light.

don’t you waste your time waiting, duchess said. hand to throat, her face soaked in milk. and she is
done. she is done with the house, what the house might do to her. she walks along the wall,
slipping one finger to expose the blood. darling looked closely and saw the difference. please keep
ringing, she whispered, running.

shuddering like i’d seen something, seen something unsuspecting. i was holding my coat closed at
the neck, different from the others. i don’t want to be found and i hope i don’t see any light. i will
have to stop walking towards the sea. the water too deep to wade. no scream, only a soft shluck
as water closes over a wound. i am dank and ill and i don’t need much.

darling would’ve done anything; please, she said stupidly. the light went out and i don’t think it
was deliberate. yes it was disgusting, branches gesturing outside the window, tearing apart clouds. darling, startled by the otherwise ordinary morning. the sea rubbing its back against the shore, the hot wind. the portrait of the girl above the fireplace looks very much like her. it could be her, yesterday. it could be darling, knowing she's being lied to. she fancies that this is her home, that she has a need to be here. the resemblance confirms that the house has been coming after her, that there is not an edge. she wants to say that there is not a door by there are several doors moving along the highway.
she can hear the line. she is here herself, the line strapped against the wall. she is interested in what is to come, furniture crashing, a waterfall rearranging the room.

ritual function:

the door closes. not effective to merely report the door closing, the bang click and echo.

the fireplace never without, unable to finish burning.

lament: tower.
generous windows, no guarantee against peril.

she is always window cropped; it must be generous,

lending her a place to wait,

caring for her absence.

the problem of adapting to wait within a window.

the problem of ships sinking from the ceiling.

of coming in the back way.

of nearly the truth but not close enough--close enough to convince her.

errors accumulate, flanked by the door, candelabra, cerebellum.

_The room I showed you?_ no need to go there, ever.

the dark, dissolving the solidity of the wall.

darling’s arms held out stiffly, fingers extended to alert her to the presence of objects

encountered in the dark.

transparent baskets, picture frames, embroidery hoops. dropped in a black, a haunted night, a

weeping within. explaining what’s happening, she covers her dress with an apron. merely making a

performance of her emotions, leaving without shutting the door.

propping the queue card on her knees, her eyes flashing overhead. no one can stop her; she can’t

see what she won’t see. satisfied to hold a banister, to know the submission of the house,

faltering marble, dull and noble. telling, saying over and over the name as way of stalling.

wrenching the name from her protest. memory won’t be good enough, earthworm’s witness.

whenever she’s overwhelmed she stands in the window, unsure of what will come next.

the elaboration of a vault, a lie a lie a lie, only a list she can look up, a meaning that goes under,

that covers a name pulled from view. sweeping up all the sunflower shells, the cat whiskers and
record needles; cracking open every egg, searching for some change, a few cents. she’s normally looking down.

carousel horses stampeding through the window. feeling herself fall, no one calling her.

a trail of water drops on a bare floor.

7.2
darling prefers to walk, at once feeling herself here, and elsewhere. she can’t account for the movement of her body, an absence connecting each room. lamplight glancing off her smooth swept hair, shoulders curling like ferns. the window doesn’t interest her, affirming an ambivalence between nearness and distance, the ordinary arrangement of sofa, side table, shade. the window will stop her from calling, from meddling too much. stop making trouble, duchess had said. the house a phantom, a jumble of bright sounds embracing her breath. walking as a different way of dividing time, inelastic time, without unraveling the edge.

darling says stumbling, let me go.

the inability of the house to influence her behavior, to make her turn the corner into an unassaulted room. a weakness against which she reacts, pitching black, prowling around without her slippers on. a weakness she loves: she pushes against the house, still searching, expecting the next door to open. to her, the window in this room is suggestive of going away. where would she go, if she were let go? outside the house, an endless sea, a forest where nothing is stable. the window turns every tree upside down. i can’t go into the woods alone, darling says. looking out is not the same to her as going anywhere, going everywhere. she is escorted through the hall. she is walking backwards across the room, pushing furniture out of her way. leave me alone, darling days. at the doorway she’s forced to stop. the difficulty of a doorway: difficulty of beginning, of going through, of trespassing. i might stumble, risk entering without strategy. darling tips a chair under
the lip of the doorknob.

she has to make trouble; swollen mouth, burgeoning longing. daring dares to look out the window and stop looking at me she says. she could kick and scratch at glass like she’d kick and scratch a face. darling close to the wall, excess swept against the wall like snow. excess the house hasn’t room for; dirt under her nails, fragile bones. she has think about voice, a cry transgressing solitude. don’t let her say a word, duchess had said. darling knows she isn’t in any condition. she has been in a place she won’t look again, a slow day accumulating dripping faucets, the concerns of silver and china. for everything, for nothing, she goes forward, collecting roughness, unevenness, chipping every plate. she is still responsible, still the one who witnesses the ghosts.

7.3
darling takes away her name, takes off her dress. her figure in the full-length mirror distorted by a bold outline, a residue of chalk indicating her hips, her belly. i’m stubborn, darling says, tracing her thighs, the hillock of her knee. a door that won’t fit sits flush. otherwise, she doesn’t know what comes next. in the basement, wine crates and potato sacks; only the ordinary is really mysterious, reminding her to keep her secret, to keep her mouth shut.

duchess has been sweeping up the ashes; it gets dark so early. too early for a dozen roses and a mink coat. she had to find something; a cup she will never touch with her mouth. a reserve she holds against the sea, wrong from the beginning, refusing to be absorbed by the foundation. too much concrete and too much dust. get your gloves, little girl, duchess said, and darling finished what was left. i don’t like things to be kept from me, duchess says, and darling takes a wristwatch from her pocket and sets it on the coffee table.

did you notice it was missing? darling says. darling says, very simple and very small.

darling is always looking. duchess is always watching. darling has run away, slipped the watch back
in her pocket. her hand closes, her hand opens: nothing but flesh, white satin cut on velvet.
darling looks at herself in the mirror and nearly loses her balance. pretty clothes leave her cold
and insistent. the house silent, an artificial wind stirring up her hair. she can’t stop pressing against
the wall; perhaps she hopes to hear the chandeliers and forks and spoons. perhaps she thinks of
a place next to the sea, a vulnerable place smelling of glue and kerosene, a sulphurous light split
open, shuddering ripples on the sand. so close to the sound that she expects something to
happen; how fragile her certainty is.
duchess walks by without noticing. duchess has no other way. she doesn’t see much besides the
sea, and the dark swatch of trees looming over.

7.4

the bell rings and the rain she demands. darling is determined not to be turned aside; she turns
with the leaves, she marks the distance from her room to the door: compared to naught but
bone, bone bone her body water-tight, air-tight; her body opposed to atmosphere, distressed by
a cloudless sky, doubting the bedlam made by beasts. cautious about her excessive, unreal body;
not an excess of interior, but of surface, a firm velvet sack. a strange creature wandering around
in women’s clothes, struggling to create a reference she can understand. sheltering the pulsing,
visceral flesh within an upper coat of skin; clutching her empty stomach, drawing in a kiss. she has
to be very careful, small feathered footsteps, slithering in the hips. she moves slowly, an erasure
marked by over-acting: sugar flying everywhere; she strokes herself wildly; the waves wash out
her face; she reacts, already at the point of spilling, regardless of circumstance. duchess has gone
to look at the sky and darling weeps, without even having a mouth! all this looking frightens her.
darling will never be allowed to try. she is incapable of floating, saturating her body with rubbing
alcohol, with her belongings. she learned this she knows--she has been decorative rather than
deceitful, waiting without utility. her avarice of water, her timid argument: what remains of beauty wrought from carnage; a particular beauty, sweat rolling from head to heel. a girl who moves, the smell of a hunted animal, a path of viscera. she can’t refuse a gaping nothing, a deep breath, snapping back to position, lifting her tongue, salvaged from a wreck of glitter and stardust. violently salvaged, claimed; darling would do anything, motivated by desire and sometimes triggered by boredom, by necessity. what she wants: entirely impossible.

instead of walking inside, i just knock on the door. i don’t know what to say; i can’t hear over the rush, a whistle and a mist clothing the window. what i would have done if i could, but i can’t touch anything. the cat breaks in the door. i know where to look. i want a long line; there is nothing here but unseemly noise, a chronicle of come-ons. *kill the phone.*

duchess says *get out, get out get out go on.* her body taut and furious. a rejection settled in her mouth, her lips slipping over stones; a sincerity in superfluity, a dazzle in her eyes. an intent she expresses by pleading for a stop; darling can barely hear over the clatter of hooves. expressing indifference through zeal, ardour; sucking out a mollusk. a dark room, a small window, darling sitting on a stool with her body struggling to contain a swollen word. her desire gathering, very specific, very technical. if she gets what she wants, if she figures out what she’s found, she will rarely look out, the forest and the sea rendered unfamiliar and disturbing. kept as she is, unsatisfied, trying to find an entrance: she makes the noise.

7.5

she’s heard the wind, so many times, and taken it for a sparrow. the animal she resembles in her organs, in the drift of her bones. she has learned to keep watch: a way she has of looking, shutting out the moon.

her dress basted with dirt; her love and ritual of dusting every accomplice. clouds plummeting
into the sea, soaking up the salt and spit. she is what she must be. there is nothing beyond her
own interests.

she used herself as a distraction. she'd traversed long corridors clad in mirrors from floor to
ceiling; messy hands and an objectionable angle. her own dark corner delivering a whisper, gaudy
and sour. *i am darling, i am darling.* an excess she is transported to, a familiarity. suddenly another
door opens. darling is here for the first time, her body breathless, silent, weltering in emotion. *i
know what is going on - i have observed…* and she drives the bird out the window, shuddering at
last.

passing a hand over her face, wondering how to be satisfied with what is already inside the house
and how she might keep it well.
EPISODE EIGHT / The Girl with a Secret

8.1

holding a hallway, a woman slowly striding. close your eyes and it won’t be there anymore. duchess
takes herself back up the staircase. there is nothing she needs, no benefit to sunlight. turn your back and she will come closer. she ascends and passes the open door: the waves chase after her; one by one she closes the windows.

the luxury of looking out for hours uninterrupted. the important image of the sea, the rough division of land and water: a penalty of perpetual loss. pressing her forehead against the glass, her eyes uplifted, duchess declares her territory. the awful sound of phlegm, labouring through her: a beautiful monster at best.

darling cuts her name in every tree. in the wood, a vibrant line of dusk. darling moves, moves out of the way. lulled by a sound in the trees, heat coiling about her neck. help me look, she says, covering her ears with her hands. a mess of pine needles, too pale and delicate. she has to pull it out. she watches herself doing this, as if it is done. in her pocket, a spoonful of sand.

darling soaks the last moisture from her lips with a handkerchief and washes the residue of milk from her glass. with her mouth closed like this, she is quiet and well-ordered. she has nowhere else to be. it is her responsibility to preserve a record. she has tried counting, blown on her hands to keep herself steady. she doesn't see duchess standing there, licking her fingers and smoothing back her hair.

darling running back towards the house. darling's beard of soil.

darling looking over her shoulder.

birds rising from the earth.

duchess idling by the window, holding a cat to her breast, calling it a glutton.

darling's hands fly away from her face. sunrise full of sirens and the gentle murmur of mice crouched in dust. she's still breathing, unable to stop the great wave with her hand.

8.2
in this house the rooms are disconnected. i can never put anything down; i have to carry 
everything i have around everywhere. i wrangle cleanliness from the brutal wind; i attempt to 
hold the fury of these rooms. sometimes i would like to be seen, i would like to be resolved to 
elegance. these crumbs are for rodents. this stain on the windowsill is a warning.

all morning, the ravens have called each other from tree to tree. the message never alters and is 
too easy to read. they lust after my empire.

on the other side of the house and down into the sea, careful not to make a sound.

i didn’t close the door and the door did not open. i didn’t hear the ping, a long-forgotten urge. 
even these love letters are lifted. i think i’ve had enough time, rusting in pleasure. i thought i’d be 
honest; i’m not awful, after all. i go back over everything that was said. thirst and frugality are 
words i find useful. all this salt makes me think of lining seashells along the wall: an orchestra of 
false methods, no real thunder in bitter carbuncle.

my secret movements drift to the basement. nothing else gets done; i proceed from the door like 
this is already over. i need to see the light; attend to my habit of observing the tide. i can never 
tell where it’s going. no recovery occurs on release; i can see that. hopefully she’ll come back. the 
beach is stiff from immoderate use.

soon i’ll have to cut down this tree; then there will be the ringing of a small bell, a grim silence 
eroded by sunlight. i brought up this emptiness, dusted it off: she won’t go far.

8.3

whatever peril i like, darling says, flinging her hair over her shoulder. in front of the fire is not an 
unlikely place for her to examine her options, to keep the devil at bay. the night has unrolled its
polite veil and she never stops counting.

in seawater she'd soaked her housecoat, brought it to her lips.

the part of the house that is closed off chases her around the perimeter for a few episodes. the noise of some distance startled her, brought her around to an account of waves devouring the shore. she does hundreds of things every day, mostly for duchess. what can be done with years: standing, shaking; a long feathered quiver shot through her knees. in her answers she hasn’t changed. the music swells, exaggerates. the water won’t go down, there’s a danger that doesn’t appeal, a garden of thumbprints obstructing her doubt.

her soft eye available for intimacy. an anxiety about whether the phone will ring: she’ll flush, try to say hello. try not to seem like she’s uncertain, pale and ugly in her distress. a rose blooming where her forearm meets her elbow, a stain on the underside, otherwise like a lizard’s cold belly.

darling says, *i did not loose track*. she points out where the waves were moving, her hand dropping as she realizes the futility of her actions and the impossibility of capturing her reflection in the water.

the cat at the bottom of the stairs awaits dissolution.

darling complains that the ocean is no longer there. she will have to go alone, knocking the bushes and treacle out of her way, reciting against a contrary wind. she imagines it will work: she will be useful. it will end happily. she is no longer impressed by the dark.

8.4

duchess cannot go anywhere without tearing the house apart. all she knows is searching, flipping furniture, striking matches on the walls. sometimes she isn’t alone; her panic slowly replaced by advancing light, a peculiarity surrounding the woods and all the birds who fled. sweet drowsiness
hidden in her word, a flower pressed flush against the window. she looks as far as water allows.

after that: sails short of breath, faithful clouds.

overlapping rooms suspended under half-light, fire shuddering without air: duchess longs to look everywhere, impatiently, lamenting the busy lives of girls before the light goes down and night comes, quickening the cold. she would like to go home but she’s not sure which room to stop in, uncertain of this vessel. she is the last to know where she could be.

she was looking for something; nothing the sea could offer. she raises her eyes: silence, and the terror of moving between. what can i do with all these chairs? duchess says. she has even more things than softness. she wants to know less, to abandon this attachment: beauty is the least. duchess would like to see what happens, what will happen. she knows that she should be ashamed, that she should see her way out. looking gives her something to do. first, the sea, clutching her apron; then, the forest, birds singing in the trees because they are not alone.

all of these brought together, ready to bruise.

8.5

are you sure you didn’t see her? duchess says.

she passed while tending to the light. possibly darling’s just lost, observing her promises, bearing her name.

the weather came rainy, an envelope closing over the unsettled sea. somewhere, waves strike slate, and the lighthouse roars. the sea, purring and rubbing against the walls like a cat that wants in. no light flickers as i approach - the house wilted, obeying the passage of the afternoon, a trickle of daughters and dead fish tumbling from its eaves like hair. nobody has paid much attention to the crumbling stone, the broken glass. peering in: dusty pianos, a clatter of school
desks and collapsed chandeliers; business abandoned at the moment everything came to a stop.
my own face hovers on the mirrored wall in the distance, then vanishes. efforts have been made
to tear the clinging vines away, but industry has succumbed to a gradual decay. tiny cherubs hover
over the entrance, castrated and beheaded, scallops giggling at their feet.

water intrudes, delivers a great waste. all that interests me is a name. i won't leave until i want to
leave; every fire escape beckons, every chimney huffs a little cloud of ordinary grey. i dash from
window to window: finally i find darling crouched in a corner, a shadow spreading across her slim
back. i hate to lie, darling says. it bothers me to lie to her. i turn the dial, lift my eyes: in the balcony
above, a window has flown open, but the aperture is sealed with sheets of white butcher paper.

you'd better use your handkerchief, darling says. i haven't got one; i'm not a little lost. i stir my
breath against the lens, stroke the shutter with the hem of my coat. i hope i'm not too late.

it could be the last night i wander the estate. i could be wrong–i follow the impulse, my desire to
be alone. a bare mattress thrust upon the floor, a wall strewn with silk and spiders. no one
knows about this room, about her mussed hair, her mouth gagged, her knees almost spread.

she'll never leave, never leave the light out.
EPISODE NINE / Girl from Nowhere

9.1

66
a few drops of sweat attend her body--anemones, bracketed by nylon and lace. she throws open
the width, observes an opposing movement: the house withdrawing into itself, anger spiked by
embroidery floss, spun sugar. the cat glides onto the roof, dropping to feast on wood-sorrel. a
dove-coloured girl jumps from peril, runs from the red room to the casement. as the sun sets,
darling finds herself alone.

her alarm lasts through the night, too enamored of locks.

i am encouraged to call her once every hour: to let the phone ring three times. she takes a
breath only out of necessity: otherwise, the simple word overwhelms; only the cry is precious.
she doesn’t want to move, to disturb her remarkable smallness, the heat of honey blazing the
curtains - swaddling the room in cinders and ash. her sweet way of saying she’d like to see
someone coming down the stairs to fetch her.

i drag on; it may rain, the aster thin on the ground. i hurry downstairs and back up, my hands
drifting in vales of light. i repeatedly shift positions. i see by her look that she is no longer
interested in me; something beyond the window catches her. i start by emptying the milk glass
into the kitchen sink. i try the pilot, leave the cat to her sentry. i want to say something, but my
mouth stiffens, burdened, as if some heavy creature has nested on my tongue. i imagine myself,
for a few moments, somewhere else: a stooping forest, a path punctured without demand.

in response, i abandon the wall canvassed by a gold-veined mirror, the dirty shoelace dangling
from the unshaded light. rather than drink, i find something easy to hold. darling no longer wishes
to say anything.

darling stands and gathers up her dress, drawing it off; a softly uttered hiss against skin. she is all
down and brutal wool, plucking the errant hair from her clavicle, flicking a crust from her nostril.
something could be missing; the intense echo of silverware clattering on glass. the difficulty of
slender nettles thundering against the door.

the first barrier, brought by those who can tell what would come to pass if she hadn’t stood in shadow. the house opens and closes, spits out tropical lobsters and sow bugs; a clot of bees and walking sticks. the interruption is sweet, if disruptive. the neighbors do not believe the roses had been shipped several hundred miles. the sea extends a palm of salt, a blessing to keep the dark at bay.

there should have been quicksilver, a convulsion of light. darling begins by turning off every switch: carefully examining, and opening, every drawer. where will i start? in the sawdust? without silence, without distractions: always the bluster of traffic, clouds careening in the sky, refusing to untangle the light.

9.2

i wait for the opportunity. darling turns; the door left open. look! duchess cried in bewilderment. a bruise around every light, expanding and contracting. while i look i listen for footsteps on the stairs. i do not need to step through the door to witness the proximity of the sea. a girl who is not afraid could jump very easily, could narrowly miss the rocks. i assure myself that such a thing would never happen. i look away.

darling could be anywhere around here, miles away in the woods.

i keep my watching eyes that way - the sea very far from strong today. what is it to be false? duchess calls out the direction in which darling has run. the waves pass along the shore. how can i hurry? a vicious turning of the chamber, a curve from which duchess cannot reach the telephone. from the door to the phone sprawled the broken body of the house. the whine of a
hinge like a dog from below, the screen rolling open: a way to escape the feeling of being enclosed.

her eyes watch the big clock, the tender hours.

she’s seen all the wrong things.

duchess avoids darling’s eyes. darling glances at the clock with a start. she walks to the door and looks into the room, doubting what she sees. *i saw what happened* darling says. *of course, darling,* duchess says. duchess closes her eyes completely.

9.3

duchess knows where to look; she won’t waste these moments scouring the woods. darling could be out, making laps around the house. she’s missed the original airdate. the lights are burning late tonight. she’d talked like she was going away, like silk leaves and plaster tree trunks would part and tip her onto a concrete floor.

morning settling and the house empty, upstairs and down. duchess banging the wall; the only sound her fist against fiber board. not a sound like the anxiety of gulls whirling over the sea. the window wiped clean of fingerprints; the cat pleased. duchess guides her flashlight beam, so near that i want to scream. a clock rattling in the adjacent room, a spot on the floor she steps over on her way. crossing the hall anxiously, certain that i will not see her sidestep, a small movement she has to make in order to proceed. *i have no idea where she could be*… duchess says, striding through a maze of diamonds woven in wool. she will handle this. the tide is in, the beach and the lower part of the cliffs bare. duchess pushes disasters to the side. i don’t like to see her like this, to see her closing each cupboard quietly.
i keep swallowing. a patch of darkness moves. i swallow and then i start. a patch of darkness moves, and stops. she has hidden in the forest, found a bird, and thump, thump, thump. a patch of darkness moves, stops and moves again.

everything has to move, yes yes move and stop.

everything so still she says stop but keep moving she kept moving keeps moving now so she can make it stop. she makes it slow; duchess had told her to run and darling caught her breath and came back. all the trees marked with x, a girl wondering. hunger slithering in her stomach, she woke folded on the ground, scenes missing. she laced her fingers behind her head, came forward step by step, her little eyes covered by hair. she knows that it will never happen to her.

it was the seaweed rising through the floor.
it was the salt taste of her palm when she licked her fingers clean.
it was the fire that filled the room.

she should go in; when darling saw that the light had gone out she thought it was the end. when she saw the x marked on the door she thought she should go in. she'd seen this before; she heard the ordinary, everyday sounds. a door i don't want to go in. she followed her shadow along, a saw slicing through a trunk, the rhythm she called softly, a head mounted on the wall. ashes falling from the tree. a failure of warmth, of comfort.

she makes it stop - at other times it felt like end; now she has a reason to stay.

9.5

the house was intended to be a home. everything had been tried to make it comfortable; darkness was required, and in this window, light. the floor deliberately dirty, with silhouettes
careening round the fire. the seashore would always be soaking wet, and the smell of jasmine would gradually become intense. what mattered was the placement of the foundation on the hill, and the direction of the wind. some afternoons she would sit in her casement gazing out at nothing. a breeze would lift off the water to stir her; her mouth, ever more red, would fill with saliva. her effort in watching lead to unseen movements and a triumph over passing ships. the image of fish hanging from the trees in the forest beyond her sight appeals to her. at an enormous distance she appears as nothing more than a speck covered with glass sealed up in marble, wood and stone.

i found a key, darling says.

a key? says duchess. you don’t mean a key?

darling hangs her head and says, i found it. a key, nearly buried on the beach.

the key glitters on her open palm and her hair is stuck over her eyes so she doesn’t stare, and her open mouth is clogged with salt water. the key feels cold and hard in her hand. her lips move gently. i found a key, darling says.

darling had arrived and found the house upon the hill. darling had dared to climb the hill, aware of the dark brambles around her; insects vibrating in the air. she had wanted only to creep back towards her train. she had looked up at the house, long and low and built of rough stone. then she looked beyond the chimneys to a line of pine trees, dipping towards a vast edge of jagged rock. somewhere below the sea clutched the cliff and broadcast a bewildering wail. there was a wind, and darling had shivered, a long, slow sob reverberating in her body. as she came closer and closer the house got larger, the windows began to swarm and hum and somehow darling knew the secret was meant for her; she knew this house; knew the inarticulate warmth, the terrible sorrow locked away in its rooms.
EPISODE TEN / A Room with Dark Mirrors

10.1

the sea is not visible at all. duchess looks as if she hopes to catch a glimpse of the sky rolling up, water swirling down a drain: a hollow, concrete shell where the ocean once swelled, clamoring. simply waiting and watching, her face quite sharp, utterly still. the wind carries a threat, explores her dark hair, halts in her ear. duchess watches, mute, almost as if she is planning something.

duchess never really enjoys wondering about the noises she hears. tomorrow or the next day the telephone will ring, and she will lift from her perch and grasp the receiver. all day she morbidly rearranges the room; going very carefully over places she has already looked. her management of velvet and damask: brutal because she doesn’t care; she would break the legs off this table, toss the tea set from the cliffs. all this aimless gulping and pestering, trying to attract
attention. *noises must be made by ghosts*, duchess says. noises made by falling rocks. what suits her is to never see the sea again; to wake to nothing but a picture.

pulling the door neatly shut, rubbing ashes from the rug. a girl who was never here before becomes so familiar. duchess hopes it is nothing, listening to the business of the forest, trees rising from a concrete floor. she thinks hollow, hollow; stands still as she would not if she thought someone was looking, letting her stomach out, expelling breath from the bottom of the sea.

*keep your nose where it belongs*, duchess says. duchess settling her matching gloves and purse in her lap, missing nothing. dampness gathers where her thighs press together, the gleam of studio lights flaring on the window pane; she has to hold her quiet like a pocketbook. in her quick, darting glance she is careful not to be caught. she pushes the curtains aside too tightly, too tight to come off easily. she knows something.

10.2

*things have to be done*, says duchess. a storm raises, flickering in the window behind her like a film projected on a screen. darling dawdles, gathering her coat and gloves, twisting her hat over the crown of her head. she look more like a woman in a long white dress than is likely.

*i took the wrong path*, says darling. *i wasn't in any trouble… i didn't hear anything…* the forest gauzy, silent, a diaphanous veil thrust over the wind.

*be quiet!* duchess says, moving the curtains aside, fastening them with a braided rope and securing the window latch. slight rain gleams in the tree limbs like phosphor, a wet stain sloping down the trunk. the weather urgent, unbearably awkward. *it happened in the woods*, duchess says. i wonder
how she could know anything about the woods, about wrestling free the ax that had been
embedded in a tree stump. only fish are real to her.

*i'll stay with you as long as you want*, darling says.

thunder brings up the light, a shadow huddled against the door. at this hour of the night it is easy
to say no, to say stop following me. brass hooves sparking the carpet, an itinerary through the
house to the sea, all distance converted into distress.

10.3

the sand vibrates as waves withdraw; the cry of the bitter sunk through rock. the noise is so loud
i can't hear anything else. the beach flushed with microscopic reef animals and drift seeds washed
ashore from distant forests. duchess is drawn to observe the endless arrival and departure of the
waves; she says it is the light that interests her. the light is never absent; everything is white. even
in the terror of night the moon shimmers, a glossy stone on the smooth surface of the sea.

*if i am going to drown, i insist on drowning in the sea*, duchess says. the ringing of a buoy rocked by
waves, a body collapsed in watered velvet. i would know her if i opened my eyes; i would know
that woman, the open and closing of her mouth.

waves reel against the stark, the forest damaged and worn. oh darling! duchess rushes forward
and embraces her, her skirt filling with air like a parachute, her face twisted in a horrible
expression. *i don't like to make phone calls*, duchess says.

darling presses her chin to her chest, eyes dropping, tongue aimless. *the widows want a third girl,*
darling says. trouble scatters every timid cloud; she said she never saw them coming towards her with an ax. a strange thing for her to say. a strange thing for her sponsors to decide.

_i never trust old wives_, says duchess. i used to be afraid, but not anymore. i am still here; i cannot stop hearing the sea rushing into the whale, the shrieks of star shaped fibers.

a few crumpled papers and stripped screws swept under the furniture. 
a glass of water on a saucer with two blue pills. 
a steep booming sliding through the house.

_it was her_, says darling. _hammering on the door_.

10.4

the sound gets louder and louder.

i don’t like the forest. i have to get back to the house before night. i have to give myself time. if i had enough time i would retrieve the ax and put it back in its place. in the evening, sometimes, i can see duchess standing in the window. when i see duchess waiting by the window i get worried. i don’t like to see her struck and disturbed by the sea. her purposeless watching, continually guided by visions of distant objects. her voice clutching, _crying is anyone out there?_

when i came to the house i had nothing but a suitcase. i had a suitcase packed with a plain cotton dress, an ordinary blouse and pleated skirt, a scarf, a handkerchief, a vial of lavender scent, four pairs of underwear, a wide brimmed straw hat and a pair of kidskin gloves, as well as socks and such embellishments as i’d collected. i have never been back to the city. i presented myself and i had very little. the house and its furnishings swarmed all around. duchess won’t tell me why
she sent for me but she is tender and i am commonly used to her affection. for me she has an
endearing name of little. she adds to me and i am affected; i feel beautiful, and correct. it is the
small she is inclined to be fond of; the house, surmounting her ambition, she has mostly closed. i
am a gentler kind of beast.

i like to listen to the wind. there could be a message; i might be brought a sign. i am prepared for
whatever; i am at my best. i let the house guide me: there is discretion within its walls, and intent.
from the doorway i am thrown into her arms.

10.5

there! duchess says, pointing out the window. there. i saw her. i know i saw her. i'm sure she was
there. standing among the trees, so firm in herself, draining light from withering stars.

she kept looking into the fire.
she kept staring into the fire.
i saw her in my dream.

fire all around, transposed over her face. a girl engulfed in bashful shadow, a flicker shaking across
her silhouette, spreading through a wilderness of globe and atlas, model ships and toy soldiers.
too eager, too anxious to vanish; the force of fire ascending the stairs.

i do not want to hear anything about my habits, duchess says. she spent all afternoon draping every
mirror and painting. her small economy unnecessary; going without is something she can fake. i
do not want you to think i am dirty. everything came back to her, the key on the coffee table and
the ax buried deeply and sweetly near the shed. dust, duchess says loudly, dust.
say you haven’t seen me, darling says, pushing open the door to let the cat out. she moves cautiously, as if to shield herself. her nightgown frilled at the wrists and covered with pink rosebuds. she moves, not just forward, but up. on her own, she moves, not missing anything. she can fill the house with her presence just by strolling through the halls.

duchess hits the window with her fist. there! duchess says, drawing air and shouting and gulping and shouting. the glass is very fragile, and in a blinding moment it shatters; a scrape and clatter and a torment to her. duchess says there were other windows. darling fetches the dustpan and kneels near the edge of the scattered glass. her lips move against the dusty shafts of light. a person can get tired of the sea.

duchess sucks out a shard of glass, concerned with her own carelessness. stillness might save her, and crowded furniture. a tide of light has pricked her and drawn a little bit of blood. the glass had been cold and cruel to touch! i know this is real, duchess says, swelling—-a bloated spider.

darling fills a space, a position. she still can’t recall the word; she is still seeing fire. it is getting late, duchess, darlings says, taking her from the room. i am going to leave the door unlocked. i can’t lock it because duchess lost the key.
my collection of warning signs: the wind barking all night, a black cat, long as a clothing line, sprawled across the entryway. nothing i can easily avoid. duchess is calling from the stairs, beyond the reach of an outstretched cord. i'll have to take a message, draw away to reveal the empty room. i listen carefully; i am elsewhere, familiar space rendered awful by the absence of a woman sitting, licking an envelope. an ache in every object for a function and a purpose. i walk into the scene. when i got the phone call i knew i missed the mark. the shot left me in the hallway, restlessly shifting my weight. this ghost has extravagant foes.

i know that the roof will come crashing in, that the sea could sweep into the drawing room, efficiently extend the deadline. i press nearer the fire, as if the cold has unsettled me. it couldn't be my body, burned beyond recognition. i will show her. i will show how. i will show up and say see. she will sit here. it is warm next to the fire; watching the flames puts me into a trance. i'd like
to cut off my arm. something forces me to move, to take a marvelous step. i unfold the letter i’d
folded six times; when i’ve looked at it long enough it should be burned.

less than an hour has elapsed. fire falling from everyplace, tattered wallpaper blending and
clashing with the room, the rooms beyond this room. i don’t want to look anymore. something
made me take it, the weight wrong in my hand, unbalancing me. i only asked for a lock of hair. i
almost left it behind; i went away and came back for it, a tiny bundle like a puppy’s tail. it takes so
long to walk up the stairs. the sea, the forest dominate the house. there is a resemblance to an
edge, emptying the stars of light. i want to say there is not an edge, that the sea starts below the
cliffs and continues, but somewhere everything stops. the house is not an orchestra; the cunning
of beasts does not concern it. i hope i won’t be recognized; i hope that i can find a way of moving
through this wall.

11.2

using the window as an amplifier, she calls. i like to look at the ocean, don’t you? duchess says. the
waves mirth below, a better and different place, a great deep of ghosts scarlet, sea blue. is that
her? darling says, is that her? yes, says duchess, yes.

i want to talk about the devil, duchess says.

she advances, she advances. beyond the cliff near the sea, the house. the faint, inert shadow of
machinery looming across the wall. the light too intemperate to see closely, to observe her. you
are beautiful, duchess says. darling continues to stare at a point in the distance. the sea is visible
out there, a tiny speck, a vessel rising on calm waves. duchess vaguely follows darling’s gaze. it is
my dream, duchess says. darling stumbles, nearly falls, as she starts forward. her fall is absurd. sand
pours from her skirt in great draughts; she is half buried, half out. a nightmare, darling says, unable
to say why, she likes to be frightened, to recover from her surprise.

11.3

this is certainly a woman dressed for bad weather. duchess can never bring herself to sit still for very long. she picks up one tchotchke, then another, uncertain. that is her pose. she’s changed the lighting, and her hair, burnished black. her eyes seem to break free, like spiders that usually live under stones. when something goes wrong, it is always her responsibility and usually her fault. yet, nothing can disturb her tranquil closed mouth. an intimate familiarity surrounds her: through dress and appearance she is more ordinary, more indistinct than horrid suspicion will allow.

darling moves slowly backward, bumping into the davenport. sorry… she says.

there’s an awful lot still missing, says duchess. the house can be changed and developed, expanded and renewed. and then from the top to the bottom! and then duchess will raise her feet from the floor; throw her head to the side, as if the action were spontaneous, as if she were wary of her own vulnerability. many women would refuse to hold a minute. the shimmering of little lights is enough for them. duchess can see all that, can imagine the door forced wide open to behold a bright blue.

blood shoots to darling’s head. she will not make any more mistakes. she will not deny the dew that’s settled on the windowsill. she will hold the key in her hand just over her knee, as if she’d recently locked the door. she will be exactly like a sweethearth, scurrying from the room.

i think the weather will change, says darling. locating the correct lock has presented difficulties; too many unfinished hallways, walls uncommonly white. she might become more human, more blind
than ever. the wind has stood sentry for the last few hours; the sea uniformly smooth and soft, but the light falls differently upon the surface, burning the krill. later in the day darling’ll develop a headache and then she’ll have to open the window.

11.4

all day long darling is home. she is in one room searching or else sitting by the fire: it’s all reflections, no pure light. in her position she can go far away and stay home at the same time. her mobility super-colossal, without flesh. the transformation from the house to the sea to the forest is not the same as being everywhere. as here and elsewhere. darling stands on the threshold and cries, *leap up, white stallions!*

*keep, oh, so still,* says duchess. darling often faces the painful failure of success, the very repulsive prospect of her hair in a knot. these old walls built for other purposes. the right angle and the straight line must remain mysterious, curiously constructed. the house evades her own intention, the four walls reverse, open onto an endless thicket of stone.

darling shuts the last door on her way to the last room. has she yet met a wolf? all the trees here look the same. she has never taken a break, never scratched out her name from the list of household duties. darling sticks to the side, seeking out a way in. the land cracked open, a mist permitted to rise. she can’t depend on the path she took; it may stop, here. this tree isn’t at all the same; the sun crashes through the treetops, bowling over every bird. it is what she wanted, she knows herself well enough. she didn’t even hear her name called. darling could go back at any time, escape the ever-leaden sky, the smell of decay. *i can’t go on,* darling says, *i won’t stay much longer.*
darling wanders through the house, passing through the night, the universe contracting. she's not what she was, before. no temptation halts her progress; from the window she watches crowded trees launch their resentment against blackened walls, the tall chimneys bellowing to the sky. duchess only has to hear darling walk along, ghosts stirring where she steps; darling walks where no one should be, searching for a room without a key.

when she lost her way in the darkness she stopped to listen, with face uplifted, dreaming of things far distant, ships dropping off the horizon, voices locked beneath the sea. a single, bare light bulb glaring, her heart still beating da-dada-da. duchess has no reason to accuse darling, no reason to listen so closely. she is making a fool of herself, leaning out the window like that.

when i look, i have to see something. like this smudge on the floor: i know what that is. otherwise, flowers gawking in the window, drawing every bee. by evening i'll be bitten, swollen and swept on the shore. tomorrow i'll be dreading daylight - first i'll close my eyes, then i'll reach for clouds, stick stars in my hair. any damage is my own. i've decided i won't let her come near me. what is it about fire, urged into a cinder box.

she's opening her mouth - mouth open and eyes closed. duchess has gone cold without realizing. she has left the door open to the wind, the rain, the great house shucked by salt air crumbling about her. her silk night dress, little sustenance.
I had to have the key. don’t throw it away, duchess says. it came from up there, where the clouds mercilessly strangle the sunlight, the house strange and overcast. i was used. the scent of jasmine filled the room. her unearthly scream broke through - what was it if it wasn’t that? it could have been the wind, duchess says, surfaced phantoms displacing the wail, the camera
clocking her reflection in the mirror, scattering every shade. that painting is bad, says duchess. i don't want this receding light to stop, i don't want the dim low line to cease; there is not a house can stand against the rearing waves, galloping gradually to raise the blush her chastity denies, from which she is moving away. i almost knew what her wild staring was meant to impart; i can tell she can't really see me. duchess is used to spending her time alone, no rival for willful gazing out the dormer window. you don't have to stay here, duchess says and i recognize her animal spirit, the anxiety in the progress of her arms. i lay the key against her back to cure her and drop my hand to cover her mouth. for now, close your eyes, i say, my mind so sensible that i cry a little.

duchess dries my tears; she doesn't like to be observed in an idle occupation. what i want most is to be forgiven, to knock over the grandfather clock and shout you're dead! as long as the flowers on the sideboard are fresh i will continue to wander these halls, my hair glassy and gleaming like sand; i have wandered and found rooms disappearing, hallways lost as kittens, doors locked against interruption. i am surely drifting, i am used to the wind and rain, the water all over the place. it was foolish not to ask. will you? will you do it? i know you are a sensible girl duchess says - she is yet far from flattering me. i think the kettle is whistling, that fire won't make a difference: i know what it is like, columns of smoke and ash driven by the wind.

12.2
i wilt. a confusion of light settling in the wood; shadows dropping without any reason. something dark and ill-formed struggling to peel open my drooping eye - i was once there, a whirlwind of
dust running through table legs, kicking up cloth. i pass through, falling from deep to deep. i show myself purposefully, my chin resting on my chest. i have done everything to keep her away to keep her waiting.

in the summer, it is always the same scent erupting from the walls: drowned flowers, scolding the sun. darling has a secret hiding place. a place that belongs to her completely, a cloister of gleaming surfaces arranging the light.

how would you like to see the desert? duchess says. a heat that begins in the patient air and radiates through the body. darling has always been a strong, healthy girl. there is nothing like a mess of sand and stone strewn over thirsty flesh. it only makes the hours worse, looking out to sea.

i think, everything, darling says. the light from the windows rushes across the floor; hastens her heels. i won’t get lost, darling says. the hour so late that no girls are to be found drifting, bedraggled, swallowing moths from the air. the rain on the roof in the night--darling pulls aside the curtain and is surprised to see sunlight velveting the lawn.

when will these hands take their advantage? consider a séance. there must be something dull, relics that do no miracle. she would let go her tongue. she would lock herself in a room until the spirit rapped a dismissal. there, you see. somewhere in this room, a howl held together by spit and treacle.

12.3

a carton of milk left on the windowsill, attracting flies. darling notices that the couch has wandered away from the wall, tiny ships in disarray on the wallpaper. the couch doesn’t sit right where it should be. she’d been kneeling in the kitchen, scratching at a piece of linoleum. if she
found a stray strand of hair; she sealed it in an envelope. duchess had spoken of vaulted ceilings, about putting on her mermaid tail, the house submerged in swaying seas. the house broken in the middle. what i want to do, i have to do: smiling, waving, blowing a kiss. i have a threat to wield, a ritualized baring of the teeth.

fly paper spiraling from the ceiling fan, catching in her hair. she shrieks and pulls away, because she cannot speak. i found my key, darling says, drifting behind her, tied to a balloon string. i worry she will get lost: she needs language to play these parlour games. come on girls, let’s gather round.

this house is a little lonesome, almost like a real home. darling’s toiling in the heat, bleaching every counter. observing herself, she wants it to be real: the very day she buried the key she did not recognize the cat. she thought it hardly worth mentioning. the milk turned sour; the rooms between rooms were difficult to find.

12.4

lilacs spring through the mild clatter; she says the sounds disturbs her. the disruption of the sputtering sea, whining like a little brat. suppose nothing happens? says darling. she pants, bumps and squeals, ghoulishly digging among neglected flowerbeds, removing bottlecaps, headstrong weeds. she has to keep herself from getting too frightened--she has to battle her pulsing breath; it wouldn’t do for her to walk in like this. first, she needs to hear her own voice play back.

duchess has everything she needs. she walks around the room, lighting every candle. she will not be allowed to rest. are you here? duchess says. beyond this point a long corridor, countless doors and a single echo, eager to respond. are you there? and i call out, filled with the name. it is difficult for duchess to do anything but moan, her eyes striding forcefully.
in the summer, a cat napping on a stack of laundered sheets: a heat that swells and spreads languidly through the body, expelled as soon as she is able to speak. once her mouth breaks open so much departs; the secret too big for her-- how could she be ready. *i wanted that; i needed that*, says darling, tenderly pushing in her chair.

*i saw the way you looked*, says duchess. covered in creeping ivy, foxtails brushing against her kneecaps. some parts so rotten that the sound of an ache shows through. even in daylight, it is difficult to come down.

12.5 unsettled objects creep across the floor: the awkward movement of a sugar bowl, flies emerging from the spill. where nothing should be: havoc, and kittens drowned in a knotted pillowcase. a girl stomping in the mud, her skirt crusted, her home turning at the seams. darling doesn’t have to listen, doesn’t have to support the weight of this drowning white. she will pull out a clear sky, shout that there is no way through the wall.

darling moves faster than she should. past trees, pushing asides offences, uncomfortable in her dress. she isn’t going anywhere, she’s inspecting. the pipes are only clumsy, rinsed in red. the wires fashioned from matchsticks and tinfoil. the wind struck down and still, the dark hovering somewhere beyond, about to approach, to inquire. wistful that water would answer. darling is not so sure of snow. there is nothing but a crackle and a summit she can see falling towards her. she turns around and suddenly the footsteps stop.

there is nothing beyond the beginning; she is supposed to be here, trampling the baby’s breath. she doesn’t need to go far to find the mechanism, to take hold. darling is a little tipsy, scalding the spotless rose, taking her thimble to a toothed edge, startled to see all this sparkling, this enamel. she won’t touch a thing without wiping off her fingerprints afterwards. *i can hardly feel my hands*,
darling says.

EPISODE THIRTEEN / House of Deadly Night

13.1
duchess gasps, \textit{the cold}. the world beyond the windows goes on forever and ever; fades until there’s nothing left but the house, bloated and unfixed. she tries to imagine what she would look like if she were gathering the broken remains of a star. in her position she is different from the others, attempting to be true. duchess slides the bolt in the latch and lifts her hair off her neck, tempted to take off her dress. the sun will never reach her: everything is as it should be, her small preserve of marble and glass.

darling’ll bring in the heavy, putrid smell of the sea, clumps of knotted weed unfurling from her pockets; gasping, mouthless fish bludgeoned by her heels. she walks through the house, leads me through several rooms. her footsteps falling with a hiss. girls gather on the perimeter, swaddled in cobwebs, a cold sweat trilling over my limbs. a straight line is painted on the hardwood floor. the water trailing down her bare legs hardly moves her. i’ve never seen so many doors. \textit{don’t stand there}, darling says.

she waits. duchess rises before the phone even rings: she is vulnerable to interception, the noise of abandoned objects, an even and continuous roll. she makes plans as she cradles the receiver. around the mouth and eyes, an iron gate. a hard edge she perceives, flecked with blood. duchess taps on the wall, not exactly looking; listening. the sound is clear and tastes of tinfoil. a clamour not easily confined - could never be mapped, the slender whirl of whispers round the room.

darling thrusts her hand into the water, brings up a frayed piece of string. \textit{there was…} darling says. \textit{i had, i had a what}. a feeling that she is watched. an eye at the keyhole, lifting her spirits. an almost bottomless condition, crumbling plaster; water she can’t do without, baskets of laundry and a cat at the bottom of the trashcan. it is a hard thing to look where necessary. i can only think of kittens, a way to make room.
where will I put this? says duchess, gesturing towards the orange peels on her desk, her nightgown crumpled by the door. she will have to prepare. she will have to look good. she feels the pull forward; she enjoys it more than plunging in a knife. somewhere, a city all lit up. the pleasure of distance, and of beautiful wallpaper, embellished with gold.

13.2

duchess clutches her coat closed at the neck, bewildered by the curve of sweat slipping down her back. is this supposed to be here? she says. the unfrequented wood crossed with flickering lights, glitter lost in the crush of trees. duchess must check the tide: it should be impossible. shadows crowd the passage, the space she is certain of. the line of fur about her body: whatever is soft. pressing herself to the wall, thankful that the disturbance in the bedroom is forgotten. darling stretches out on the couch, her head tilted so that she can see the moon through the window, upside down. the stars tonight are very, very still. she pulls off her earrings and drops them into a teacup swiftly, neatly and efficiently. duchess refuses to look: something outside has captured her. something bound in strange, seductive words. her eyes track the reflection of light on water, the invitation of the sea's gesturing waves. salt aches in her; a little; her legs continue to tremble.

the letter she had left on her dresser is gone, yet she will insist that nothing is missing.

this time! this one time! duchess says. the ocean does end: a dryness that begins at the outer edge of her lips and moves its way onto her tongue. it is unclear if she has swallowed the sea, the sarcophagus. she sometimes resembles a woman fighting with a fish, cupping the waves between her palms; a woman delivered from her distress.
duchess is leaping toward the window, trying to locate a ghost, the one she is always introduced to. a ghost that will rise instantly in darkness, that will leave no marks. it will take her a long time to remember the name, to yield to a voice carried over the phone. she has already moved all the hangings around, torn the nails from the walls herself.

darling stands up on her toes to reach the ceiling, the sun. trying her way, listening without vision. to a room, darling says pleasantly. or what's left of it. the easy way she wears her long, cold stare: her mouth moves horribly, spits against the wind.

13.3

nothing stirs in the house but quick shadows, blowing blossoms across the dining room. the light that never was needs to be satisfied. the key feels cold in her hand; her abdomen sprouting white fur.

darling rests her head against the doorway and the wind streams down her back. her mouth curled and sharp like a scimitar. her head bent against the light, her pale stockings stained red at the feet. she'd felt the futility, closed her eyes more tightly, a roar pounding in her ears.

darling skims over to the chesterfield and throws herself upon the blue cretonne, motioning for duchess to sit beside her. her eyes dart momentarily to the door and then return to settle on duchess' face. duchess had been standing on a chair beside the window, hardly breathing and cold all over. how long do you wait here? says darling.

duchess makes a little bleating noise and says nothing.
darling rises; she has met this burden before. the sky glistening white, the trees pillowed with clouds. she is still a girl, made reckless. she hurls herself out of doors, her knife clattering to the threshold, forgotten. directed by the sun, she heads down to the water. where her hand dug into the sand and withdrew, the gleam appears.

13.4

underneath the bed, a tangle of fishing nets; mice strapped in a swarm of silk. darling sorts out the crumbs and small fragments of glass, tossing them into the wastebasket. she could stay up all night; how could she get bored among all this disorder. tell me what's happening, she says.

duchess has to keep listening, eager for the wind to drop a human sound. her modest hand at her throat, her quick steps away from the light: a blind circuit left in ashes. it is always the same girl, over and over; the fragrance is enough. duchess has a proper manner: she will answer when she thinks it time. otherwise, clomping upstairs in her dear little heels, raging with her ring of keys. a command: touch me, i'm flesh. i'm here. i draw my breath - i am calling; i can hardly continue without skipping ahead. i should be in the dark, empty water, my white bed sheet spread out to the sea, the waves singeing my skin. i am skin, with spangled light: the beauty of a belly ache.

duchess circles the room as if searching for something. when i'm lonely, i think of you, she says. her pocket full of red, a glistening lick of equal weight upon her tongue. she has spent too long studying the sea, the ashen light that curves along the surface. she would have the corridors chopped off, the doors sealed shut. the emptiness of a hundred rooms. i used to stroke her hair.

darling doesn't notice at first that she is soaking wet. she sits staring, oblivious to the sound of
the bell. closer and closer and her eyes swell like eggs; closer and the smell of tuberose, an
impulse in the air. she sucks in her lips and bites them, her crouching, leopard mouth: the moon
on the water, the moon swallowed and returned safely to the sky. her yellow mouth, her nose
running, the birds motionless in the trees.

i'm going to close this door, says duchess.

13.5

the night puts on a ghoulish mask, the wind tapping at her bedroom window, hovering over her
bed, waiting for her to wake screaming. darling fails, dreams instead of dresses wandering snowy
white palaces, dresses without women. dresses dangling in the morning sun, a flare of light
erupting. no more tonight, and darling wakes, moving her hand to cover her mouth. a pit of black
that keeps her from speaking; such the vulture of love. she forgets as soon as she rises. she holds
the doorknob in her hand and feels the warmth drain out.

i came up to see what you are doing, says duchess. she makes a little pirouette in the hall and puts
her hands in the air and says, all it needs is a coat of paint!

i don't know what i saw or heard, says darling. the morning painfully frail. the phantoms no longer
smoothing out the lawn. darling sensible, anxious to keep the wind from her hair, to prevent it
from putting out the fire.

do not touch it! says duchess. do not ever touch it!

back to reading, sitting by the window. summer spreads across the room, grown tiresome. the
heat must be removed: darling cups it in her mouth and spits it out the door, her tongue crackling, a spirit caught in her teeth. she steps back, turns this way and that: cleaning, dusting and airing. duchess pauses by the door for an instant to listen then passes down the stairs. restless sounds, polished silver and a mist gathering on the floor. darling won’t rear up against the ocean today.

the scene in the forest: empty as usual.
the wind hesitates at the threshold, crouched low and hidden. darling counts every dowel as she walks down stairs, her hand slipping along the banister. there is something missing, an absence marked by roses. a lump of roses, made quickly. the sea so terribly out of the way. i am patient, i watch this again and again. darling walking, never even knowing. she has improved, the errors she makes are different. she hasn’t mentioned the basement. a twined root disturbs the balance, causes interruption. causes darling to howl, *it means so much to you! it means nothing to me.*

something there in the trees, twittering. something there in the sky, suspended over the house.
her heart will burst, sweat and twist in her throat.

i will forgive her. _show me you forgive me_, i say. there is something beyond the wild. darling looks into the fire, the very brightest part. it is getting dark and all day she’d done nothing. she looks, and she doesn’t hear a thing. she looks into the fire and she is coming from a long way away.

there is a difference in the flame that she doesn’t understand.

i know where i am, of course. i start at the beginning, desperate to claim a patch of darkness. i know my way around this house. i know where she keeps the sugar and the salt. i let her speak as if i wasn’t here. especially her, that girl caught in a blind circuit of cats and moss. i am waiting for her to appear in the window: the interval is almost painful.

14.2

gathering clouds, blushed with sunlight, a lattice of spider webs clamped over my mouth. there is nothing, nothing, this hallway never used. this hallway sorry it has to be kept a secret. i have spoken numerous times of waiting, and may i say i am very pleased to change my withered dress.

yes, that’s what you do, you run away.

don’t think i don’t know that you took my key, i laid it to rest there and then took the light bulb out. i know that lamp is the lamp from the drawing room and not that one in the cave.

why did you scream out?

hard to push past this darkness with the light bulbs all undone and my fingertips raw, but i glide my hand along the wall. i know the entrance will yield, that i will fall through, discovering what
fire has not destroyed.

a hollow bloodless wild, turned cold. i am satin fish, sleaze of silk. the house empty, pulsing with shattered glass - reversing the light of the sea. ships lost in the window frame, sunken love letters thrust through the deep. i need these small domestic noises, questions that are expected to break. you say the key matters: almost too much. i can’t pick one room without it; i will never get away. the mouse hiding in my shoe will do the work for me, shine towards the spare and straight.

it is convenient to keep looking. i left this room empty but for a sheet of paper wrapped around a candle, the ceiling breaking out in flowers. i am still careful. i twist the bulb in the socket, cry when light pierces my flesh.

14.3

duchess and darling discover the moon is full instead of reaching their rooms and turning out the lights.

a silver lace, a small and compact moon, a distance vast and almost empty. the lawn drenched, shadows rustling to get out of the way. move, says duchess, pushing darling out of the house with her fingertips. trees surround the house, stars shuddering in the sky. darling stands on the beach, waves barking at her heels, her face tilted to catch the moon swaggering between thin chimneys ornamenting the roof like birthday candles. her features fallen in the dark, nothing still or silent: droves of whales bellowing in the night, her tongue audibly peeling from the roof of her mouth. darling wonders what’s so urgent about the moon. she stops at the tide, long white beards waving at the tide, her voice carrying over the sea. i can go without water, she says. she returns slowly, mindful of the interior; the routine.
at first, darling does not see it at all. the door is nearly always firmly closed. do you know where these stairs go? duchess says. what is there - only a wall. the haunted, twitching boards: a creaking loud enough to drown the cats and garbage. at the top of the stairwell, three closed doors. in her hand, a key she has been given. she does not even notice the shadows plunging down the stairs.

beyond this room, only more rooms, says duchess.

14.4
darling can’t help looking into the glass hanging at the end of the hall. every time she passes she catches herself going by, a reflection cast upon the place of her. otherwise, the path from her room to the sea is very predictable and appropriate. darling and her shadow stroll the same way, gliding from the hips. once there, she wanders the beach either bored or desiring to play the piano. she would like to be shipwrecked, castaway; then she could admire the sea air, released from the spectre of the big, dreary house behind her. she has given up the search, feeling other to a watching presence. she will wait; she will, perhaps, break into flame. beneath the sand, there are lost things hidden, things blown here by a storm, bloated and bitter things thriving under her feet. darling takes no notice of them; she paces, lurching in her dowdy dress. she is still spinning when the waves come and douse her in salt, startling her chattering skirt.

at the cliff’s edge, the house rises abruptly. a house like a worn old cat, used to carelessness and neglect. miles of light stretch along the corridors, united by radiance and heat. duchess has been unable to sufficiently escape, turning again and again to the limit of the window, wondering what has become of her curious feeling of having lost something--an absence made worse by her smile. duchess is restricted entirely to sound, her last call collapsed in the space between regions:
a failure she recalls with great fury, the telephone smashed against the wall.

the house tightened at the corners, lewd bells shedding their weight in the partition between land and manor; the windows closed and severe.

i might find something terrible - i like to listen, troubled and frightened. i’m looking for something to happen that will change everything: the darkness at the edge, pared down. i use her as an example: i pull her hair back tightly, slap her face. i confess that, until i started watching, i was alone with my instruments, occupied by the water’s edge.

i deserve my own name.

i have been sincere.

i walk constantly behind her, circling steadily. she might do something while i am not looking, and then i will cry. in silence, i wait for her to return.

duchess continues gazing at the ocean, following a ship for awhile with a long, cold stare. when the vessel drops beyond distant waves duchess turns away in panic, shutting her hands in her pockets. duchess does not belong out there, among the birds scattered through the trees, shaking dust from their wings. they make their nests in vapor: she simply sits with folded hands, staring into space, thinking purposefully of bodiless monsters gleaming in the dark sea, many species mingling near the ocean’s surface, veiled in the deep, so low there is no sense in looking for them.

darling holds out the air, puts a breath between her hands. the problem is in finding a way to move forward once the fire has been put out. to stop the flames before they reach a wild place. to stop the sea from colliding. darling has tried to smother the snapping flames with the swamp
of her skirts… she has a picture in her mind of the house at night, aﬂame from end-to-end.

14.5
duchess makes a list of every window, and notes whether they are open or closed. something is changing, and a chill strolls in from the forest, settling about her like a cloud. the cat isn’t where she left it and the fruit in the red bowl in the center of the table is bruised. she will have to go out and come back in again.

after she is done counting, there will not be champagne. she will be tired, withdrawn. she wonders when she will be delivered of this task: the outcome is uncertain. the windows seem to multiply and disappear at once. it is not easy for duchess to pass through so many narrow doorways. in the staircase, she feels gravity drop, then rise swiftly and pull back, dragging blood from her head to her toes. as if the sea pursues her.

darling did not follow when duchess left the room. she sits swaying in her seat, her head bobbing, a litany simultaneous with the sunrise.

duchess scrawls the number of windows so far on the wallpaper and stands back, nearly colliding with the cat dancing next to her. she leans to pick the cat up and as she presses it to her body she notices a window she hasn’t seen before and tallies another hatch mark on the wall. what she has added is color, and transparency. i wish i knew what was left, duchess says.

there is no one to stop duchess from moving in and out of every room, even those rooms in the closed off wing. yet, she has to be careful, starting over again and again, avoiding the floorboards that chatter, the worn rugs that must be gotten rid of. she moves without regard to walls, keeping her eye fixed on the white spaces lingering in each room, like a hole punched out. she is
not where she should be; it is not daylight that has caused her to lose her way.

d this morning is not as bitter as darling thought. her face shows the reaction that is needed, the source of her complaint. *i stare at the sun every day,* darling says.

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**EPISODE FIFTEEN / House of Many Doors**

15.1

crack her lips, her smile split in three. darling swipes blood with her tongue, tastes pennies rattling in her throat. turning aside, she returns to the search: the hallway rather long. it has a rug thrown across it and it is very tight. she walks right on. she can be very small, she can
be silent and unnoticeable. she is already familiar with this hallway; she has described it, sneaking all around her. the path itself continues to grow. oh yes.

she isn’t in the right place; the light will never fall out, the dark will never fall in. she is here to stay. it would be impossible not to feel her own weight. she taps against the wall, communicates on that level. she wants to know what the house will do once all the lights are off. she likes to make a fuss, to emit a little yelp.

still, she rarely listens well.

she’d like to get away quickly, without tossing the rose petals on the hall carpet. she is already distracted by a lump under the rug that refuses to sort out. it is like i’m not even in the room. all she does is stare and fumble, nothing pleasant.

*keep staring, darling*, duchess says.

continually entering through the wrong door, darling skips around the afternoon. she is dressed to greet an inquiry but there will be no interruption. contrary to the course of the sun, she follows the sea. she ought to know the waves won’t bring the key back to her. she has no trouble in finding duchess, over and over again.

*yes, darling - always*, says duchess.

i slip around the corner, moving an eye around my wrist. i check behind the curtains. it might have been darling.

she might get broken or she might get lost. ash mounted in a clam shell is the stuff of her legacy.
don’t look, darling - let it go. these stairs show no sign of use. there is nothing ordinary here, nothing dull. a mirror with seaweed draped over it, a girl preserved by salt.

she can move.

she can remember.

she can talk to me.

15.2

everything has been fairly quiet. darling serves coffee with lemon peel, reluctantly taking a view of the lawn laid wide, shrouded in light. a figure darts out of the wood. it is too far away to see clearly; the wind, uncertain, flings a tumult of leaves across the window pane. the figure follows the line of trees, an expanse that withdraws, swallowing the field.

it is easy for duchess to observe the gradual progress of the figure across the lawn. it hurries as if equipped with new technology, threatened by the empty green sprawling toward the wood. duchess swirls her spoon in her cup, irritated and embarrassed.

i wish i knew where they were heading, duchess says. they could be moving near the house. there is plenty of room. there is room to hide and room to get lost. there is nothing like a closed door.

darling sighs, the issue of her prayers dancing next to her. all the trees decked in gold.

a vapor wraps around me. i need a place to lie down, where no possible injury can be done. the trees circle on their own, gathering armfuls of flowers, ferns. i count my fingers: one, and more than one. i miss the trees that haven’t returned, old patterns struck in moss. i have something to do here, if i can wait, if i can find a way to start a fire. the distance from the house to the forest
can be wide. it can be filled with heavy stones of rain. my hands work busily.

at the entrance, a curtain falls and a light is lit, a faint half-flush. all wind and water stops. duchess searches for a key, worried she will not know it, that she will not recognize the peculiar shape. the key is on the windowsill, filled with mourning, dark and small.

darling can’t put it together. the light did not come from the house. duchess sits next to her and takes darling’s hand between her own. darling says, i don’t know where i am. duchess drapes her head on darling’s shoulder. darling tries not to move, sure that her handkerchief is crushed in her pocket, that feathers clog her throat. she is close to correct; her problem is in assuming there is more.

the close smell of an animal enveloping them, a thick warmth and the shudder that comes at last.

darling dries the dishes, terribly repelled. her dress weighed down and her knees pressed together by the cloth. duchess rises and says, when will you disappear? and darling decides not to answer at all; instead, she looks for the key, concealed by the folds of the tablecloth the dishes are stacked upon. when she finds it she bends her head and continues her interrupted work.

15.3

the house is bigger, more silent and more boring than ever. nothing appears changed. the clouds predominate, the house entirely subordinate to the sea. these do not make the atmosphere into what it is.

duchess squanders time at the window. she is placed against the sea by the window she has
selected. the waves change continually and the more she looks the more amusing the patterns
dashing across the surface become. darling wonders how she can sustain this. she wonders why
duchess’ eyes don’t blink; she wonders if duchess will cry, and if her tears will only add to the
mirth of the waves below.

darling notices a fine layer of dust on the floor that wasn’t there before. the dust is not
fascinating in the way of water. it was no function but accumulation. darling will not kneel in her
stockings today. she walks across the floor and observes the footsteps left behind her.

duchess feels the unsupportable weight of the day allowed to waste, the powerlessness of her
occupation. she feels she ought to suck on stones, but the scene holds her, transfixed by endless
damp. the waves are not alike in shape. some ascend and some drop below the still-water line,
too weak and pale to occupy space as well as height.

watch the moon. the moon will change colors, and you know what happens next, says duchess.

darling faces the window, suffering terribly. there is a false bottom to the ocean where she has
hidden the key. it was difficult to throw away. she did not want to go out into the rain. she had
stood in the sand in her kidskin shoes, her lower limbs crossing and recrossing, until she was
released.

15.4

ridiculously easy to hold the house intact. a little oil, a melody hung in ivy. everything i can find
garnished in salt. it is too cumbersome to figure out the rules: i endow more horrors! more
toads and snakes.
darling might not recognize the house, rendered almost invisible by the thicket, so little spoken of. the sight of the lone house on the hill should have sent her into hiding. moving sluggishly through woodlands, unable to hurdle stone walls. i would not have hurt her. for her i have the tenderest affection. i have gathered the opportunities that have presented themselves, passed them on to her. she has a hundred, thousand keys - the house will be a better place. she will stay long enough to make sure the door is closed tightly. to ensure the house is kind to her.

15.5

darling flips the switch and the lights flick on, fill out the room. strange shapes leap around her, bend over her head, drawn by the slick scent of her skin, sucking up her violet stink. she casts her eyes over uncertain space, glides into a corner and stops. she pauses to take a breath and she stops, unable to move. for awhile she is unable to move, and then she goes back over her steps, holding her gaze steadily on the spot she’d stopped, attempting to persuade herself she hadn’t seen anything at all. before she can reach the moment, the lights go out and sink her in extensive black. she’d thought she’d saw a tall, white gleam; a gigantic proportion shining full. she stops to listen and she hears a door closing, the horrible crack of a socket igniting, the figure of the moon drifting through the window. she follows along the wall, and succeeds in reaching the stairs.

i find myself there and i feel compelled to follow her. the air soft and languid, the sea lifting salt into the air and a bird drifting, calling the forest from sleep. never before have i felt such serenity. the next episode will come, an answer will be provided and i will understand, if i keep close to her; if i watch carefully. i am with her and she does not know it. i belong here and she does not
know it. i am close enough to hear everything, how pleasure slips over and the ocean inhales, slamming the door. i hate to forfeit the places i've already looked - the small and unnoticeable house plants, great whales going by, silver scattered on the waves. i've seen them before and i can't recall where but i am familiar with small objects, pine cones plummeting from tall trees. despite the uneven surface, i think i am through; the key must be somewhere in the house mixed up with her things, it will never disappear. i throw out my arms to catch the salt air. i am afraid to succeed, afraid to find out, again, that i've lost the opportunity.

darling must be cheerful. in the morning she works on the house. she puts everything in order, she stacks the teacups, she neatens the garden. the movements she makes, not only in cleaning and watering and washing, but also those made by her lips and her breath, have wasted and worn away her blood and bones. an orange may be a luxury but real success depends on decoration, floral arrangements and lighting. she must know how and when and wherewith to accept a proposal. water and air are vital, but they will not stay; they do not warm her. the charred remains of all substances, the milk of certain animals are bound to have a definite place in her way of living. on all occasions, under all circumstances and at any time of night she will be ready.

i look out of the window and watch as the waves suck back, white froth coiling and leavening; suddenly her face appears as if she is here, shining and beautiful! i have never seen her so clearly, so near. my heart, bloodthirsty, beats and i start to whisper. i whisper her name, i say her name against the glass, i say her name and i am ungovernable. i try later to call her, again, from the sea, but she will not come. i press my lips against the windowpane and tell myself, this is holy. i kiss the glass again and again until a fog rises upon it, a muted symphony of skin cells flecked with flossy spit. it is holy, i say. i use all my time thinking of her.

a frightful weight slips over darling's body, pinning her to the mattress, and a voice breaks over
her, a wave upon the shore, sending prickles all over her skin. she can scarcely raise her head. she screams, but there is nobody to hear her, and her hands are useless, shackled at her sides. this is deliberate. there is ugly purpose here. o! she says. this time! this one time! deliver me from this torment! or tear out my throat! and she screams again and again, thinking herself dead.

the blood cracks and hisses, the fires cling ascending, caught in her hair. she opens her mouth and the flames pour; she closes it and they sink into her belly, and still she shouts, and the sea roars, and the birds in the trees look on, their dull whisper moving in the clouds. she shudders and clasps the windowsill, the first decisive movement reeling across the sky, a multitude of feathers dashed into the sun. she drops her eyelids and a hand holds them open; she echoes the litany and falls gasping by the window, the cold.

her diary, her makeup, her conversation. she imagines her death. she imagines herself, her death. her impatience. she has had the pleasure, she sighes. she locks away her possessions. her diary, untidy and undisciplined. her pain and anguish have strange power. she starts out of the house, she confesses her innocence. there must be a diary. duchess springs, begins searching. behind books on the bookshelf, in the drawers of the writing desk, inside cushions, under floor rugs, behind the dark painting over the fireplace, among the plates on the sideboard, in the wardrobe, in the dirty linen, in the kitchen cupboard. i'm afraid of looking. the diary which is here. it looks nasty, duchess says.
darling sits crouched at the bottom of the stair, her skirt tucked expertly under her knees, a book balanced there with the pages fanned, her arm drifting, suspended, fingers curled towards the palm. her face turns, surprised by the figure mounted at the top of the stairs on the floor above, duchess wearing a shabby black cocktail dress, her features altered since the last moment.

*i made a mistake about the number*, duchess says, and then turns.

darling rushes forward and everything begins to shudder, flowers caught in disarray, her hair
upset, strands clinging to the long gold chain circling her neck. she lifts her hands as if she could stop the door from closing, if she is quick enough, if she is in time. duchess yawns wearily, settled in her coat, ready for the rain to start falling.

darling stands at the edge of the spotlight, the toe of her pointed boot nudging aside the compass, as if she could convince the encroaching dark to split its tightening fist. do you hear me? she says. from above, she is very small, no more than a girl in a dress that has gotten too long, and the black birds in the tree laugh a little and then return to preening their miserable feathers. the iron fence grows ever tall and cold and the tree's leafless branches seem merely a chaos of shadow, overthrown and confused, at the bottom of the hill.

i smell salt air, darling says. she can't keep watch from here: the things she needs to see are so far away. she should not have left.

the house unfolded at the middle, two wings multiplying: more windows and chimneys than a girl has use for. darling is always running around in her best dress, wearing only one shoe, the other held tenderly by a strap. there is a path peppered with fallen leaves and a way towards the house but she turns and continues turning, a circle growing smaller as she spins on her bare foot, a great volume of silk swirling around her shoulders like an astonishing sea creature. don't go, she says, but it took her too long to recognize the effect of light moving furiously.

the grey flattens all that there is, dulls what might shine. darling sits waiting with a box perched on her knees, sitting doing nothing but staring at the crack in the ground that spreads out before her, a crack that splits in two directions, a jagged movement that halts before it gets too far. she could watch the progress of this cavern and wait but she's done enough watching and waiting.
she rises and all kinds of flowers crowd around her and voices in the background come close, reminding her to hurry. she tucks the box under her arm and shakes back her hair.

darling goes and dumps herself against an outcrop of brick, tossing the box to the floor, folding one arm over herself and grasping her elbow with her hand. the wall in its coarse coat of grey, water stained and salt worn. she remembers that something happened to her here. she tells herself a new version of events, that she is glad she’s decided to return, despite the hank of shorn blonde hair hidden in the box. these contents are suddenly precious to her; it is not possible but now it is the truth.

16.2

we are all inside, thick with shades. duchess is the one who speaks the least. darling preoccupied by the problems of the house, the malign workings of ghosts. she will outwit her shadow. the contents of the house are apparently entirely haunted by spirits drawn from the past. we have been taught and persuaded to survey the sea continually. the house is surrounded by green precincts, bathed in shivering light. if duchess does not move away from the window, she will stir the devil beyond the precipice. the broken crag. the blood on the floor and open door do not explain such brutality. i must constantly watch, to see what they are up to. their brief, helpless struggles expose their own fraudulence. the first attack commences with a ruffling of the surface. words are forgotten and whispered, retrieved.

there can be no forced entry; i must be gentle. if i were to become difficult, duchess would tear the lace at her neck and wrists.

16.3
the effects of wear have reduced the darling's dreams to a minimum.

waiting for something to happen, waiting for a result: darling bends over a staircase, looking into a broken mirror, a mirror dropped from several stories up. she'd wanted to see what would happen. looking at herself split, looking at the crumbling staircase split: infinitely rising. the misfortune of the dropped mirror: she enjoys looking at herself, a fissure as clear as a crack. she might take it as a bad sign but there is no necessity to take it as sign at all.

accidents happen, darling says. indeed, says duchess, you could fall into a hole you didn't know was there. a fall interpreted in many ways: it could be ignorance or uncertainty--it could be constitution or circumstance. duchess and darling have no way of figuring out the formula, of estimating the descent.

darling finds that she can't remember exactly how she got here. a dissonant passage has settled where the train suddenly vanished, abandoning her on the platform, cars passing under light then plummeting towards the dark. darling, making an effort to remember the details, pantomimes the train falling towards a cavity of sand, hoping that at least some images will be maintained by such efforts.

darling made her vigilant way from the station, dragging her suitcase halfway up the hill to the house, counting the chimneys without abbreviation--every one a headstone.

the sea had invaded the house - the doors swelled and perspired, wouldn't open; the sheets on the twin beds felt damp. a cat was laying in a spot of sunlight on the floor, slats of shadow making out duchess' strange, detached expression. duchess called to her darling, and as they stood in their bathrobes with the house towering around them, duchess effortlessly took the innards out
of a cat, giving them each a lung, saying, we are watched.

16.4

a day stirred by a devil. darling spent all the morning lying on the grass in front of the house, confined beneath the enormous maple tree. she is fond of living here. fond of the scent of rot in the soil, of latent shadows clinging to the wood, and of the scenery itself.

the house, sickly-flavoured, far from the city in which she grew up. from its windows darling can see the sea, great and wide, occasionally interrupted by boats passing to and fro. they have a right to return as she does not. as she is tied to the hour. as the hour lasts too long, at once present and absent. out of all the rooms, she is forbidden to enter the one that would lead her astray.

she would rather lie on the grass than acknowledge her love, disagreeably sweet. she often says that she suffers. she has an inclination to stay; she would never go from here to there. it is the transition she finds disturbing--she hopes she'll never have to leave.

beyond the house lies the forest, populated by uneasy birds, beasts massing under gentle pines.

innumerably delicate or broad, dominated by curiosity, full of sighs and squeaks which pulse in the air, sending their distant rumble to darling, an aubade now strong and now weak, as the waves are strong or light.

a long line of gulls pass the house. the sight of them gives her pleasure.
she has felt little sympathy lately, little desire to inspect the door that has been there all along. Darling stops pulling at the overgrown grass, wonders why she should get her hands dirty. she must endure every day that she has left, find comfort in the demands made of her.

she lifts her hand to salute the skein of birds, she hardly knows why. she walks down to the side of the water and suddenly, after gazing upon the impression of a body left in the sand, she returns home, certain that duchess is watching. why? duchess’s eyes pass over darling’s skin, cold as the wind that hurdles over the sea. everything she knows, everything that surrounds the house and everything inside the house, known and unknown, has an effect upon darling’s purpose and upon her vision of what will become. at any moment she is aware of her location; she has seen everything there is to see. she wonders when she will get lost: she hasn’t had a drop today. she hasn’t looked, encouraged by her obstinacy, unwilling to employ the threat.

darling has been very foolish with her love, and that is difficult to confess.

16.5

you’re not really here, i say. i don’t like losing track of where i am. i start again. she’s not ready to put her coat back on. i thought i’d take up haunting. i moved things when she wasn’t looking. i don’t know how to tell her i am not a ghost. i pull a rabbit from the fireplace. she isn’t ready and she doesn’t notice the rabbit leaping, quickly, from the room. i am really scared of everything. ashes scattered on the floor. 

where are the dead? darling says.

the house has always been empty, blanched by the sea and sun. she won’t recall the gestures i have made, lifting dust from the mantle so it glitters in the air. it is nothing to her. a black pool
has developed in her eye. it marks out the space where i stand, nested in the curtains like a spider. the outline of my body forcing its way through damask.

even in summer, the house on the cliff is cold. the sea speaks carefully, taking the opportunity to climb high rocks. washing away small piles of stones. darling sprawls by the fire, ruining her eyes. you shouldn’t read in the dark, duchess says. the sea rising, the water deeper and deeper. i move aside to make room for her, next to me. the walls crawling with flowers. the outlines of unseen knickknacks and curios lengthening, twisting. i see without seeing. i know something is wrong.

the chimney belts out a cacophony of black clouds, swelling until they obliterate the sky. the sea returns to low tide, the rocks damp, sweating; a sucking sound like water down a drain clogged with hair.
17.1

all this searching and collecting has lead to no solid result. the last of spiders thrust from the
dustpan, the staircase inspected, her hostility turned against a grime splashed against the wall. her
idleness at the mercy of the day. darling wonders how often she’s been wrong, how often she has betrayed the imperative to continue, how often abandoned her task, her face hanging from the window. what is she looking at out there? she knows such days.

such days are familiar to her. finally darling is able to rest, propping her elbows on the table, sinking a spoon in her tea. resolutely casual and careless, casting her dirty cup in a sink full of filth. she struggles out of her dress and drops it on the floor. it is hard to see what is going on.

i am present at all times, lured onward and forced back by the inconstant light, her refusal to learn her lines. i think of the different things i might do. the light smashing against the door, the light already set to move. if i wait here long enough, i will get something: i will shudder to a stop.

they look so small, darling says, gazing out the window. the waves recede; the same, again. she’s only seen old photographs of shipwrecks, unwelcome sailors disturbing the house. think of the clean linen, the stubborn mattress.

darling has known all along.

duchess holds the length of her hair in her hand and runs her fingers through it. duchess can keep doing this, over and over. nothing will stop her from staying exactly where she is.

17.2

duchess is satisfied to be still, to never go beyond the door. the only dignified course is for her to wait, to continue sorting handfuls of soiled brooches, untwinned earrings. the sea rolling outside, the forest collapsing on itself: her own shadow will not move out of her way. no, nothing: she is often content with silence, polishing the silver. she imagines the sea, a weight that has a hold over
her though she hasn’t been touched by salt, her body satisfied, her hair swept up. a kind of embrace that dissolves as she takes her next breath. she listens and she watches and the scenery is not what she wants to see. she leaps, pushing back her chair, her cup and saucer catching her words: sly! insinuating!

how long has she known the comfort of these walls? years and again years, the simple permission of abiding, assured that all light must travel behind. that rooms unmake themselves as she exits them. trailing after her, a squadron of empty space: she feels this is quite correct. she won’t speak about the voice, the chorus, the girl who ought to be paying attention. every girl is the same, duchess says. she won’t say that girls are necessary, but someone must go into the wood, down to the sea. darling’s hand pressed to her mouth, the storm wrought by invisible means. the wind summoned, that it might have its way: black debris crusted on the beach. the girl in this house tired of hanging around.

darling thinks of bile, the house yearning for rupture. that incomparable bitterness, held so dearly for so long. she won’t bother to recognize this room again: soon it will be gone. she thinks of the wind running alongside the house, the turn she has taken, walking around the room. a line around her mouth, a line she can follow out the front door. i made sure no one can get in, darling says, pouring duchess tea. a shadow jerks and scuttles, clashing against darling’s skirt, grooming the rug with its tongue.

somewhere near the sea, somewhere near the wood, somewhere the wind pushes back the tall standing grass, urgently dividing each stalk. when everyone else has left, i will still be here. a sequence i missed concerns me: i thought i could look away. the air wilting all around, a shiver that starts in my belly, shrivels with no issue in my throat.
the crude division of clouds, the sun allowed to plummet.

duchess spits out a nail. she will continue to be warm for awhile. duchess will have her way.

17.3

duchess is where she ought to be. the house is all there is. the windows squat below the eaves, the whole of what she requires: rooms lit between dark and dark. she is urged to face the water; her visions are of ships, gulls, clamshells tossed by waves. the sound of stones and shells tumbling in the tide temporarily make her forget her suffering. there is duchess and there is darling - there is no one else.

there is the air between them.

the moon tethered over the wood, the girl swaying between the trees, her figure struggling to shine. darling makes a fuss about everything she has to do, shakes her hair out wildly, spits onto the ground, refuses to mark the path. nothing but rocks and mud. the only thing for her to do is to find the key. she needs the day more than ever; these fading hours engulfed in light. searching the forest is a problem; she has to start over and over again. she has her body to refer to as well as the trees, closing around her. in the dark she hears the wailing, the trumpeting of widows over water. darling raises her head and stands there, staring, careful not to move.

there is a knife, a stone, a key, an ax. there is a cup and a noise that comes to rest in it.
i want the devil for a friend, darling says. from the dark there is no answer. from the sea no company. darling observes too much of nothing, trees yawning, a whispering of limbs, the damp that enters with the tide.

17.4

this vicinity, too close. all these trees, standing tall, without number. darling unable to warm her hands, chilled by the wind traveling through the wood, lash of salt in the air, her shoulders dappled with stars, with sand. she looks into the dark and finds it far from pleasant. soon she will know everything, she will return to the house with her pockets full of stones.

the moon has opened its eye, threatened to uncover her.

a tree strikes out the path. she sees that an ax is buried in the stump and so she is afraid, thinking of her unfathomed dream. feeling for the stone in her pocket, its weight sordid and necessary. she's always liked the woods, even when they fail to relieve her.

all this hassle over furnishings and knickknacks, broken machinery and pale speckled china. among them she has found herself besieged, her entire body harassed by the endless everything accumulating dust. darling thinks of the mess, the mistake of too much at once. there is duchess, presiding over each encumbered space, caressing the arms of the bergère, her dainty shoes propped on the bout-de-pied, lapping tea from her saucer. an increasing emptiness striding from redundant days, distraction and ruin carousing the corridors. it is the same whether she corrects
the flaws or allows them to swarm by millions. she thinks sadly of her body, sunk in the deep of
the wood, her body wrapped in a cloak of feathers, swarthy black.

she stands there a long time, and then, suddenly daring, darling gasps the handle of the ax, lifting
her arms above her head so that the alliance between the ax and herself becomes a wing
stretched out behind her. dazzled, darling grasps the edges of her shadow and brings it to her
lips.

darling returns to the house, dragging the ax behind her as she dragged her suitcase the day she
arrived, wondering at the great and terrible expanse of the house upon the hill, her figure trivial
besides its scowling facade. she has not deceived herself: she has experienced it; the house a
living ember, always pulsing and radiant, reminding her of the horror of the surface, the beloved
dead air of the void.

17.5

i look at the sea - the surface, shell thin, and i don't know why darling has returned, severed from
her shadow. it creeps after her, murmuring, smaller, less silent and less fluid than it was before.

she has broken her wandering, returned to the scene. she stands at the entrance, under these
conditions: a bell rings and continues to ring, forever repeating the same thing, as if its clapper
were walking in a circle. she must have done something right.
darling takes her shadow’s hand, saying you don’t lie and cheat the way duchess does. they walk together into the foyer; their footsteps tolling the parquet floor. her careless hand turns on the light.

i can’t see the ships clearly at this distance. they hover on the summit of each wave, then disappear.

it is not just water in the sea.

darling fumbles for a stone in her pocket, leaning the ax against the credenza. she knows what it is good for. the telephone, unable to contain itself, sounds the alarm.

darling decides to leave the phone right where it is.

i see the white spaces, trembling light where nothing is possible. the separation between the house and the land is suddenly much clearer. a flash that is hard to follow, difficult to master. there is no need for darling to be in the house; she ought to have something to do--the house insists too much on routine, on long moments of passivity. if i could summon her, i would send her back into the forest. i know where that cave is.

the tokens of the sea litter the floor. seaweed, fishbone, anchor.
this door has always been closed. darling is entirely sure: if she were to open it, she would ruin everything. it took her this long to uncover this one rule: opening the door is an impulse she can control.

duchess and darling stand back to back. their beauty is difficult to decipher. darling is fair as duchess is not. duchess faces the sea and darling undoes the latch.

when the softening follows, the replication of rooms will be multiple. this door a centre to which every other door is attracted, the closed off sections of the house gathering in reminiscence.

darling can’t continue past this point. she can stomp her feet on the floorboards, even scream, if she feels like it. her task forgotten, she can cease to search. yet there are tricks that duchess knows--she stands there with her eyes open. she never blinks. i can’t do that, darling says, and she puts her weight against the door.

darling has never come this far. she listens for the scurry of the boom mike flitting over her head, she looks at the wall where the relic of a tree wavers, flourishing its birds. she stares at the fireplace: it is agony, ripping into her. how will she sort through all of this? once she left the city she was lost, no longer who she was before.

this new thing.
duchess watches the sea; nothing changes, much. she wonders if she is drowning. there is water within the room; all she is, water. she can hear the fish inhaling, whales passing in the night. this is what she has.
darling forces herself to walk. She has the feeling that if she starts she will never stop, but she continues nevertheless. She moves along the length of the witless corridor, her movement stifled, overdone. There are not many steps she can skip: she uses the pattern on the carpet as a marker, to measure her progress. She stands, her reflection inverted in the crystal doorknob, wondering whether she ought to turn it, or turn away.
before duchess, the window shows a swatch of darkening sky. the cat sits beside her, suddenly
familiar, his back bowed in pleasure, a small fat fur rubbing against her leg. it can’t be! says duchess.
there is a weight in her hand, a wolf in her hand: it is a stone she pockets, cleverly.

the cat looks at her.

his eyes are very green. his eyes are always the same.

darling steps to the door and puts her hand on the glass knob. it is cold. it has never been let in
the sun. her shadow stands beside her, tamed by her hand. she ought to be in bed, she thinks. she
ought to dream, again, that things are actually starting to happen. what can you do for me? darling
says to the shadow. there’s got to be an end, darling says.

the cat snarls, concerned about a change in the air: a vibration that raises the hair on his back,
thunder disrupting the walls like rocks shaken in a tin can.

on the other side of the door, something scratches, somehow soft and relentless.

18.2

the sea, full of distance, a condition evoking a yearning to cross, to conquer fathoms deep. if the
roaring swells should overtake me, i would be satisfied. to be infused by salt. and if i thought of
what has passed, i would smile sweetly. it is already too late for me to be scared away.
i remember that i heard nothing myself. when i first knew something was wrong, when i saw that
the house was more than it should be. the house empty, but for darling and duchess, who were
little more than wretched. how easy it was to show them the way, to keep the door closed.

to see darling detached from her shadow, the polka dots running down her dress, the blush in
her cheeks a red stain slipping down her neck--a tongue. worse than drowning, to slowly melt, a
puddle of tinsel and borax at her feet. darling pacing round her bed, oblivious to any alteration:
she sees the path before her as it was yesterday, not as it has become.

down on the beach, a handful of seashells scattered this way and that: is there a pattern, a
purpose? darling will have to bolt the door, braid her hair from left to right. otherwise, what
might happen? the house holds in the cold, a kind of slickness to the walls, a gleam she can’t
escape. it is more than an accident. it is small clouds of breath held dearly, with pity.

i amuse myself by placing obstacles in her path. her confusion brings me flowers, a reason to
keep trying. the room beyond the door, of no importance. dust and heirlooms, a canticle of
spiders.

looking for a key, aren’t you? duchess says, pulling closed her quilted satin robe. vile thing, a key. she
turns to the window, to the howl of an unreleased wave.

if only darling knew where to look.
duchess closes the curtains at last. her silhouette flocked by velvet, a halo cast by a single unshaded light bulb dangling from the ceiling. and then what? i am always able to walk away from this.

oh bright window, bring me home.

18.3

the trees too cautious, branches withdrawn, holding in a spectacle of light and dark: a dappled bed of grass. the sky curiously low, the wind shuddering to a start, her hair skipping forward into her mouth. darling will have to stop, to stand as if eagerly awaiting the middle of the night. the blood in her body, shuddering. she follows the trail cut in the grass, barely recognizing the bushes that crowd around her: beyond them a thin whiteness shoulders out the dark of the sound stage. she walks and she wants to stop but she is urged forward, irreversibly.

i have seen her look surprised, a sequence of emotion altering her face. it is not unusual. she is often moved to desire, inspired to show a trick she is familiar with. her fistful of knives, her handful of pearls: how she tells the weight of water, the buoyancy of land. she doesn’t mind walking alone.

darling knows she is too fast, too early; her discomfort constant. there is a stone in her chest and something crushing the hem of her dress. she is never ready for what comes next. she calls and there is an answer from the night, from the sleepless stars.
she is given the warning; she is in danger.

the grass ripples under her heels, a carpet of artificial green. it isn’t safe for her to wait here, a
girl surrendering to necessity.

cut to the next thing; the forest frustrated by loss--an absence of birds, no message wielding a
saber in the sky.

18.4

the wind with sudden heaving: a response of surface to weight. the house stands solid, last
shadows creeping over the front door. clouds thud and shatter against the turrets, silvery wisps
sparkling, a collection caught in cotton. the keys, the keys and darling’s open mouth, salvaging the
bad lie, the betrayal. singing split end and then loud mouthed hooves along unsteady hallways.

i thought i saw something move, darling says, a rush of air disrupting the troublesome business of
the light. contamination meeting with a wall and one laugh--a signal without answer. darling can’t
keep waiting; she strikes against the wall, anywhere, looking for a way in. within the structure an
echo: wads of tinsel, shredded. she has an impulse to stop, to revise her last movement: her hand
moving through a flock of bubbles, shattering blood. carnage dripping down her dress and a gasp,
released, from her throat. nothing eerie about faded light, this dull dappling of the carpet. her
enjoyment over, darling fastens a handkerchief to her neck, to cover the marks a mouth left
behind.

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ashamed and ready to return, darling pauses at the double doors, eavesdropping on the sounds enclosed within. insects sucked through a wet tube, tongued. the suture of a threshing edge, unsettled snow dark with roars. let go and quick: bounding back, snapping radiance against the atmosphere. darling wonders why duchess ever wanted her at all, was it divination, or a decision? the heroics of kitchen gossip and a girl hanging: everything must be a result. from her lips a wail not yet ready, embarrassing admissions poised, unwelcome. the beast withdrawing, layering it's unwholesome self against the rug, a vibration expanding to fill the house: rubber and the belly. without pause, a piston. get me out of here, darling says.

18.5

it is hard to prove duchess has never left. she rarely has the feeling she is not watched; the air crowds around her, pulsing against her own body. a cold slip, a surge of bad weather. duchess knows there is wisdom in staying where she is. there are reasons why she doesn’t go outside.

darling often makes wild guesses.

the lawn is completely filled with worms.

the sea is very interesting to watch, but the feeling of the waves rushing is too much to take. something will go wrong.
watching is almost the same as being there.

it is an advantage of depth, exquisite stillness.

these are the risks of a mammal. the thrill of the walls moving in. duchess makes a fuss at the
window, as a signal. the water seems to rise, to engulf more space. there is less sky than there
was, and a tiny boat, drifting on the horizon. is that something to kill, over there? duchess says.
darling will have to climb the tree herself, holding the knife in her teeth. later, she will toss her
soiled dress into the bathtub, run the water over the scratches on her knees. vanilla and milk and
at last, a whistle. a warming within the walls; veil of steam, darling holding in her breath.

duchess makes the rules, and she will not waiver.
certain that she sees the stillness. the flat surface of water, interrupted for a pause: something there and not there, disturbing her sense of time. the waves unaltered, long enough to be defined
by their outline. It is easy enough for her to recognize that everything has stopped. After duchess has moved away from the window, a shadow strolls beneath the surface of the sea.

duchess will wait until tomorrow.

darling pushes open the door, going over the room, line by line. The furniture is as it always has been, faithful. The arrangement is not very likable, but it will do. The entire room is open to the influence of the window, where duchess stands all day long, gazing with an intensity that cannot be ignored. In the middle of the room sits the davenport with the coffee table before it. The fireplace in the middle of the room is burning, as ever--and the entire space smells of smoke and roses. *Is this my room?* Darling says. The space is common. She turns to the window, where the sea waits. *Will watching it make me a bad girl?* Darling says.

In her own room there is turbulence, discarded belongings; yesterday’s dress thrown over the lampshade, crumpled stockings kicked under the bed. The springs creaking like a ship, lost at sea. Darling has been lonely here, pretending she is stronger. Nothing can persuade her to turn out the light: she leaves it burning, pushing away the noises that won’t quite… that want some attention. Darling bites inside of her mouth, drawing blood.

*i think there is someone in the house,* darling says.
darling is sure that she is staunch. she has been completely motionless and compliant for the last few hours, standing in the sea and allowing each one to cross her, the apex of every wave dividing between her legs.

if she knew about the rusted battleships buried in the sand, she would be disappointed. some things i keep to myself: i sing, flip my tongue rather than tell.

i look at her, even though she hasn’t moved. i watch her as i often do. i shuffle in the sand, making noises that don’t quite reach her. the house on the cliffs above us is dark: duchess has been persuaded to turn out the lights. duchess is walking in the inner perimeter, holding up her skirts, stopping at each window, trying to find the best view, stumbling over globs of dark shadows.

there is something too close, near presence: something wrong. when i glance up, a glitch: long black hair hanging from a window. a stiff mountain, a poisoned comb. there is no one besides darling

and i am

and there is venom running down darling’s neck.

i am feeling wondrous, enormous pain.

i don’t realize it is blood until a drop begins to slip from the corner of my mouth. i wonder if it is enough.
a few minutes pass. are you there? says darling

er her body swollen, lewdly ripe, the flesh possessive of its organs. her body beyond lace curtains, candlesticks.

i am still grimacing

and grunting - it makes her nervous, now that she can hear me.

it feels like i am still biting her.

this throbbing, these symptoms. all the times i have made her nervous; i kept interrupting her pacing from room to room. i never have to answer. i know her typical activities--enough to last me a long time. i wonder if i can keep watching, all the way until the end.

my flesh has become warm. i can feel pain in my joints--startled, the crying starts with a wail and a whirlwind of dust.

a purple flume, her halted breath.

darling returns to the house despite the fact that it is still progressing. her hands are unable to move. there is a tight air in the corridor and a certainty that it will take her a couple days to recover. a paper moon, a paper heart, floundering in the fire.

her unwashed hair, damp from the fog.
some girls have fallen into a coma from such a bite.

duchess not really looking at the sea--looking at the window, the glass, the water caught there.

you have to stop, duchess says. sounds she doesn’t recall making, too concerned about the
possibility of broken glass. she closes her half-open mouth, sends darling to the only room she
knows.

the room alarmed and monitored.

duchess is regretting her vow. if she could leave the house she could have covered darling’s eyes
with her own hands, lifted her hair and wrapped it around her neck, snake of silk. duchess,
suspended between the roof and the floor, is no longer convinced that she can answer the
question. what happened here?

i was wrong about the pain subsiding. completely wrong. i have lived, hoping to be found, guiding
my light through the mist to the first granite stone. i have been here ever since, unable to contain
the scream: from my mouth comes a red dress.

some of it must be real. i can’t believe this, otherwise.

darling limping down the hallway, walking on sharp stones, bare feet. her tendons severely
stretched as if used for the first time. she did not expect her inclination to cry.
she was quite nauseous, but that has passed. soon darling will go to bed wondering whether she will wake tomorrow experiencing something completely new that she hasn’t even thought of, or if tomorrow will be one of many ordinary days. some heaving and then some fumbling. none of this is darling’s fault. she didn’t ask to be put in this situation, and merely reacts out of fear. any fault, if there must be any, is mine.

19.3

in a photograph hanging on the wall there is a row of girls. they are girls compelled by exhaustion. a confusion of charm and condition, so easily forged. they are too tired to move; they stand still, reluctant to touch the keys in their pockets. the girl at the end of the line falls off and drifts way, thinking she might escape through the moon.

darling has had enough of looking at this picture to last her a long time. did you hear what i said? she says and duchess replies, of course it is creepy to talk about ghosts.

darling drops to her knee to pick up a key. the house expands, swallowing the wind drifting through the dormer windows. they key is lying beside a stone and she puts them each into the pockets of her dress. the key was hurried and hot in her palm.

from the front door to the sea. the path tangles, dies violently at the cliff’s edge. the sea, hemorrhaging, a graveyard of stinking fish. the problems of girls in heavy dresses. darling and duchess are still working with this history. start in the corner; document little changes: the moment doesn’t disappear.
darling walks with her heart popping grotesquely in her chest, her legs hopping under their own command, a neck muscle bulging and pulling her head around. though my memory appears to be clear i have no idea how this came about. in the high trees above, vultures hanging their damp wings out to dry—they look like demons, duchess says, pushing shut the door as darling’s figure fades into the forest.

around the house there is a perimeter of wire, several bowls of rain water: efforts to initiate, or prevent. the right key in the correct room and an invisible map.

not only is the pain almost entirely gone, but darling is unusually happy.

i am extremely pleased. i am overjoyed.

19.4

the call bounding off the smooth surface of water. the house a clatter and clash of rocking chairs, music boxes—the cat slapping its tail against the door. darling is not actually rolling yet. she is moving backwards in slow motion, putting the knickknacks back in their places. she goes through the entire process: lifting every framed photo, every vase, and wiping it with a damp cloth. this is important. she is unaware of the monstrous and awful sounds of bones shifting, of cartilage and blood. suddenly a choir, the collapse of her body onto the sofa. a veil of dust drifting, mingling sweat and sage. a static rises, flickers across the wall, sparkling.

duchess still thinks of the sea in her own way. she calls it a lovable creature. she watches it swell, fascinated. snippets of ships rising and popping on the waves. duchess thinks of when the horizon
was all black, and the water an inked cauldron. she presses her mouth into the collar of her jacket and sighs.

darling is disappointed in the result of her efforts. she didn’t even have to clean. she’d fixed on a room, hoped to make it real. she made an attempt and things might have altered, dependent on the time of day and the weather. the breeze disrupting the curtains. the room disturbed by its residents, the enameled box, the velvet pincushion. a glitch, a gap that’s slowly closing; soon there will be no unknown room - or will the gaps continue to multiply despite darling’s intentions? a lot could happen. it will certainly happen. darling will continue to hold her place. to notice how the house and the sea sit side by side, though they were never meant to be together.

_i must get back to my duty_, says duchess.

19.5

slowly slipping, dragged down by her dress. the netting is not as delicate as she expected. darling’s hand closes around a passing dash, misses. darling gets it wrong. randomly groping in dark water. she has no alternative but to keep searching, to stay awake.

duchess has no fear of phantoms. her shadow fills to fit the space. there are voices in another room, a soft blue cloak draped over the back of a chair. duchess laughs as she touches it, checking the pockets. a tunnel of web, first instar; a sling kicking hairs. duchess is constantly walking around corners, ready to give up. ready to recognize a change without conjuring an extra body. the incredible tenderness of molted fur.
i know i am not mistaken. i watch and the watching is useful. duchess does not say what her intent is. there is a red pulse in her mouth, wrought of deliberation. duchess sits by the window, waving her feet in the air.

darling drifting across the polished floor, pretending she is doing something new. vile splendor, various swoops and crashes; the reminder of a footprint left on the back of her long skirt.

and how can something that moves be just one thing or another? there is nothing to stop her from punching a hole in the wall. if she cannot capture the sky in any other way, she should make a fist. what does her mouth communicate? ardor and the light, thrust from the shaded lamp. a roach in her jaw. these noises tell me something.

stridulating and chucking out tiny diamonds, cleaning day still quite a ways away.
EPISODE TWENTY / Mask of Words

20. I

the house, carefully put together. the wall, the window: she decides to walk away. she must suffer
destruction, great beauty she didn’t think she could. she wrapped a handkerchief around the
roses, so they would not wound her. her hand, open to the world. the house, transparent. a
structure with a bunch of things inside it: rotting wood, soiled linens, enamel backed hairbrushes.
awkwardness and confusion make it comfortable. darling lies there, leaden, totally on her own.
she lapses in fantasies of sentiment, exactly what she needs. darling is a bird, beautifully plumed. she is giving chase, moving from treetop to treetop, the forest floor a passing blur. sometimes she stumbles and her shadow gains, reclaiming the distance between them. there is a cry, a keening.

there is no time to mend. she pushes the broken pieces beyond the visible. the deflated body of her slip hangs from her mouth, its straps two fishhooks. the house is sealed tight at every corner; she has made sure of that. she has indulged, every day, in a close inspection.

duchess hardly ever moves from her perch at the window. she can withstand the little heat and the little cold that slips in, unseamed. she thinks of the store of dried goods laid up in the pantry. she considers the spiders attending the eaves and precipices, more than the house can support. how can she love this? she is able to be herself; the sea is not worth visiting. duchess: radiantly sad, her eyes observing the masts and sails passing over the water, black and heavy with a burden. the ships may go wherever they please. duchess shuts up. she shutters, shudders, awakens on the stairs with her skirt around her neck. there is nothing better than the embrace of silk.

20.2

the house lost between the forest and the sea. the house constrained, gracious. the apron slipping off darling’s hips, her skirt flocked with offerings and flowers. bits and pieces of sunlight flit through her hair; she walks down to the water, her bare feet escaping the coiling tide. furrows in the water, blunt and shallow. the hollows and heights, and darling dashing madly across the sand, shouting words she doesn’t know. she walks widdershins, circling the bed of sand and sea:
her movements an effort to set the house and water side by side. the path closed, then open, the
entrance wound tight. darling ought to know where to go to get her teacups, her tattered lace.
she ought to know when to mother her pear, her bruised apples. it is difficult to tell if she knows
what is beyond these trifles. her lips salt swollen; a thin thread of blood leaps down her neck,
staining the collar of her blouse.

there are vibrations underwater, more or less harmonious. the pitch is something she can
experience, as if it were material. she falls down upon the sand and sighs. she does this
deliberately, of course she is reluctant. this dainty monster, never ready to return home. above
her, a veil drawn over the windows, no lamp brimming through. i can take my own way, darling
says. a few steps in the darkness will not deceive her.

i think this is all true. everything that happens is governed by the light. horrors may come: the
water rises above the line, the house holds back.

the impression of her body stays in her place for days. darling could not have done this.

20.3

the house cleaves the sea and the land, squatting like a fat toad with its mouth unglued. the split
between the water and the wood irreversible, evidence of the wilding. darling walks along the
fissure, knowing there is danger, a lion in the mouth of every wave. there is something else: the
place where the tree is cut. a silver gracing the sea, a deep she isn’t allowed to approach. duchess
watches from the precipice, reaching for the first restraint, the curtain falling from her hand.

darling drives the dainty toe of her slipper into the engorged sand.

the red seeps in, staining the silk.

darling whispers to the ghost in her pocket. she says ax and she says hex and her words are striking against the door. the door swings open and darling takes a few steps into the darkness, pausing to slip a stone into her stocking. she has to regulate the balance, it is her duty. darling looks for a place she can hide, a closet to slip into before duchess walks by. the space within the walls difficult to name, but damp. darling thinks of her jar filled with eyelashes, of sunlight sweeping across glass. a holy place in her mind. reluctant to abandon the warmth of the coats crowded around her, warm skins of fur and oiled flesh. how patient she must be.

all of these possible directions: a network of tunnels and hallways, a girl bounding from place to place.

everything becomes a threat: the sounding waves, the gleam of the windows gazing blankly at the clean sheet of water waiting there. everything is against her.

and then, the wind comes.
darling clipping mint from the stoop with a pair of silver shears. i am watching her, waiting for her tea to cool. she’s curiously steady, and still, kneeling in the gravel so that her knees bear the impression of a thousand tiny stones. i feel like i miss a lot despite my efforts. i might as well let go: she’ll rise, turn towards the kitchen sink, rinsing soil from her hands.

possibly the light at the end of the hallway is unraveling. duchess would rather be lost at sea than go chasing after the swelling dusk. more often than not she will remain silent. this is not a refusal, a refuge; she swallows a draught of scented water. she whispers, darling. sometimes she feels how little is the distance between her and the wilderness. it is alarming. she has become very curious about the boat that passes by her window every afternoon. duchess has done all that she possibly can. the cat’s body she will leave alone. this dreadful room of rust, of damp hair, amethyst in the ashtray, rampant dust.

i might switch places with this coat stand. see what happens. if i look too long in one direction i feel bored. i start with the house, the windows. i am used to their resistance. the challenge is in finding her, remembering where she was. her breath hot against the cat’s fur coat.

darling picks up her cup: she has to find some warmth. she won’t take any sugar today.

isn’t that a light in the window?
at the bedside, a pitcher full of cool water, a spiral of orange peel. a crumpled handkerchief: a tender thing. darling’s shoes wait at the foot of her bed, each cavity filled with sand.

her foot withdraws: she shrieks, holds her hand out to catch the sound.

her steady walk across the room—the window slides open, she spits the stone from her mouth. she only came to listen to the wind.

she is prepared to describe her dream. the door unlocked, a girl warned to stay away. a lantern abandoned along the path, her descent the only thing left—to set fire to the trunk to tear that tree out by its roots—the boom of the body, the embrace of the sand.

to chop off every offending branch, stands of her own hair strangled by every limb.

she dreamt she collected the venom pooled in the trunk, drop by drop emptied into a vial. that is how she remembers it.

every morning something surprises her. she thinks of this as a beginning. standing in the foyer, lifting her skirt, slipping her hand between silk and flesh, the elastic band pressing into her wrist.
she will gladly wait. it is horrible and it is ugly and it is what she wants. she is certain. certain that
she will scream. the sound makes things happen, makes things real.

EPISODE TWENTY-ONE / Memory of Darkness

21.1

about to blow out the candle, i stop.

i start by letting myself slip; i am caught. i have a bloated weapon--small bursts of glitter, escaping
at the seams. there is wet concrete in the basement, a doll abandoned at the bottom of the
stairs. i push open the double doors and duchess says, there is something more here than mere
shadows. she doesn’t know what a tiger ought to look like. to her it is all lattices, an unfamiliar
veil wrecked by a furrow. she walks where i walk and the house whines, wind rocked. i never notice where she wants to go.

duchess slips her hands behind darling’s ears and holds her hair back from her face. there are finally blossoms on the tree. duchess has never really been kind. she has refused every mistake, asked for the windows to be watched twice. she kisses the glass with devotion, conscious of her lip’s reply, the imprint flecked with red.

*keep your head down,* duchess says.

when the wind failed to lift darling was permitted to claim a room. no white sails filled with effort. the walls stood silent, torn from sound. the room without a light: she should know the problem, the inaccuracy of her plans. her difficulty with always touching the wall on the way to this room, a light impression, a thread of soot. there is nowhere else to go, but the path already intended.

when flowers are ripe girls are drawn into the woods. girls have to go somewhere.

so much depends upon darling’s willingness to look between parted fingers, when she has guarded her eyes with her hand.

21.2

the vulgar texture of warm bed sheets, the body absent. darling pulls the contents taught, tucks the sheets in. a girl ought to make her own bed, fold her own clothes, make sure the door is locked before she leaves the room. let her be tidy. let her use her hands and her arms. let her
thwart desire, thwacking it with a feather duster. so much depends upon her movements, her
daily observation of the hall clock striking one

and she turns round and about
two, and at last the cat comes to her hand

and three--she is plagued by a noise from without the room.

darling sweeps a small pile of feathers under the davenport, where they won’t be seen. she does
what she can. she says a small charm, crosses out a bulleted line on her list. ridiculous waste, she
says, exiting the room.

the sea, easy to swallow. puny and delicate, embroidered with seashells and strands of seaweed.
ships passing, spinning to the right and away. she often feels the pull, the sentimental urge to sink,
surrender.

the key lies under the cup, useless. if she weren’t listless and miserable, she’d go out on her own,
the hour overtaking her dancing feet. her dress unbuttoned at the back, pockets full of stones
and shells. if she were past her mood of waiting, if she could recognize the invisible gaps and cuts
which evade her eye.

who placed her inside this house and raised a wall all around it? through the dead leaves, first
door; hidden in the treetops, the empty shore; find her around the corner, drying the silverware
with her long, fine hair, find her distracted by a passing cloud, wondering if she has been used, modified and indeed perverted in many different ways.

21.3

the front of the house, she might not know.

the back of the house, knowing what she can do.

the details inside, unreliable as the day.

the failure of the house to capture the day.

*it hasn’t happened*, duchess says, gazing at the sun pressed between the borders of the window. it already has. while she was watching, while she watched darling kicking over every sandcastle down on the beach. the girl receiving each wave gladly, horrified to be holding all this salt at once. duchess has never been the one to say goodbye. duchess has been dwelling among tapestried roses, withered roses. when she approached the window it was already setting. unprepared for it, certain that the light slithering out of the hallway, backing away, is a message meant especially for her.

darling saw it differently. she saw the night fall limply along the corridors like something to do with singing. she thought of the forest next door, of the birds vaulting through the trees. of duchess gliding over absent ashtrays.
can she get this close to the window without becoming a window herself? already so dark, a
darkness templed by the portraits hanging on the walls and the steady chanting of the clock.
duchess rests her hand on the back of the armchair; the wood warm where the cat rested. this
warmth delights her, her laughter shielded by the curtain, the glass. she turns without taking the
warmth she needs, closing the door as an oath.

her readiness to rush home, a savage dark cloud. darling observes the setting sun sending the
ships back by sea. the silver of latent stars dappling her forehead, the light reaching deep.

darling won’t keep the key; once inside she returns it to the hidden compartment in the jewelry
box. i don’t want to spend all my time putting stuff away, darling says, taking the armchair in her
arms and dragging it back to where it was. the novelty of the sound of splinters, movement from
one room to the next. her breath plunging and rising, blood struggling in her body so that her
legs itch, her kneecaps ashen.
never still or silent, voices in the walls beyond, rooms past knowing. listening to the light bulb
hushing, a tower and a temple entombing her body; her brooch and her toothpick. the girl in the
window becoming. the girl in the window willing. a girl met with a galaxy around her finger. a
darling, a duchess, managing what they can: guided by the passing light, trying to find that last
door.

21.4
the measure between the house and the sea. she can see herself running wildly. the reach of water for the body and body’s own longing to engulf that dangerous passage. the lure of of the tide, ripped away.

the measure between the shadow that extends from the infantry of trees lining the edge of the forest and the front door. a breadth suffused with anxiety. why must she always go forward, without looking back? she might easily rest, her hair whipped into her mouth, her hair traveling down her tongue. a nest and a briar, some comfort in the spoiler, in the ache of waiting, standing still. darling keeps her head down, her attention on the ground passing beneath her.

i am permitted to watch, watching that must be done. i keep vigil - black visage, capacious jaws. i was not asked here, as darling was. i look to see what might be wrought. i am interested in whatever interests her. i take up her cause; i am a glutton of her divisions. i catch up to her every day, offering a blank key, a light blown out, a deep water soaked in green. i will not stop as long as there is more. always ready for anything to happen - it is by my will that things occur. here, a curtain will shudder, stirred by a breeze. there, the moon is full, and the cat sits at the foot of bed, slicking its fur. by my insistence the space between the house and its buffers dwindles, contracting until duchess and darling are brought near as well. until duchess is caressing darling’s fine hair. tenderness and also violence, her hand guided down and compelled to draw back again to the crown of darling’s head. i say it must be a caress. it must be careful. darlings feels the touch no more than if duchess had caressed the davenport. in darling there is a puncture, a wound. i find the entry and fit my mouth to it. i draw blood and i am glad. everything a result of her cunning. she stands in the window, taunting me with the gradually unveiled lift of her eyes. she unbuttons her collar, displaying the radiant stem of her neck.
there is a sound deep within the house and we turn to look.

21.5

at first blue, an imbalance of depth. she found her own bird lifting, lifting. she parted her lips and the forest opened. light erupted, retreating from the fire that hovers in the trees.

the waves beckon but she will not go out. the reluctance of the woman. she does not want to look; her body listless, reluctant to rise. she is dreaming of the green pool, that lip of water that appears where it is not. she had woken and found the cat had brought her a sack, a mottled mess of sinew, fur.

the house already here. the cry was without. she waits, thinking of the path. she slips her hand into the pocket at her hip and presses, the outline of the key sunk into her flesh. if she could absorb it she could leave. a girl breaking out, a girl opening a lock with a twisted bobby pin. she waits for the house to show her how to listen.

the veins in her body a blueprint she can't read. the bird engulfed; the bird billowing white feathers white sails taut and the blue, monstrous in the background. she knows it very well. she thinks of the blue as helping her escape. the blue exploding.

her dress slides over her upraised arms. what holds her here? she is uncomfortable in her amazement. the house a monolith, a space to fill with images. she counts the freckles on her arm and adds another.
her tongue finds the thistle, her lips spell blood. the doors only open from the outside. a cradle of seashells, her apron. nautilus, periwinkle, bleeding tooth, lightning whelk. the variety makes her hesitation possible. she can only run so far. you shame me, she says, directing the cat away from the door.

she calls from the top of the stairs. she says i. she says i will go for a walk today. she first takes one step and then her dress closes around her like a curtain. she is unsteady. she closes one eye and tries to focus. she says i. i stepped forward. i tied a bow behind my back without looking. i passed through the clean white sheets hanging from the line in the garden.

she knows the corridors intimately, without having walked them. snaking and shimmying. she continues in this space. it holds a flower, a furnace. it holds her, dearly and then threatens with the dark. everything she does is alerted by sounds, the settling of the house into the ground. a burial, a burning, and a green light flooding every window. unfortunately the door is very small. unfortunately the walls have shifted. she wonders what it is she has been so busy with.

she is not a witness. she is not talking. the house keeps the whole. the cluster of insects inside the light, the pulse that responds to her presence. hearing a protest in the floorboards, she steps back.

she says darling and shakes the withered clouds from her hair: she will not be forbidden.
she opens her eyes. perhaps the wind will come out and stir the seaweed caught like tinsel in the
trees. she takes a sheet from the line and drapes it over her head. a shroud, veil of flesh. she
raises her arms and says, *boo.*

drawn away and delivered, winding up the distance. the house crowns the hill. the windows glint. i
moved once already to remove the light from my eyes. i close my hand around the letter with
the canceled stamp.
after licking the last few grains of sugar from the bottom of the cup, darling tosses the china into
the corner of the room where it crashes amidst a potpourri of weathered stuff—a single kidskin
glove, a seashell, a mouse that, startled, races across the toe of her pointed shoe, past the claw-
footed bed, slipping out the window. darling sighs and drops her head, her legs clutched together.
her hands catch at the window ledge, chipping off the white trim — unable to stand the thought
of the waves rolling in, retrieving their sheet of sand. of the mouse sent ricocheting, bustling up
her blouse, its tiny feet distinct, its tail a worm burrowing in her breast.
darling hears the clap of the bolt sliding from the lock. she looks towards the door and for a moment she holds: everything collapses. darling rises, scattering sand from her skirt, shadows erecting strange forms as the door opens slowly.

*duchess! cries darling, what are you doing here?*

duchess walks carefully around the room. she nudges aside the single kidskin glove, the seashell and the shattered china and, having reached the limit of her orbit, exits by the door she entered.

darling wonders what it is that duchess has been so busy with. she moves to the center of the room and slips the glove over her hand and settles the seashell in her pocket. it wasn’t my fault, darling says, picking up the broken pieces of the cup.

**22.2**

time passes without restraint. her arms engorged by velvet, a flush cast over the carpet she patrols. the light of passing steamers lifted and thrown over her; a speckling of portholes emptied of honey. she often feels left out, watching the sea press onward, guided by the moon’s soft focus. somewhere, a scream, a laugh, and otherwise, the house, the worn floorboard creaking. her repeated use of the step, the soapy water sinking through the stain, making another, larger stain. her inability to stop looking: in the sink, water running from the mouth. she twists the handle, removes the excess before it gathers into a knot. she glances at her hands, the nails uneven: velvet, she whispers, tucking the offense into her pockets. the space around her gleams, is cleanly. she struggles to bring herself to the equal of polished silver. she turns, the mass of her
moving hair collecting the silverware; a knife tucked behind her ear. she looks out and wonders if
the water is warm, if it is yet silk. this is what she does when she is alone, when i am not
watching. the clatter of the table setting barely speaking; the salt and pepper shakers complacent
next to each other. i am involved. i measure the distance of the cup from the plate. i nudge the
vase of roses closer to the center. i am small and careful. she has no necessity to notice me but
we are accustomed to each other. she pauses at the table, tucking in the chair; smoothing the
cloth so that the ripples will not remind her of the waves. she opens her mouth and allows the
light drifting quickly through the open window to climb inside. her throat a dark passage; the
trouble in her belly rising. i hardly get out, she says, at last, pushing the saucer of tea away.

22.3

duchess turns towards the window. she is in this condition for a certain number of hours out of
every day. the sea looms over, strange and imperfect. duchess runs her finger along the glass,
drawing a parallel between the water and the sky. the blue, an escape: the blue exploding.
past and present at once; mist rising in the midst of the continuously dissolving house. duchess
observes faces in the fog: the trouble of uncertain glimpses. duchess considers her damp
mattress, her water-logged bed--the exhalation of lanterns. her protective urge, to claim the fault,
the interference. the failure of her attempt to discern the link between her urge to speak and
the disturbance of the waves, held back, and the way that water will not stop. here in the flesh,
and out of it: her grasp on the split between watch and wake, ready to be let go.
darling stands from kneeling – these questions concern her more than any other, yet she is willful. she has put the key aside, beneath her notice, discarding with it a cupful of tension. if she really needs it, she will have it back: enter the yard with a spade and unearth the grave. her time well spent.

it is only because of her presence that i do not rush past her out of the room. we are surrounded on all sides by windows, by light that is difficult to identify a source for. a shudder of orbs, the beat of wings, a familiarity with disturbances that renders the root insensible. duchess continues to speak: try to eat a little flower, she says, noticing the mild air, the ordinary works of nature.

22.4

the sour taste of salt and stale tea in her mouth. no graceful way to drop a spirit–her awkward desire, the abnormal state of her body, the bundle of matchsticks tied with a frayed ribbon in the pocket of her coat. darling seems to fade, to be a part of the ordinary furniture: the buttons down her back, knobs on a dresser.

by what means will she recognize me?

if i address her, how can she hear me?

i lift the walls, slip through before the bricks settle. darling can hear the waves laughing, the chatter of pine cones in the trees, scorning the sun. light movements of mice in untrammeled
corridors, gnawing on faded rugs. how close is the silk length of her dress to her skin, how near the chimney clogged with sparrows. the sounds of the house accurately imitated: a choral of feathered throats, opening at once. darling speaks very clearly. the words are ashes, black soot. darling avoids the hours, moves backward through the house collecting every white linen, every scrap of cotton and lace.

if she could fly in the air…

swim in the sea…

hold the most loathsome object

she closes her eyes and concentrates on the key. this is the same way she looks at the sea. a tiny silver fish flashing on her open palm.

i walk, i watch, i say, i hear--i have done a thing and seen a place or only dreamt that i have done so. i have recovered what is lost; i have seen her waiting at the station, a thin scarf covering her hair, the lacquer on her nails shimmering under the gaze of the overhead light. i have heard the tracks sing, the train not far off, the fabric shattered as she steps from the platform.

22.5

darling isn’t sure where she got the earrings. she thinks of duchess, cupping golden bells in her palm, caressing the pinked seam of the cat’s flesh: cause to mourn. afterbirth in a mason jar and the feeling that she is unable to look. splitting open a lemon and dropping the halves into a teacup. the ritual of crossing the forest, the beach, leaving the house behind. duchess moving away with a thump in her gut.
the silenced ring, the hen in the house with a hole in its throat, white feathers spilling, the plump body deflating. darling sits in the moonlight gazing down at the hem of her skirt, thinking of beasts in the basement; the yawning maw of the furnace, the crusted eye of a sealed box. stroking her hair and thinking of water babbling in the faucet, thinking of you. sometimes she startles, tearing her earrings from the lobes, then blood pulling her, yanked towards the laundry hanging from the line, white sleeves waving--sails filled by gusts of air.

darling stands and knocks the heel of her boot against the chair leg, shaking off the mud.

she had spoken to someone she didn’t know. someone standing in the corridor, sweat staining the parts of their clothing close to skin. teeth gleaming silver, a neat row of stones. somehow it was embarrassing; darling’d suddenly stepped back. there was no one there. she felt she wasn’t really moving, guided like a thread. she closed her eyes to cover her mistake, lifting her hands to restrain the earrings.

no effort to make it real: moths speaking in the attic, hushed over shattered silk. moths straining in the air: someone pounding beyond the wall. darling hurries towards the parlor, gliding down the stairs — on her breast, the imprint of a mouth she can’t identify.

today she is certain she is closer to the last room, the one she is looking for.
EPISODE TWENTY-THREE

23.1 / A Ring of Roses

the sea fallen silent. circling the tide, crouching in the sand, plunging her hand down, fingers outspread, feeling for the key. darling sorts the stones, ordering them from smallest to largest, each one smooth, unsettling. her lips move, counting; her hands move with awful familiarity through the sand, sifting, her throat parched, her tongue holding onto the number. she is certain
this is the spot. she glances towards the house and asks it to wait, wait a bit longer. she needs more time; the sea waves, longing to split its coil. where is my key, says darling, moving aside the stones. the cat stands at the cliff’s edge, watching her progress: these pale, inky graves filling with water. the sea winds a lace dress. there is something here with her, watching. if she grasps the key in her fist it will withdraw. the key will be sent back. the sea must be attended to, must be shut. she rises and kneels again. darling draws back her sleeves, sweeps the sand aside. water seeps from below, keys bursting from the ground like flowers.

hold still, darling. a surge: her long dress carried by a wave. she writhes, she spells out the hour: two voices, and the sea’s cold reply. hold still, darling.

her shadow does not bend. how did she happen to come by this key? she must have buried it, at first.

23.2

don’t you ever, ever, says duchess, and the devil. i will do it myself, says duchess, pulling out a stitch. darling looks out the window. she ought not. darling looks at the velvet flocked walls. touching them brings her back where she started: her fingers flitting over the pattern, reading an inscription, a kind of variety burdened by busy tasks. she looks at duchess through the wide open door: duchess drawing the chandelier towards her with a hook, lighting each candle. her restless aching, pacing — her need to fill the house with objects past her ability.
i have things i have to do, says duchess. darling flattens herself against the wall to let duchess pass.
candlelight swarming all over them.

darling turns to face the wall, the window past her drenched with rain. duchess pauses and observes the shape of the garden, the forest in the distance huddled round the house. her breath swells across the glass and she lifts her hand to write a word in swiftly clearing mist. duchess says, does it disturb you?, wiping her hand to cancel out the worst. darling moves, taking duchess by the elbow and spinning her so the trees beyond blur them into one white body, one white dress blown out, the dark hallway sinking, flames shuddering, spitting out wax. duchess wobbling in darling’s arms, her tongue limp: the worst place. the woods swollen, the birds torn and small and stained and cruel.

nothing is wrong, says duchess.

what is supposed to happen in the woods? says darling.

i arrive at the house on the path through neatly gathered trees. a thin cloud drapes its mouth over the door. the closer i get, the more simply i see them, locked together, hands and knees entwined.

23.3
my eye slips open when i stand. the lashes stiff, speckled by crumbling ink. the eye holds. i tilt, and the lid crashes to my cheek, spewing blue dust. i see nothing; standing still so i won't be caught. i keep my mouth half open, my tongue of felt. in my belly, a clatter, a missing key. the best place to keep it, to keep it away. i will not speak, except through her. she might lift my arm, allow my look to fasten on some other distance. i see nothing there: more hallways, doors, more darkness in a knot. i wait to touch the bottom, to move when she is not looking; when my passage is not expected. i will fill my hollow arms and legs with shells and stones, track sand along every doorway. for awhile, she will not notice. she will walk past, pushing my head down with her hand.

23.4

the red bricks tower, shaking out a black sheet, sweeping out the sky. a fat bead of water slips from a sleeve drifting along the line, a gob of spit staining the worn porch. darling waits, perched at the bottom of the steps, her eyes shifting, assembling the distance into a ball of twine. in the air, a roar: the sea recoils its long, white neck.

train tracks sway above flat, blistered grass. darling totters in her kitten heels, nudging aside stray coal, black rabbits thumping in the weeds. rabbits chewing on canceled stamps, mouths gummed with glue. darling's hands swing, palms dry and pockets empty. the sea extends its reach, retrieving sheets of sand.

the weeds have reached the porch, strangling the steps: a mass a brambles; a mess of foxtails, chamomile, mint. duchess pauses, lifting her white dress to her knees. she will not wander past
this point. the house encloses: duchess with her skirt, her hands behind her back, fingers locked, darling posing beside the rose bush. this banister: a table leg. this window frame: a dresser drawer. this thin white dress: a sugar sack. the sea unraveling a key, a ring.

in the little cove down by the water, wide open mouths blare nests of bees. the sting, they sing: silk sheets doused with powder.

cake crumbs scatter in the long grass, little remnants of rust dropped from the eaves. a frayed and tattered aperture, a hole where a fox might fix a hiding place, a crow call out the gleaming dark. the door hangs open, framing her absent form at the window, hair stirred by an unsettled breeze. a shadows lifts out of the water and passes, its black eye tracking movements in the house.

23.5

relics, the smooth nub of stumps caressed. the fossils of a thousand hands marked out by a depression. a cupful of thumbtacks strewn across the path — the way impeded dangerous, inaccessible. she must find another. fill her pockets with wildflowers, wood chips. pull the cord hanging from her mouth, eyes popping open, leg lifting at the knee.

the basin brim exceeded: i am put out. caught by the open door, back to the wall, a mess of hair like bloodworms littering the floor. i had been cutting; i snap, close the cuticle. snakes writhing on
the surface, in water or liquid — an imprudent submersion. nestful, fistful, slithering and stuck: wads of knots, split ends, curlicues spliced to soap scum, salt water, steam.

darling pulls the sheet taut, tucks the corners under the mattress, thumping the center of the bed with a tightly balled fist. she brushes away bits with the blade of her firm hand, and lays the triton carefully in the center. mottled, a coil of pink flesh turned inside out, calcified. in its pit, the voice of things: the waves and the forests. she finds it unpleasant. she lifts the shell and shakes it a little, struck by the barrel of red hair released from its inner depths.

the house gravitates around the stairway, holds it like a mouthful. the stairs rise, unimpeded, and stop somewhere at the apex of a light, a halo, a carefully concealed door. a door blown out, scraped off, the form withering, a suffocated embryo. this is called moving, the steady ascent immersing the body in a gradual release of shadow.
darling disturbs the forward facing flowers. her dress pied with strange birds, flashing. the sky will clear tomorrow; the cat will stand in the garden, lazily swishing its tail. she is contained; containing--her footsteps trim the path. there should not be a fish this far from the shore. a fish gasping in the bramble.

darling will put this key back into the water: she has to be able to listen, to find out what she’s running from.
difficult to see what is coming. darling'd forgotten about the door. the door ought to be visible, now; surfacing on the deep green of surging trees. darling, almost in tears. the day she became lost. she looks round and calls repeatedly, thinking it might be here, but she sees nothing. the trees, not moving; miles of rough darkness. she's looked here, she's looked there: she sees the door when she is asleep. she walks without finding a solution.

darling crouches with her arms wrapped around her knees. she counts one, two, three. there are lights in the wood; there are sirens and alarms. she tears a hole in the earth and spits, pines needles wreathed in tinsel. i don't know where it is, she says. she looks to see if she is followed. no door opens, and she stands. the volume of her dress would make it impossible to hide: she stands, out.

she hears a foot behind her. closer, closer. a girl in trouble is often humble, pushing forward with her head down, observing the quick beat of her own shoes on the illuminated path. a key hidden in her pocket, a door erased by a pulse, a hammering coupled with a kind of calm. she will abandon this forest, throw the key into the ocean, forget she ever had it.

24.2
darling keeps her tongue out of sight, nowhere near the beach. her tongue chasing a creature deep into her throat. a thimbleful of small stones won't last: she pings them against the window, hoping duchess will look out. over the waves, a bird drifts, water turning inside out. darling's hair rests like a coiled rope on the back of her neck. the brim of her straw hat pushed off her face, the sun hanging clouds over the sea, still and sudden.

i am present at the scene. i take the fallen stones and arrange them side by side. the birds gossip in the trees and i cover my mouth in case of a surge. i am still seeing holes everywhere. i am not
willing to go all the way down to the water. i watch darling and i wish that she could see. in the 
house above us, duchess secures the door by slipping a stick into the latch.

death the house groaning and creaking.

darling stretches out on the beach, feeling nothing but the purling of the water past her body. the 
afternoon passes quietly, consumed by her slow and even breaths.

24.3

did you hear that? duchess says. i ought to turn the lights off. she pulls herself on her toes, hoping to 
catch sight of a passing ship. she has memorized the path across the water. hours pass without a 
sighting. i left something in the city, she says, the key already warm in her hand.

the cat collapses near the door.

darling ought to be here but she is down by the water, pulling an egg out of the tide. when the 
lights in the house go out darling turns to look, rocking on her heels. the dark house awfully 
familiar. darling sorts through her specimens, thrusts the smallest egg beneath the sand. the trees 
close as she moves forward, a knot of pine and aspen.

a parcel of eggs tucked under her arm, a bird persuaded to stop in limbs arrayed above her.
darling is almost near the end; the doors of the house locked against her. she won't turn around.
this is how it might have been: her breath blooming across the glass, the pane shattered. a way to 
keep warm, a way to get back inside. darling is persuaded to continue. she races along unknown 
floors, water receding behind her. somewhere past the trees, the sea stretches, unwrapping a 
gauze over the sand. follow the wind, duchess says, taking darling's basket, taking darling's hand.
another drop of water slips down the wall, curdles in the cat’s fur. duchess laughs, grasps the banister: she will not leave the house alone.

24.4

if she is accurate, the stone will hit the mark. this is where the rose bursts open. she says, it is the atmosphere. a line of saliva crusted the corner of her mouth. she has been extremely unreliable. the dishes are undone. the days have passed, a shovel scraping the sand and still no hole. her weight sunk into the house, a stain: an oily squeal. a terror of her tongue, knowing the message is absent. knowing she has nothing to do with the unlocked door. that her calculations may be off.

now she has the distance she needs. i’d be pleased if she would cry. a tear strewn pillow, a finger shoved into the wound. a filthy air and a bleeding girl are all i need. i have to be ready. on the shore, waves break, the sand gory with blood. darling dwindles to a wild eye. her hair unfixed: there cannot be a vulture in her. she cries hold, hold! and bears her body against the door. the house silent, more like a ghost. every noise appalls her.

her skinny lips seal a wild and violent sea. suppose her mouth an ax? her shrewd estimate will split the house from water, the cat from shadow. she dreams of the light that will lead her away. the light that may come from there. the door beyond which she is not allowed to pass.

i will wait until midnight.

i haven’t heard the clock yet.

shining and silky, the cat slips in.
she has taught herself to skip a stone.

24.5
duchess has been waiting, she knows where. stirring sugar into her bitter tea is a thing she can
do; she never does anything negligently. the spoon clangs in the bottom of her cup like a buoy
bell; she lifts it and lays it next to a shell rimmed with ashes.
darling claims an empty cup and duchess says, i want to talk to you. everything needs to be fixed.
there are broken window panes and loose floorboards and tattered curtains hanging dismally in
the kitchen. look carefully, says duchess. how will you decide what to do first?
darling wonders what it would be like to be at sea. if a clean cupboard would still comfort her.
she would gaze at the familiar walls, yearn for the sight of home. already it is too much: she ought
to be finished with this dusting. i look at them both, at once. they share an absence, a nothing.
they are wandering beyond this point. the things they ought to do are forgotten. she forgets her
mouth. it used to be her fingers that reached out to brush me as i passed but now her hands are
captured in her pockets.
i say, hurry, darling. i count backwards from ten. at one i will stop.
darling makes her way, the door left open. sloppy and unlike her. i watch from the window and i
feel the shadow fall before i see her running across the lawn. again and again, i picture her hair
spread against the grass, her skinned knees.
25.1

darling will bear the knife herself. she can do this by herself. there is danger, and headless women:
an unthinkable red. a polished blade like a tongue. her sweetness fails, but her account is correct.
she is permitted to open the door.
when i alter the arrangement of items in the room, she gets lost, bumping into end tables; her knees buckle. she can't move easily; even the tea table is a threat. the bruises pile, a damp, black smudge. she hasn't yet found the key. there are empty spaces where she turns, meeting with moths stopped in shadow. the key might be on a chain around her neck. if she could move like a ghost, she would pass through this wayward davenport. i lift her arms, her legs; pose her so that she is standing, ready at the door: in case it should open. in case the cat should swagger by. she might wake up and find that nothing is left: the house emptied, unencumbered. but nothing to do. a mess of light tangled on the floor.

*anything in white is wonderful*, duchess says, draping a sheet over darling's head.

a light in a dormer window, seen from overseas: it could be a signal. they will remain where they are. if the light is the only sign to look for, there could be disaster. if the light is everything, it is the voice of the waves, and of the forest. the beauty of the light is never wasted.

25.2

this is the first day of this dress. there is a little more color; another draft of light. the dress moves down the hallway and she moves inside it, swinging her arms, fingers curled into her palms. tucked into one hand, a key, and on her dress a blood stain, a small spot. darling is not to be bothered. small things don’t trouble her. it is the half-closed door that frightens her, the black line stretching from floor to ceiling. *if you’re scared why don’t you run?* says duchess. darling slips the key into her pocket and snaps a button at her wrist, despite the difficulty.

there is someone with her at all times. there is something in here with her. *it is nothing, nothing, nothing*, darling says. she still isn’t sure why the door is locked. *can’t you see me?* darling says. *can’t
you hear me? there is a curtain hung over the door to hold in the warmth. the hallway tightens around her hips. here, where i am. there, where i am not. in the curtain there is a gap, a cleaving, as if a knife slashed through it. darling traces the cut in the cloth and understands. beauty is never wasted. darling feels the movement of the hallway constricting, a throat swallowing a stone. darling feels herself moved, floating past the door. the door that must be closed and locked at all times. the curtain exceeds her grasp, slipping back in place; keeping in the air.

she was here, but now she is gone, and not dead.

25.3

at the edge of the trees a grave marked by grass. the flowers nod and cower in the wind. if darling were a tree, she would stand very still, escape detection. she would slip off the path into the forest, link arms with the steady pine. in the sky, clouds drift aimlessly, slipping strange figures through leaden limbs.

darling keeps her baubles too close to her. in one pocket one stone, and in her mouth, one key. her tongue shudders, cold blood. iron grown heavy, weary, the cry battering against her teeth.

over the sea, a cloud carrying a song. drifting till the birds dive, shapes like hexes. water curls into her open palm, settles on the sand. the water carries stones.

darling has started on her way. the path through the forest is steep on both sides. the ground covered with sawdust, so her footsteps won't show. somehow, her shadow follows closely, growling softly, snapping at the stone she holds in her extended hand.

curtains of water terraced by small ships. a fish jumps, startling her from imagining the cloud a
chorus.

in the deep wood, a burden. she might fall, or fall to her knees. in the distance, she can see that a light has been left on in the bay windows. a light for her. she lifts her foot from the ground.

she observes her small collection with pleasure. this stone shines, and this one is round and smooth. there are too many to carry.

she puts the stones into a beautiful order and thinks which she will choose. this one worn by the constant worry of her fingers, this by the flexing of her tongue. this cherished stone a mountain, a quarrel.

in the field darling stretches, all covered by poppies. she might be sleeping, two feet beneath the surface of a drowsy flower. the birds watch, a light flickering in their eyes.

surging, red velvet. she won't need to mend this. the trees open onto the lawn, needles sweeping though her skirt.

her pockets full, she kneels in the roots of the last tree, pushing her hands into the soil: filling the pit with freshly fallen stones.

the house pressed against the sea. they stand side by side, without mingling. this is the house, this is the sea. darling walks between, keeps her eye upon the wavering light, flecks dancing like pebbles in glass. her head weary, ready to rest against a white cotton pillowcase, nest of feathers.

she takes the key from her mouth, slippery with spit, and inserts it into the lock. it will not turn. the dark has shouldered out the clouds, the birds. she thinks of the tree where the knife disappeared. so that she had to dig with her hands.
she breaks the window and reaches in to turn the knob. the stale air withdraws, weeping.

25.4

i saw the curtain move. she is in there, collecting all her things. something happened here: objects strewn and scattered. even the darkness that fell. binding it all together, pushing past the door and tossing the package into the sea. watching as the things submerge. she found out something watching the package disappear. darling’s hands drop uselessly at her side. nothing she would save. waiting for the water to close, to claim, and shut away. worried that some stray silk, some sheet of paper, might float to the top.

a strange feeling she missed something. that she walked past a small scrap without noticing. a piece of evidence; flowers caught in a mirror. a fibre that could be used against her. there are a few missing scenes, moments she blacked out. how did she find out? she knows she saw something that isn’t here anymore. resting her forehead against the wall sends her back in time, pieces the shattered window. she says the word again; she calls duchess? she closes her eyes and skips ahead. climbing the stairs, the floor spreads behind her. she has nothing now, her pockets empty, hair loose. she had better start.

there is something wrong out there. the light is still on. the flame sputtering on the wick and no breeze. she’s all alone in here, searching every inch.

she can’t just sit here and wait. she doesn’t like to be held. she wants to go where the sea extends its ruffled tongue.

25.5
she is what she is now. this is her dress. it is more than merely visible. it captures the light and
breaks it. she thought she saw. darling is both rightside up and upside down. her dress is on
inside out. her dress is not familiar; it is her dress. this place is her only place. the house is
rightside up and as she climbs the stairway it flips. nothing has changed. where is the dress she
came here in? this is not her room. the light coming through the window is brutal. it focuses on
her eye. i can speak and i can speak for her: listen, listen i say she says. darling is never all alone. her
orders are not to stop. she must cross the hall in one smooth motion. someday soon she will be
a bride.

she looks out the window and the sea is steady. the sea swallows the window and she runs back
to her room. i withdraw from her eye. the sea swirls down the drain, something to do with
disappearance. no doubt the floor will creak long after she has passed. the buttons on her coat
don’t interest me. it is her condition. she will find the key before she comes to harm. darling rips
a nail from the wall. she puts her eye to the hole that is left behind. she looks closely, carefully,
cleanly. she looks all the way into the next room. the arrangement of the furniture has been
altered. nothing is in its rightful place.
EPISODE TWENTY-SIX / Shadow of an Unknown Woman

26.1

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in the house, there is nothing new or interesting. darling has read all the books. she has used the
daily chores. everything is clean and ready. the tide is in, and the waves fling themselves against
the rocks, wildly. it does not amuse her.

whatever comes, darling feels she will die.

duchess finds darling walking in the hall. duchess observes the progress she is making. the hall is
getting longer, nearer the sea. this is what duchess always wanted. this is a tone of despair. this is
a veil slipping around a corner. miles of air, expanding. duchess returns to her habit of looking;
she won’t miss the drops of blood freckling the windowsill.

to reach darling, i will have to follow. a dark corridor lined with windows. the cat matted and
snarled in a pool of sunlight draped across the floor. i let it go. i crush the flowers in my hand.
there will be an encounter. something she doesn’t have to believe. afterwards she will say, it isn’t
true. the evidence will vanish. i will wipe my fingerprint from the doorknob. first, i think of what i
need the most. i can’t want the key, the stone, the knife. i prefer to risk the house, the sea, the
wood. her white dress a beacon in this dark. beyond the edge there is only itself. at the cliff a
reversal occurs: the waves strike, send her reeling, the hallway withdrawing, a snail.

the mark where she placed her hand against the wall, fading. her immodest dress, inclined to take
her place. darling spits into her palm. there is nothing else to give.

26.2

bedded in feathers, a sneezing fit. halcyon light melting over the bedspread. points clustered in
her hair: too many to count. darling sighs, won’t bother, won’t be disturbed. darling turns, puts the pillow over her face.

hair reaching like a hand down her back.

the house mounts the hill. at the bottom, there is a gate, the wood shedding its paint; white flakes dappling the grass like snow. it isn’t winter yet. duchess wavers in the window frame, hair in curlers. she spits against the glass and wipes it away with her sleeve. i wait and i am ready. in the woods behind, the moon sways in the trees; fire.

her hair thrust over her face, eyes flickering.

darling pulled in by departing waves. sand slipping under her bare feet, her chin thrust towards the sun. she lifts her arms above her head and pulls the cord, switching on the light. it swings and the room tilts, settling on the davenport: damp stains the cushion. she pushes her sleeves down, shivering, bumps rising. the lamp is where it was before.

duchess can’t stop the sky from collecting clouds. an accrual she insists on, her moist breath spreading over glass.

the floor becomes the ceiling. darling walks with her skirt around her ears. leaves tumble from between her legs. the stars gleam; she isn’t sure which one to choose. to make her wish.

her bright red hair, victory walloping the wind.

darling places the fence post in the hole she dug, grasps it to steady herself.

duchess puts her ear to the mouthpiece. a repetition, luminous ornament. she observes the little
activities of shadows on the kitchen floor. the receiver in her hand, a hurried whisper; wings beating out dust.

26.3

she has no choice but to open the door.

snow dropping from her open mouth. a faucet, a precipice. strands of hair clinging to her face. darling grasps the handle on the door and pulls it open.

cold embracing the house. arms cased in wool, cocooned. she is ready. it isn’t easy to be embarrassed. the sea slips, settles in her head, her ringing ears. darling rollicks out the doorway.

the cat swipes at her skirt as she passes, rustling: tulle and taffeta. darling’s concern is elsewhere. upstairs the stones that line her drawer are crumbling. the weight is the same.

the water and the sky empty into the house. the wood is full of trees. darling bends and scoops sand into the cradle of her skirt. she removes the small stones.

everything in this room sticks together. duchess sits, difficult to distinguish from the upholstery. she holds a mirror in one hand, a pair of scissors in the other. she won’t give everything.

darling tucks her chin into the collar of her coat, breath beading on the fur; an infected wetness. the sea withdraws, a snail cowering in its shell, exposing a bar of sand she might cross, a way back to warmth.

a drift bars her way.
her hair lifted by invisible hands, spreading sails. a curtain pulsing with light, as if it bore a body.
darling has to go. she won’t give everything. she makes herself small. she takes a look at the air,
unsure of where to look. it is still warm. a spider drops and spins in the empty sky.

duchess is in the parlour. a book spread across her lap. her pen, a talon tracing a line. confident in
her place, she dog ears a corner. the roses crowd in. duchess closes her eyes, head dropping
towards the brooch pinned to her lapel. in her lap, the book closed, its glossy surface capturing
the red swath of her mouth.

the woods weary, leaves carelessly brushed aside, a rabbit scampering across the yellowed grass.
darling wants to get there quickly. led by her tongue, clacking. the cat high-stepping through the
snow. cold sinking through the layers of her clothes, skin recoiling. snowflakes melting in her
apron pockets. she sets a hood over the bright banner of her hair, pulls the tablecloth tight
around her shoulders. her face speckled with salt. her bottom lip drawn in.

the door is closed. duchess sleeps, the key tucked under the rug at her feet. her hand lifts, two
fingers pointing at the ceiling. there is no one to open the door. darling isn’t here to open the
door.

there are voices in another room. duchess won’t investigate. drool slips beneath the collar
wound around her neck. arms crossed as if in comfort. the house has nothing else to give.

since i got over the wall i have been attending the air. i don’t need the extra space. i saw that the
wall wasn’t yet solid. that it was close to luminosity. i saw the whole thing shatter.
duchess pulls a scarf from her pocket and ties it across darling’s eyes, making a knot at the back of her head. darling listens for the schluck of the tide withdrawing. she feels the knife in her pocket, pressed against her thigh. it isn’t just a letter opener.

darling opens her eyes. she says, i. she says, i will go for a walk. she takes one step and then another. she walks without knowing emptiness. she is careful about where her heel lands. the curtains pass over her like a dress. on the frosted glass of the parlour window her breath recedes. she isn’t sure. darling closes one eye and tries to focus. she says i. i step forward. i tie a knot behind my back, without looking. i see a house rising from the sea. she has known the house all along. the doors open for her. one door is the same as the next. she realizes she can do anything. she can change things i won’t notice. she can make a lavish mess.

darling closes her eyes and listens for the whistle, for the cloud of steam to drift in like a ghost and settle in her hair. the train isn’t anywhere near.

i have a widow, but there is no place to put her. once she was a bride. she suffers without a name, without endearment. she must assume a posture in order to be seen.

i hate the strange, the silent. but i will go where she will go. i look into the fire and i see pictures there. i look into the water and i see pictures there. i watch the flames lovingly. i repeat the name. the quiet house closing. the room overburdened with shadows. i can hardly see her, at first. a girl caught in a sudden atmosphere. she knows not to stand too close to the window. to my horror she hears a noise i make. an unfamiliar white, bellowing. this is more than a knife. a knife past virtue. this could be very real.
i think she was in the room, darling says, removing the blindfold. duchess sweeps it into her pocket, feeling the outline of the key through the sole of her shoe.
she's forgotten the plot as well. darling's made of cotton candy, covering her mouth with her hand like she might burst, a pink cloud erupting from her throat. getting warmer each time but still yet to figure anything out. the ghosts have gone and the widows have gone back to wherever.

duchess wants darling to think she's forgotten.

be a doll and let me in, darling says.

darling's waiting to be let in and duchess is seeing what she can do. how can i get to there from here? duchess has to take the risk and let darling back inside. the cat crouches in the armchair, clenching its fur like a fist as duchess passes her hand over the cat's bowed back. duchess will learn from the girl. she's still wearing the same dress and duchess is drying a plate with a dishrag made of yesterday's.

going through duchess' dresser drawers to find something or to plant some evidence, a child's rough division. a missing button could make a difference. darling would like to believe it's really missing but it's too easy to trust a button's disappearance. darling would like to forget. duchess has something in her hand and it may be a button; a shiny, bloodless button, faceted and smooth with a sour-sweet stink, a black button crushed like a fly in the pale white flesh of her fist.

i lost it near the water, darling says smiling. her clean white dolly teeth; a blanched chasm. it sounds like rain, duchess replies. there goes my hairdo. the widows out walking along the cliffs greedily spread their black dresses, watching the empty sea. all the ships docked in the drawing room,
bundled by gilt edged frames. the widows wail and their coarse weeping sounds like a busted kazoo.

*be a doll and answer the door while i change*, darling says. duchess has been around the house three times and she is not sure which door to choose. she is not going for a walk, she is investigating. duchess has not left the house for years; lost roaming endless corridors, small and troubled. darling should know better than to ask for an explanation. i ought to say something but i haven’t. girl talk, nothing important. duchess is not as forgiving as she pretends to be. she could take the zipper pull on the back of darling’s mini-dress and split her completely open; little sparrow bones, popsicle sticks.

27.2

*would it make any difference, if i remembered?* duchess says.

someone, something is scratching at her door. duchess walks across the parlour and finds the cat crouched before the threshold—*ghastly creature*, she says, swooping the warm, humid body in her embrace. i look into her face. duchess shudders, the cat perched on her breast. this is my inheritance, she says. she moves down the hall, stroking the cat, dissolving into darkness.

darling isn’t far off. it all started with a letter, an envelope licked shut. she runs all the way, skirting alongside the house, startled by her own reflection streaking across a windowpane. i look into her face. the face that looks into mine is real, all too real. the face draws me into danger. darling breaks the image; turning, she walks slowly towards the forest. she will follow her own inclinations. now she is stranded, alone in the wood. the wood grows stranger, day by day. darling looks back at the house, looming over the sea: *it is unbelievable*, she says, tearing the letter in half.
why does duchess treat her like a daughter, not a servant?

what is hidden behind the walls?

why is the cat afraid to enter the attic room?

is the figure she glimpsed in the dark hall only her imagination?

darling wants to know more than anything.

i lunge at the shadow. it is nothing. i try to stop it, a knife. an instant in candlelight, and then. the

glitter no longer visible. the glitter a horrible sound. a horrible sound, a knife vanishing in a

shadow. a knife dropped lifeless to the floor. i stand motionless. i stand halfway down salt-soaked

steps. shivering, bewildered, mad.

duchess leads the way by candlelight. darling follows, adopting the identity of the dress she is

wearing. she must go down into the water. duchess stops and starts. there is a door in the wall

where no door appeared before. darling moves towards it. darling pushes it open.

she walks through the dark.

27.3

the room shut with roses. the curtains bulge. dust on the windowsill, the bookshelf. her skirt

collects the thorns.

snow spread over the sea. stones guard the cliffs, capped in white drifts. a bone buried in the

sand. a word in private, a word split by rain. darling chases the cat out of the room, sits in the

armchair, kicking her heels against its legs. the black spot, the inside of a teapot. she can see all
around. nothing will surprise her. the ice on a wave breaks.

duchess holds the mirror on her kneecap, titling it to observe the back of her throat.

darling gathers every key she's found. one is the same as the next. she takes two keys and closes one in each hand, leaving the rest. the door only comes up to her waist.

the trees embrace the dark. studded with stars. i'm not there, yet. there's a ghost behind my eyes. i look for a place in the rain. the flashlight in my hand hits limbs of pine, passes through.

duchess lights the lantern's wick. the wind is close, riffling through her pockets. the dark comes over the house. the light in the glass chimney is a small holiday. the first thing she has to do is nail shut the door.

darling's figure framed by the doorway. moonlight cradled at her feet. the key tipped into her sleeve, her mouth a straight line. the house shudders; plaster crumbles from the ceiling.

at first there is beauty and then there is mud. she can't find anything. this is the kind of window a face will look out of. she strikes a match and holds it to her lips. it will not waver.

she would go if she had a pair of red shoes.

27.4

the women watch from the window. the window at the top of the hill. the house stands still, waiting, the glass rattling in the window frame. the wind pulses, pushes like a cat that wants in. duchess holds the mirror in her hand. she covets the glass. an image in her embrace. the sun
stretches, trying to reach her. her own shape and face in the mirror, the word vanishing between her lips. the house has not changed. only the floor responds. the mirror lies; beauty deserts her.

despite my efforts, the door swings open.

deep in the wood, darling pauses to pull a burr from her skirt. a clutter of wool and thistle, disaster. the sky turns under, a gorgeous blue shrouded in pink. something in the distance catches her eye. she speculates. an ache in her stomach, a flutter. she will dig here, unsure of where else to look.

duchess moves from room to room, hands clasped behind her back. a rabbit leaps from the fire, shivering.

the house, steady after dark. something stirs in the bushes outside. she pulls the cord. the room floods, a snarl of light rolling, pitching. the light crowds around duchess, blooming. stones spill from her pockets, ringing down the stairs. she runs her fingertip along the ledge, bringing away dust. no one has been here. the key on the ribbon around her neck, chafing and irritating her. the flowers on the sideboard sag their heads.

the sea undone. water reaching out, talons soaring with the waves.

the wind snatches the letter, carries it to sea. darling responds to the call wrapped inside a seashell. her abandoned pit. she makes sure that no one is looking, the impressions of her bare feet on the sand washed away. the beach shielded by the cloister of trees.

the letter sadly crumpled. ink purged by water.

the distractions of the house. duchess’s pointed shoe kicks the door closed. at home with
nothing, nothing to do. nothing will do for her but the sea.

*keep the door locked,* duchess says.

27.5

darling slept through the morning. she awoke with a start. the wood swallowed the cloud of birds in one great gulp. her eyes held open by pins. a squeal of green, engulfed.

the cat never goes very far. the cat is very still. the cat faded and washed out.

darling lifts the lantern and the light spreads across the hall. dark corners grow darker. a shadow moves. a shadow moves again. a dim, grotesque shadow. a shadow that won’t stay still. she mistakes one door for another. how much can she hold? a key, a letter, a knife. if she stops at the door, she doesn’t really know. the light here is not like the moon.

i never saw the way she went. i allowed her to go. she’s already gotten away. stumbling over the stones that duchess dropped. her swollen ankle—a thing i can’t forget.

darling looks for a way out. a way she knows. she smashes the glass in the turret with a rock. a signal, the shatter. the ocean thrust against the front door. suddenly she becomes aware of the atmosphere. the whispers. the accidents. she is irresistibly drawn. she is pulled. she knows she cannot, will not leave. she doesn’t say anything. she doesn’t want to know more than this. the waves creep over the tiny, lost ship. a breeze slips in her mouth. she has failed to follow the path of light through the hall. something has gone wrong.

i made a mistake.
the bird holds a key on a string in its beak.

i have a message for her. a moment i can’t plan.

duchess will stay in the house as long as she is correct. feathers spill from the pillow on her lap. this will never happen again. there has to be a scene like this.

darling puts her dress on inside-out to confuse me; disguising herself as the dead. like me, she is worried. don’t look at me, look over there, she says.

i will try everything. it is the only thing i can do.

the cat makes darling’s discarded coat into a nest.
there is nothing, get to bed, duchess says. she seats herself with two candles and a book. she keeps watch, though there is nothing. doors that open and shut, as they should, rustling silk, and sometimes whispering.

there are shadows streaking across the grounds. there are shadows trying to get in. darling knows she will have to stay silent. a shadow slipping in the window, a sheet pulled over her head. a disguise that won’t work. it approaches the door, it enters the room. the silence will not persuade her. it is like a thing and not like a thing; it is like a shadow. if it won’t leave, she’ll call. she wants it to leave here and now.
a story attached to the house. a story she wants removed. windows and doors open, in spite of locks and keys. this place, knocked down.

she must choose her moment. she very softly opens the door and descends the stairs. the shadow will be back, threatened by a fish.

where is it? says duchess. i don’t know what she’s planning, sharpening her knife. here is my hand. a shadow on the prowl outside the house.

i’m going for a walk, says darling.

the house no longer disturbed. cries and groans no longer all over it. the shadow eluded by turning down a staircase. there she is.

no reason to suppose that they see me any more than i see them. a silhouette on the cliff, saltwater dripping from the rocks. driftwood shattering. the house leaning towards the sea, the sky bruising.

28.2

pervasive scenes in a parlour. walls of fraying brick. a shadow cast by a cloud slips over her hand, holds it firmly. darling only borrowed the knife. she’ll put it back where she found it.

the room overflowing, untidy, haphazard; dead roses and dresses. nothing here relieves her boredom. the key might as well not be in her pocket at all.

i moan until i feel empty. a sound that won’t surprise them. a grey cloud, quiet, in my arms.
when she opens the door, snow begins to fall. as ridiculous as she is, she has to catch the flakes on her tongue. she finds her place by erasing the place where she stands. the snow studding her hair. her shoulders damp. the floor opening, a deep, black pit. she doesn’t pay any attention. there are openings that don’t count. her trembling image, held in the windowpane.

her actions are not interesting or beautiful.

are you familiar? says duchess, moving her head side to side.

i apologize, says darling, the air convulsing in her breath.

her words stir me. a lantern crowds in. there is the real presence of a shadow. the audible gust of the wind, wanting in. i look closely. the pillow on her bed dark with spit.

far from the house, the sea heaves. darling shakes her skirt to get the creases out. she smoothes her hair back with her hands. yesterday, in the garden, a tear slid from her eye. she was a fool. a corpse propped against the wall. she won’t go anywhere, now. i wouldn’t know how to stop her.

opening this door is a thing duchess can only do once. she has the key she has carried all along.

there is no sign of the cat. this could be the door. the light is brighter, here. like the house doesn’t exist. she hasn’t spoken, a girl dazzled in the frame.

28.3
a shadow darkens the doorway. darling, swept to her feet, her skirt ringing. the house undisturbed, the lamp on the sideboard like nothing has happened. duchess avoiding her eyes. duchess sitting in the armchair, her lips moving soundlessly. darling listens. the house great, terrible and still. she won't hear a thing. darling rests her hand on duchess's shoulder. her knuckles white, rigid. no, she can't hear it. the murmur that duchess spits, her struggle with excess.

danger passes. darling smoothes her hand over duchess's head, fixing a loose lock of hair into its coiled nest. the cat poses by the window, licking its flank.

darling will accustom her eyes, her ears. whatever is terrible will cause her to laugh. it will be impossible not to look. once she can look she will no longer be afraid. she tries over and over and over. to make the room and the door meet.

the footstep on the stairs, there and not there. the figure at the door, looking for a way out.

the house won't return to normal. things will stay as they are. the room projected behind them will remain the same. only the weather changes. a curtain of fog rising above her hips. darling picks a sugar cube from the bowl and allows it to dissolve on her outstretched tongue.

a chain slipped through the bars of the gate, a lock dangling, heavy and horrible. duchess and darling don't mind being all alone, in their house upon the hill. they talk to the dead from morning till night.

28.4
darling considers herself. darling has soft brown eyes. her mouth is shaped, a kidney bean. her full lipped mouth. her hair flowing. she is not called beautiful. no one calls her. her simple, yellow dress. darling is young and vulnerable. until now she was not at this house. she came here on a train, hills gently swelling curves. soft and swelling. darling is alone. duchess has insisted, darling is alone. darling has forgotten the past. the house is now and here. the house is still strange.

darling sits in the corner, almost forgotten.

darling observes herself in the tarnished mirror perched above the hall table. a slender girl, blond hair swept back by a blue scarf that matches her dress. a familiar girl, her long white fingers busily searching pockets for a key. a small girl, too thin, green eyes enormous in her pale face. standing in the window, the sunlight drifting across her fair hair, her body, her hands hidden in the pleats of her skirt.

darling is waiting. darling stands looking out the window, the house behind her. she glances over her shoulder, catching sight of herself in the looking glass, pausing to fix her two jet black plaits on top of her head. a quick glance assures her. she is dissatisfied with her reflection. her lips pursed, as if for a kiss. a moment later she runs along the passage, her long braids flapping carelessly down her back.

darling has opened the door herself. her short, dark hair in disarray. a shaft of sunlight pours through the open window, slipping across her face. wholly feminine and lovely. her pleasant face suggests a poet. she realizes she is not alone. in the same instant she realizes that she is not alone in the room. darling turns her attention. the light slim and attractive. the dust lifting, a spectacle not quite real. the light grows rapidly dimmer, and goes out.
darling is not defined well enough to see. i try to make this clear. her dark-haired moody countenance. she has found her image and accepted her own urgent plea. she looks. another wave of light falls through the window. there is always a danger of becoming washed-out. darling stares out and worries. her frail health, her hesitation. oh? she says, frowning.

when darling opened the door, there was no sign of the cat. there was no sound from outside. everything in the room told a story. everything in the room said, once… darling is apprehensive. the room is warm. i hold her hand, and she is shivering. the dust and cold flows all around us. the instant darling begins to moan, the dust settles, stops.

28.5

a woman without a name. the agony of a name, gathering. duchess leans against the doorjamb. there is nothing to prevent her from speaking. her eyes hold the room.

i hope you’ll forgive the candles, darling, says duchess.

i move in the direction of the open doorway, darling flowing ahead of me, ascending the stairs. an empty room lies beyond. there is a small, crude window, and a light bulb on a string dangling from the ceiling. there is no ghost of any kind. the room is narrow. the stairs resist my efforts to climb. darling hears a faint creak. she stops. outside, the sea, contracting. the sound is not repeated. everything dusty. her footsteps imprinted in the grey soot that covers the warped floorboards. the room quiet, indulgent.

the key clicks in the lock.
duchess has never tried to stop darling. darling goes wherever she wants. she goes everywhere.
the house the sea the wood. within this limit, the extent of her reach. no longer afraid of the
dark, her eyes holding in view. here she has had a beginning. she has been employed. she has
carried out her impulses without daring to call them more. there is a limit.

i have followed her from room to room, only to discover that i must never speak. that i cannot
breach the interspaces of the dark.

no one is visible on the lawn as darling moves away from the house. her steps quicken, skirt
rustling, caught by needles of reflected sunlight. darling leaves the path. darling stares at the
house. a chill seizes her as she forces herself to move forward, back toward the iron doors.

darling runs into the hallway. the lights in the corridor are off. it is too late. the house will not
permit her. duchess leans against the doorjamb. she sees no need to search. the impulse is not
in her. it is safer to do what she usually does, what the house intends her to do. the house is not
unreasonable.

darling peers into the dark, growing sick and dizzy. the clock strikes.
a secret between herself and the sea. the waves return in return. the sand swept from under her feet. darling observes herself standing, a lonesome figure with a dress swept back, tugged by an unseen hand. she sees herself before the house they live in together. duchess is wise to keep her distance from the window for awhile.

duchess and darling possess the knowledge that will unlock the door, but that can only be done with opportunity. through their silence, they prepare the way. blood on the wall, a body in the closet. a body dumped over a cliff. here, a boat she can paddle, if she knew her way. stars she can’t depend upon: none of them are recognizable. the system collapses. darling stops before anything happens. the offer of the boat fades. i keep my eye on her, to see what she will try next.

a bruise floods below her eye, staining her cheek. a bruise she woke up with, tearing at her eyes in her sleep. darling says she doesn’t know how or why. she says with red wax on her teeth.

a draft stirs the draped tablecloth. she can feel something behind her, upon her. waiting on the door step for the door to be opened. duchess faces the opposite direction. she won’t look, her hand placed over her eyes with the fingers slightly spread. the threat leaks through. all i need to know is that i can find them, in the house upon the hill pretending to listen to the sea, pretending not to look. the door and the room meet.

duchess admires the view. the cry of the door creaking open brings the sea back in. darling can feel the damp through her thin glove. her slow look across the room brings in the first wave.
here is a house, identical to the first in every way. two houses revolving, side by side. crossing and recrossing. the sea pushed back, waves mounting. here, a girl kneeling at the heart, stacking firewood, the flames not yet lit. her dress soiled, filthy. snow crusting the window pane like snot. the scene activated by her voice. the room bends and twists, turning itself inside out. suddenly: color. the transcendent, bold fuschia of her mouth.

If she drowns…

her slow look across the room fails to take me in. duchess drops her line, slips.

at a light touch on her face, darling screams.

duchess knows she is alone. the paint chipping off the wall where she pressed her mouth, whispering. the hint of a torn envelope. the phone line cut, the great noise of glass breaking. she shoves the pin into her finger beneath the nail, doesn’t cry. her skirt stuck with cat hairs, reminders of a ghost. i can only describe the things that are ordinarily left out. it is dark, here. the only light issues from the outline of the door.

darling screams, a severed braid of hair coiled on her pillow, hissing.

When I arrived, says darling, This door was open.

delirious stairway, wound tight in the center of the house. duchess pauses, her progress interrupted. it isn’t easy to stay. she cups the flame of the candle in her hand and listens. throbbling, swooshing, like something getting built. her fingers encased in wax.

all the books on the shelves unraveled, the letter surrendering to the fire.
duchess floats through the hallway, unfurling, her eyes tracking the points of her shoes as they peek intermittently from beneath her skirt—a cat's paw reaching under a door. she crosses to a window with panes divided by iron crosses, spitting into her hand and pressing her palm flat against the scene of pine bright with fallen snow. the wind hurling shimmering cascades of ice like grain from a farmer's outstretched grasp. a low, ceaseless wail and duchess shudders, slipping her chilled hand into the pocket of her dress. when she reaches the door she halts and looks back down the hall, the rug and infantry of windows fading into the distance behind her. and then she moves on, the door pushed in, swinging effortlessly in a wide arc, crossing into a room with a ceiling barely higher than her head, the air still and stagnant within it as if it had been sucked out centuries ago.

duchess stands in the room with her hand idly drooping from her pocket, her palm clammy, an itch in the back of her throat. she looks toward the corridor again. she feels the urge to speak but there is no one around to listen. between her and the ceiling an electric current slithers, raising fine hairs on her head as if yanked by an unseen hand. duchess takes in the room. there is one window and within it there is nothing but the sea, swelling to fill the precipice, to fill the room from edge to edge. the floor buckling under the weight, under the image of sunlight cresting every wave. the room dazzled, bombarded with speckled motes, the light caught on the water held in the window cast into the room fragmenting, multiplied immeasurably. duchess gasps. a penetrating light lies over everything, smothering the walls, the crevices, the slender opening of the door.

duchess walks to the window and places her hand with the fingers fanned out, a peacock displaying its tail, dead center, gazing through the glass tenderly.
i watch to aid her loneliness. i urge her forward. each morning darling makes her bed, tucking
the corners of the sheets neatly and tightly beneath the mattress. her attention is not the
pestering, sloppy negligence of the sea, smoothing a shard of glass. my observations may be too
much. here is a light gathered in a stone. darling searches through each closet, tossing out more
dresses, chiffon ruffling in the air like waves. dresses tossed all over, shattered ships, tattered
sails. this is the obvious place to look. here, and here, and here. she has looked already, and
looked again.

all the keys look alike to me.

there are keys enough to last. it is pitch black in here. here is another closet, and another, and a
drawer, and rooms she doesn’t know about yet. there are still rooms. darling all a tangle.

duchess, speaking through the doorway. this door must be kept closed and locked, says duchess.
darling is ashamed. the key on the chain around her neck is warm, is hot. if she should die, the
cold of the house would become her cold. breath sucked from her lips like the sea withdrawing
from the sand. the waiting darkness. you ought to stay inside, says duchess.

i cannot be still a moment. i don’t care if i am caught. my whole body trembles. i smooth
darling’s hair back with my hand. she pulls her shoulders in, stiffly, seized by a chill. she leaves
the house without saying a word. she goes out the back way, to avoid passing duchess in the
parlour. before she exits, darling turns the mirror to face the wall.

29.5
darling and duchess face each other. they don’t see the difference. they each have a difficult time submitting to the hours. they have no control over this. each moment, broken in half, split into segments, occupied by tasks. darling starts to call their problem a shadow. a shadow possesses the shape of a thing. there are two forms suggested; one is dark. as an illustration, darling cut her wrist with a butter knife and a strand of blood speeds down like a spider dangling on a thread. darling brings all the keys together. she tries to explain it to duchess so it makes sense. they both look out the window at once.

their eyes settle halfway between the house and the sea.

gazing out the window produces and image. here is something they both can recognize, and agree upon. it is a thing they have made themselves, through the assertion of their look. the image is and is not. they are capable of making it appear. darling selects a key from the pile and swallows it whole. they become lost again. stuck again. there is moss spreading across the wall. darling feels the weight of duchess’s hand on her thigh.

it isn’t only darling and duchess looking for an absence. i think of her cracking a hardboiled egg on the tabletop, thin lines spreading, crazed. i think of the possibility. darling peels the shell, grounding it into a fine, white powder by hammering it with her fist. a terrible sound, and the beauty of remaining flesh. she won’t be reduced to a girl, sitting a room, a girl caught in a series of stills. the room already lost in the past, haunted by the image of what it might become. darling sneezes into her sleeve, the fabric grey, spotted with blood. she looks in every direction. she acts like she is listening.

for duchess, the sight of the ocean is a sign. there is danger in leaving the house. there is a problem with passing through the threshold. there are many obstacles, including the
resemblance of one room to the next. i observe her movements from elsewhere. a woman huddled behind a wall. no defense against the siren call of lurching waves. she vanishes into this image, the house. her last words on the telephone, don’t try to find me.
darling leaves the house without uttering a word. she looks carefully through the cluttered trees, the hollow spaces left between. there is only the dark, a stone tossed over the hedge. she would like to know what i am doing. i make noises when i should have been still and silent--scratching and shuffling, muffled coughs. she passes several images half hidden among the shrubs and cliffs. is there anyone there? she says, pushing knitted branches apart.

at the tideline, darling waits. she is certain she recognizes this ship. soon she will be noticed. she hacks and spits the key into her hand. the sight of a girl standing alone on a beach with the wind passing through her hair is all the atmosphere she needs. she wonders where this ship has come from. where it will end. she’s ever always here. the apparition of a ship trawling the sea, horrible not to touch.

duchess whispers through the keyhole. there is a note taped to the door. there is an ax hidden under her bed. there is a letter tucked under the rug. the vase exploding with roses floats across the room, lofted by an unseen hand. duchess covers her wailing mouth. i pretend not to listen; i hear her. duchess heads for the door. duchess circles through the house, returning to the same room.

darling tosses the key into the waves. the key thrown back by the sea like a rider from a horse’s back. the beauty of an arc that constantly arrives. still, she feels she has succeeded. she made the attempt. that is all it takes. she will be heard.

her footprints in the sand fill with water, and then wash away.
the day passes; uneasily, wearily. receding light sprawls bright and hot across the divan. here are
strange figures; chimeras made and unmade. a thrill courses through her, thunder in her heart.
flowers wither in the cluttered upholstery, a mess of thread. duchess paces in the hall,
movements observed from the woods beyond.

darling twirls, sleeves pulsing in the air. silk butterflies led by music she can’t resist. her head
tossed, baring a long, slender throat, ruff of white feathers. beauty will hold. the trees move
aside to guide her, the path unraveling.

the parlour smolders in the last light, parched of color, everything ablaze. the house uplifted; a
vapor in the atmosphere. every room clear, almost empty–black and white. the phone rings.
duchess’s lips almost caress the receiver. she says hello? she fills her mouth with fire.

i have chosen my knife. i send its blade darting through the long, heavy curtains. it moves
effortlessly. tattered crepe, disruption and disarray. the waves withdraw, the sea holds its
breath. the moon, belching over still water. darling pulls the knife from the mattress, a roar
filling her ears. a splotch of blood, triumphant.

an eclipse of moths descends to devour her best wool dress. every eye observes her, swooping
and hollering, the knife slashing through the air. darling slams the door. it is not fear that bars
her. moths drift from her tousled hair. her face downy with dust, dead skin, rust. her lips part,
release the letter tucked under her tongue. a letter she tears to pieces and burns upon the fire.
its persistence is her only torment.

30.3
the gulls on the sand pause idly, drawing in the sun's heat. they bow to the lowing tide, beak to breast. duchess calls from the window, darling, find yourself; she is always suffocating, intrusive, terrible. hugging the key to her chest. if darling is to find the key, it must appear a coincidence.

here there are over three hundred windows, some darker than others. duchess needs the ocean air. the sight of the water is a pleasure to her. there is nothing o stop her from watching. no thick curtains to smother the scene. the tide will continue to move, in and out.

darling has a shape i recognize, even in this dress. i take a handful of her skirt and pull. i slip a pebble into the lock to prevent the bolt from sliding into the slot. she will return this way, following the pattern on the carpet, following the sounds of birds gossiping in the attic. their chattering slows and stops, the volume in the room switched off. darlings stands with one hand folded over her eyes, trying not to see.

darling will choose for herself. she knows i won’t always be here, keeping track of her movements, of her tasks and accomplishments. i have my own things to do. i can’t wait, i can’t waste. darling and duchess will reach the room in different ways, uncertain if they’ve seen this door before. they have been here, always and again. here is a mouse scampering along the wall. here is a window bounded by white curtains, like gap teeth. here the house, spackled with light, ready to surrender. it has done its best to be a home.

can you hear me? i say. i’m trying to help. already there is a knock at the door. i turn and there is no sign, no trace of her. the music box sits open on the overstuffed chair, the tiny dancer whirling in its stiff tutu.

here is a big, ugly beast. the closet door closed; the beast tangled in the coats and galoshes. its howl won’t come closer than sound.
duchess descends the darkening stairs. candlelight wavers, bright smudges dancing against the wall. a vague shadow falls over her white face. the outline of her dress is clear. there is no moon tonight. every window in the house, lit, and the sea swirls and crashes against the cliff. warmth and joy spread through her.

darling, determined to know what's behind this locked door. she sets her eye to the keyhole, but there's nothing to see. an empty room with broken windows. a trunk, a dusty lampshade, a suitcase full of neatly folded clothes. her efforts to remember fail; she does not recognize this dress. the portraits left to mildew. if she opens this door, she will discover furniture gathering dust. it can't happen, darling says, rising. nothing will happen. she will not resist. she finds it beautiful, moving from room to room: it is beautiful until she stops. until the knife leaps from her hand.

as she nears the room darling touches my hand very lightly. we look at each other without speaking. i am content to wait.

30.4

did you see? says duchess. the sound of ice breaking, cracking: broken bones. here is another reference to the dark. here is absence, a nothing she latches onto: sagging, yawning velvet. hands decked in shining soapsuds. the clean dishes fit her purpose. darling is silent. the only sound, the birds beyond the window. duchess ends where she began: stacking teacups in the cupboard, wiping her soapy fingerprints from the windowpane with a rag. darling moves in and out of the house. i watch the way she stands, one hand pushed deep into the pocket of her coat. i want to see how it is done: the appearance and disappearance of a girl. let me go, says darling, lifting her
skirt to display the ropes and wires. a candelabra mounted on the wall has strong control over a woman. her ways of vanishing.
duchess, laughing, touches the brooch at her breast. staying is no choice for her at all. she has been a nice girl. she has treated herself to several peppermint lozenges. she knows that one day she will have to tell the truth, but for now she laughs, certain that they will be brought closer by the house.
i see myself in this room. the floor bloodied, the bird dead. the pearls around duchess’s neck splitting, spilling across the floor, tracks of red like rose gardens. it won’t be necessary for me to remember this: i will be there, in the present, standing at the open window, the wind thrusting back my hair.
darling sits quietly by the fire. it is painful for her to listen, so closely, so intensely.

30.5

the door slamming. a doll wrapped tightly in gauze. terror mounts. darling won’t allow me to take her pulse; she sweeps from the room. the waves cuddle with the rocks. there is more to this than blood. i continue: more than abnormality. the difference between what i think i see and what i see: the glory of the chandelier hovering over the room. the hum of machinery past her vision, a sound she hasn’t paid attention to for awhile.

i can’t forget the night i first heard the howling, darling says. she needs me here; i know the way. i can tell what will happen before the door even closes. i crash against the house. i am a missing girl. i wish i had something to do here: a little gesture, a word of comfort. no demand is made
on me: i watch and i keep track. i count a hundred windows, a hundred doors, a thousand misplaced keys. two women, duchess’s hand on darling’s shoulder. i have nothing. one less, one more.

*here you are, darling,* duchess says. a chair knocked over, a room filthy with cobwebs, every candle lit. darling turns to face duchess. *i don’t go far,* darling says. *i went outside; i didn’t see anything.* not a clue to be found. there is only cold, damp earth and trees pacing through the forest and the moon blazing above the sea. there is no secret passageway, no unexpected visitor. the days pass. darling must learn to never want to leave. the house lovely in the moonlight. here is a ring in the lion’s mouth. here there is nothing to be afraid of.

it is only the dark.

**CUT SCENES / Voices in the Wind**

duchess purses her lips and blows the candle out. i feel her warm breath stir my hair.

darling, stooping to drink water from the faucet. how did she choose this house? she wonders if it will ever be the same again. she understands how details like a quilt spread across the bed can make all the difference. she notices as much as she should. the curtains, the clock are things that matter. if she wants to use poison, she’ll have to wear gloves.
nothing remains but the house, the wood, and the sea. there darling sits in the warm sunlight, falling in love, clinging to her pride and dignity. as i watch her i can see so clearly. a girl framed in the clutter of an old house, in the leaves of a tree. sweet and pretty, like a girl in a book.

my lips caress her cheek. darling, you know the answer already.

duchess is standing by the chair where darling is sitting, reading a book. duchess rests her hand on darling’s shoulder, and darling glances up: they share a look. darling stares off into space, a tinge of fear draped in her lovely eyes. she is picturing the room upstairs. out past the parlour’s picture window, the sea recoils, the only sound its steady roar, an animal trapped in its pen.

goodbye, darling thinks. there are mysteries that will never be resolved. that doesn’t trouble her. the dead are dead. she puts her hand in duchess’s. she stands and they move towards the open door. i don’t care very much where they go, as long as they stay together.

*

duchess muses. she has attempted to overcome the house, but the house will be heard: its shifting and groaning, its mice and moths. sometimes the creakings so startle her that she feels as if she is eternally waking from a dream, tottering on the edge of a staircase. she opens her eyes only to look, to assure herself that no one else is around. often she hears a voice. in such moments she is astonished: she pauses, even stops. nothing escapes her notice. it is necessary for her to distinguish between herself and the house.
everything takes place in the house, or in the acreage around it. the vast house and its shadows are her property, the only thing she has. duchess shivers a little. she is always inside, looking out. she finds herself, again and again, withdrawing into dim scenery.

*

darling is busy. there is cat hair everywhere: grey clouds collecting under the bed, the davenport. she twists a handkerchief in her hands, as if she were strangling the cat. she’s had a difficult time moving through the day. she will be generous. the cat cleans itself, to a point, dandelions wilting in its belly.

duchess is familiar with the details of the house. she knows the danger of leaving: ghosts swell to fill the rooms. when all the lights are out, there are things done in the dark. she has been hollering for miles, moving apprehensively towards the window: i can hear the train coming now, duchess says. i get a little closer to her. i can see the thin veil of powder dusted over her face, the tiny lines echoing around her mouth. she knows the work required of her, the letter fluttering frantically in the fire. the sea, tangled at the edge of her eye. something keeps her here. she has been stupid, confused, afraid, but she knows her position; nothing will alter.

darling takes the first step towards the door. she moves to the side, as if i am in the way. in her pocket, sand, fresh from the ground. she circles the room, spilling a shimmering pillar of sand from her closed fist. she pinches the candle out. she says three words. she places an egg in her mouth. this is the night and the beginning of things. this is her tongue, whispering. lips pressed against the window. the house cleansed by saltwater, sand, fire. her white dress stained.

*
it begins with the image of a bird. darling whispers to herself, *one hour till midnight.* the chandelier hanging above the stairs begins to rattle. the basin of her skirt wet with tears. the bird already gone. everything in the room filtered through an orange lens, so that it burns without getting hot. darling makes a motion as a signal to anyone who is watching. she will be alight. she can take care of herself. she takes care of herself by allowing everything to go totally out of control, but at least her dress is ironed and her lipstick doesn’t bleed in a halo around her mouth.

duchess lifts herself from the davenport, swooping the sleeping carbuncle of cat into her arms.

darling strips her dress, removing the layers like onion skins. she is full of secrets, her arms bent strangely back, marks made by a bird’s sharp beak on her clavicle, collarbone. she looks so small, standing in the deflated pool of her dress. it is normal to her, having cameras peppered throughout the house. there are things that have happened here that no one has ever seen. she has only alluded, left the intention ill-defined. on the wall behind her there is the eerie suggestion of a hand-print. there is the greed of the house for her attention. she will have to wet her rag, again, and wipe down this plaster.

the room is smaller than i thought. her bed takes almost all the space. i hide the key under the pillow, where she is certain to find it.

*

a white cloth rises above the sea. a single pulse, increasing: uncontrollable longing. waves push torrents of static towards the house.
darling emerges from the water, her hair spread in curlicues across her long, white back. she lifts her hand and the waves subside. today, everything will stop. here she will stop. this is how she feels about fish. she has to go underground. the first possibility is breaking some mirrors.

duchess is careful not to move. sweat slips down the back of her neck, a chill passing through her like a ghost. she gathers strength as the moments accrue. her shoulders tense, struggle to escape from stillness. this is the last; she trembles, she glows; she is consumed. the shadows will prevail.

darling spreads a line of salt across the threshold. she calls are you here? where are you? with no result, no echo. she makes me blush. she checks her progress, glancing behind her: only a quiet and lonely fog. her fingertips, stretched as far as she can reach, barely brush the ceiling. darling shakes off the mist clinging to her skirt, clucking, pulling bits of glass from her hair. now that the door is closed, things will get worse. all i can do is watch. it starts with her memories, things she has saved. roses dipped in white paint. knives slipped under bed-stands, keys dropped in pitchers of milk. secrets she has had to hold. she begins with these fragments. they will lead her somewhere; she will allow herself to be lead, to be held. to the precipice, the terrible edge: beyond which the clouds assume shapes.

i don’t have the voice, i only watch and wait, with the guidance of a window.

CRITICAL AFTERWORD:

A SECRET PASSAGEWAY TO NOWHERE BUT ITSELF
For the last year I have lived in a cabin in the mountains. The cabin is surrounded on all sides by trees. The wind comes fierce on some days and the trees sway and waltz and the sound of neighbor’s dogs barking is muffled by the sound of the wind messing with the trees. In the cabin I have a small altar. There is a bell, and a pinecone, and a seashell. If I hold my ear to the shell I can hear the ocean, trapped inside. In Colorado it seems as if the ocean is only beyond the horizon, that if I walked through the plains far enough the sea will come to meet me. My fiancé’s grandmother passed away about two weeks ago and I put her picture on the altar and lit a candle for her. We went to Minnesota for her memorial and it was raining; the lightning was streaking sideways across the sky. The ice on the lake melted; it was spring where before it had still been winter, and the geese had been standing out on the frozen water on one leg, switching to the other when their foot got cold. We opened the windows and let the spring air in.

*Beyond This Point Are Monsters* is and is not a diaristic text. I’m more interested in recording my own impressions than in following a plot closely or allowing things to happen. Documenting the shots and cuts and how mistakes that occurred during filming create a second, invisible narrative. So I’m writing a text that isn’t there—a text that haunts the original. A bad copy, maybe. Blurred, a ghost. All of this stems from my habit of not being able to sit still without doing something. I watch TV; I knit; I journal obsessively. I particularly like doing two things at once. Formally, the diary is really thrilling. It’s so nebulous, changeable. Narrative gets dismantled. I think of the diary as a text as a method of transporting experience, rather than being about the narrative or story it contains. There’s also something at once precious and useful about a vessel—it can perform the most ordinary tasks, but it can also hold and protect the most
extraordinary substances. I like Carole Maso’s notion of the vessel as

Always trying to attain the unattainable. Container of the uncontainable. Weird, gorgeous vessel. Voluptuous vessel. Room for the random, the senseless, the heartbreaking to be played out. A form both compressed, distilled, and expansive enough to accommodate the most difficult and the most subtle states of being. (24)

My diary is a mirror of my activities. Waiting, watching, reading.

Writing through the image, or between images opens up the diegetic space of linear narrative and allows the errant and the unexpected to slip in. If film is, as Abigail Child has said, “more a language-inventing machine than a language” then the formal elements of cinema must contain those possibilities for the implementation of language itself. Dissecting the structural codes of cinema offers opportunities for re-imagining the paths that a page might take; for example, in his essay *Devotional Cinema*, Nathaniel Dorsky wrote that “shots, as moments of luminous accommodation, ripen and expand and are popped like soap bubbles by the cut. The cuts redeclare the clarity of the shots, restating the primal clarity of the view. Otherwise the shots become too solid.” It is interesting to think about these moments in a film, the shot and the cut, and then to attempt to embody those actions with words on a page not only visually, with line breaks and paragraphs, but in other, metaphorical ways, using the word to duplicate and expand upon what shots and cuts do. Shots, cuts, dissolves, the frame “the apparatus of cinema is a kind of ghost of the page, its indebted other, or perhaps an other that has metamorphosized its larval self” (Dorsky). The page, a silken carapace; the image, gossamer wings movement, the awakening of the subject that was bound by the gutter, the colophon.

The medium of film, and particularly the Gothic genre, opens up the formal and structural possibilities of the page by turning to cinema as a repository of images that point back towards language. Films like Las Von Trier’s *Antichrist* (2009) not only record and play with the
supernatural and grotesque side of nature, but they translate it for us, and present the reality of a world undone as prevailing in the moment of the film’s unfolding. These strange hands, unborn animals, reach through the screen and take possession of us, guiding the line extending from our pens, the ink curling like a fist and then stopping. In Von Trier’s film, nature is anthropomorphized as an entity which stands in for extreme states of being, mirroring psychological throes of the character Her (played by Charlotte Gainsbourg). Her abjection (over the death of her child) and desire for revenge (against her husband, for his domination and control over her intellectual and emotional life) is evidenced by nature: the acorns pounding relentlessly on their tin roof, the fox who eats his own entrails, the raven buried who won’t die, etc.. The control which she assumes over her own body marks her (for Him, played by William Dafoe) as preternaturally evil, undermining the surface of their relationship and her position as a bereaved mother. Antichrist barters with juxtapositions between inner and outer, domesticity and nature, good and evil, order and chaos, and what is at stake is the body of the woman and the viewer’s ability to retain their sympathy under the duress of extreme violence and terror. The slippages between these binaries expose an intimacy in which the concocted and the corporeal are equally valued as authentic, and in which meaning will never be clearly defined, just as the impossibility dividing between anguish and desire, subject and object remain impossible.

TELEVISION & MELODRAMA

The OED defines episode as an “incidental narrative or digression in a poem, story, etc., separable from the main subject, yet arising naturally from it.” It is interesting for me to think about each episode as a casual or unnecessary element of the show’s arc. Hobson states that the soap opera “is based on fictional realism and explores and celebrates the domestic, personal and everyday in all its guises…Through its characters the soap opera must connect with the
experience of its audience, and its contents must be stories of the ordinary” (Hobson 35).
However, the digressive concerns of *Dark Shadows* drift from the everyday: hauntings, psychic possession, vampirism, lycanthropes, time travel. The first 210 episodes invoke a traditional gothic narrative: a heroine in search of her identity in a great, mysterious house by the sea. The condition of watching the show must be invested with the everyday: television is “firmly located within the home and the real worlds and images to which it gives access flow directly within, and blend with, the progress of everyday life” (Buonanno 36). That is, the phenomenological experience of watching TV is subsumed by the domestic demands of the home. In this context, I think about the writing I am doing as an expression of my gaze on the screen and on the interactions and exchanges the characters make; a gaze surrounded by the vulnerable and fluid space in which I locate my viewing activity. I take notes as I watch and constellate the handwritten pages into scenes, concentrating on the prevalent visual metaphors of the show and hoping that these interests will reproduce a plot that is anterior to the show’s own plot, releasing information that was obscured or invisible in the original text. The repetition and position of secondary objects, such as keys or fire or a painting, stand in for exposition, complication, rising action, etc. In television, “the meaning of everyday action, ordinary gesture, and standard decor is thus intensified [by these representing objects which absorb the absence of human contact] so that the psychic strains, breaks, and escalations of feelings are made manifest” (Joyrich 47). I hope that through writing these pieces that the meaning invoked by melodrama is somehow resituated or denied.

When I watch *Dark Shadows* my activity is far removed from the experience of the viewer at the time of the show’s original broadcast or for those who watch it in rerun on cable TV; this difference is embodied by the contrast between gaze and glance. “TV’s regime of vision is less intense than cinema’s; it is a regime of the glance rather than the gaze. The gaze implies a
concentration of the spectator’s activity into that of looking; the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking” (Ellis 137). Because I tend to observe the show closely, as one would watch a film, I am not watching the show in the situation common to TV broadcasts: I don’t walk around the house and do other things while the show is playing from a DVD in my laptop. In order to frustrate this complication, I hybridize each text I produce by interrupting the material from watching Dark Shadows with elements gathered from other, disparate sources, as well as portions of my personal diary. In this way, the accidental and the rampant are allowed to enter.

In the house where I grew up, I had a television in my bedroom. I would turn the dial to the public access station late at night when I was supposed to be asleep. Local bulletin board messages scrolled by, broadcasting a dreamy blue light that was good enough to read by. I also read while the sound was on, sitcoms and soaps and late night talk shows. The difference between reading, watching, and writing dissolves. It becomes impossible to untangle them, to discern where the image metamorphoses into the word. I am always already watching, always being watched, always reading and writing. The television blends into the furniture, but if I need something to do, a noise to fill the room, I can turn it on.

In the home environment which by its very nature is imbued with mostly routine practices and experiences, the televisual experience coexists with the various tasks and commitments of domestic life and the continual shifting of our attention span: sometimes focused on the ensemble of pictures and sounds emanating from the screen, sometimes distracted by tasks and demands that relegate the switched-on set to the background.

But it is precisely because television allows us to switch between looking and listening, between involvement and detachment, and because it offers us both demanding and relaxing forms of cultural entertainment and social participation, that it can claim to possess the true and authentically distinctive qualities of an open medium. It is flexible; and it is resistant both to theoretical imposition and to the empirical experience of fixed, essential and unchanging characteristics. (Buonanno 41)

The text of Dark Shadows creates a very real, defined world. The means of production are hidden (but slip in occasionally, boom mikes hovering like butterflies over the characters’ heads) and the
implication is that their reality is also mine: that the invisible and unfathomable are with us at every moment, that haunted houses deliberately imply that the secrets their empty, endless rooms contains are the same as the unfathomed reaches contained within us, and that the division between fiction and reality is murky, at best.

DOMESTIC / POETIC SPACE

The house in *Dark Shadows*, Collinwood, functions as a self-contained, self-reflecting environment for the characters within it. Like the heroine of the show, Victoria Winters, the house has mysterious, fluid identity—the house used for location shots is located in Newport, Rhode Island, standing in for Collinsport, Maine. The house, also known as Seaview Terrace and the Carey Mansion, was originally constructed in Washington DC and then dismantled and brought to Newport, where it has served at various times as a summer cottage for the wealthy, a boarding school for girls, and a dormitory for college students ("Carey Mansion"). In her book *Housing Problems*, Susan Bernstein states that there is something necessarily uncanny about architecture and houses in particular, and I think it is especially true of Collinwood as it is represented by the television sets which depict the interior of the mansion. These rooms are remarkably absent of affect. Whenever Mrs. Collins gazes out the window towards the sea, we know that she is only looking at the camera; that the sea itself is quite far away. When Victoria and David scramble through the woods, the concrete walls of the set are sometimes visible, and the pots in which the trees around sit; these video disturbances or bloopers highlight the simulated quality of the TV environment, calling into question the stability of the narrative. These moments of slippage, when the apparatus of production becomes apparent (the cue card at the beginning of each episode, the fires that cause lens flares) are startling. These moments dismantle the division between the television and me, between subject and object. They bring us closer together.
The OED defines series as a “number or set of material things of one kind ranged in a line, either contiguously or at more or less regular intervals; a range or continued spatial succession of similar objects; in early use applied to a row of building.” This epistemological link between series and the notion of architecture arranged in a line seems useful when I think about structuring episodes on the page; Bernstein argues that “the house brought under scrutiny always reveals itself to be another text, another inscribed surface” (Bernstein 3). The house portrayed in Dark Shadows and especially in my own text is a circumscribed feminine domestic space; Nancy Armstrong has said that as the home “became the woman’s sphere, then, the household appeared to detach itself from the political world and to provide the complement and antidote to it. And in this way, novels helped to transform the household into what might be called ‘counterimage’ of the modern marketplace, an apolitical realm of culture within the culture as a whole” (48). Conflict is confined within the house, and it is woman’s authority which provides or prevents closure.

THE DIMINUTIVE

In naming darling and duchess, I choose diminutive addresses with which the female characters on Dark Shadows are sometimes described. The figure of the house is great and terrible, and the persons enclosed in it are small. Burke said that “we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered, into compliance” (3.13). I reject the idea that the figures of beautiful women flatter the viewer into compliance, and would like to subvert this rational. Laura Mulvey said that “the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in context, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox” (242). At the instance of sight, rational thought is suspended; the eye surrenders to beauty (the woman) or sublimity (the house). Mulvey also said that pleasure in looking is split
between active/male and passive/female—"The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (242). This fetishistic scopophilia, build[ing] up the physical beauty of the object [and] transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (the male’s gaze is aligned with the viewer’s gaze and the look provokes anxiety, which can be solved through “fetishistic scopophilia, build[ing] up the physical beauty of the object [and] transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (Mulvey 245). Or, the anxiety may be resolved through sadism, by assigning guilt to the object of the look and forgiving it. Mary Ann Doane added to this argument by writing that the position of the ‘the female spectator’ is that of a being stranded between incommensurable entities” (7). The female spectator is caught oscillating between active/passive positions while attempting to identify with the narrative process. “It is as though masculinity were required to effectively conceptualize access to activity or agency (whether illusory or not)” (Doane 8). What happens to the female figure when she occupies a masculine space through a subversion or transgression of gender? Does she take on the characteristics of the male spectator; “pure, unified and self-sufficient” position (Doane 8)? How can these ideas be enacted through writing? Female beauty and nature reinforce masculinity as authorial—he sees, he is free to own, to create. What happens when ‘her’ beauty is flayed or marred? When beauty and death are combined? When the distinction between the beauty of the female figure and the sublimity of the house are interwoven?

THE MODERN GOTHIC

Particularly in the literary Gothic the encounter between good and evil often is mediated through a woman character. This conflict is endlessly repeated in films and literature with an insistence on a formulaic plot in which a young woman arrives at a
foreboding house, usually as a bride or governess, and battles with her desire for, and paranoia of, the man who resides there. She is constantly in danger, threatened by her own suspicions and by those in the house who appear to despise her. These conflicts are resolved in the end when the heroine either recognizes her misjudgment of the man she loves (usually the husband), or locates within him true evil (usually a man she fell in love with but is not married to). Either way, she exits the house with her identity more firmly her own than when she entered. In this section I investigate the representation and development of evil in the modern Gothic through the lens of three of these women: Mrs. De Winter in Daphne du Maurier’s Rebecca as well as Hitchcock’s film Rebecca, Letty in Dorothy Scarborough’s The Wind, and Merricat in Shirley Jackson’s We Have Always Lived in the Castle.

The grotesque and threatening other in Dorothy Scarborough’s The Wind (1925) is figured not through the body of the other but through the malicious embodiment of the weather. Letty Mason, the novel’s heroine, is a recently orphaned teenager who has left the bountiful, blooming land of her childhood Virginia for the wilds of West Texas. The novel is peppered with longing for pastoral landscapes: Letty is reluctant to view her new home as anything than a bewildering assailant:

How could a frail, sensitive woman fight the wind? How oppose a wild, shouting voice that never let her know the peace of silence? —a resistless force that was at her all the day, a naked, unbodied wind—like a ghost more terrible because invisible—that wailed to her across waste places in the night, calling to her like a demon lover? (Scarborough 3-4)

Is nature, by definition, careless and without mercy or meaning? Is it evil? Rather than the wind representing the whims of nature, in Scarborough’s novel the wind seems to stand for Letty’s inability to cope with her situation as an outcast (from the life she knew in
Virginia, from her cousin’s home on the prairie) and as a woman who must marry in order to survive (and thus the sexual and physical demands of marriage). In fact, Letty’s perception of the wind is often grounded in sensual language: the wind is “a demon lover” with “obscene antics, [and] horrific gestures” (Scarborough 197). These observations of the wind’s active lasciviousness are bound to Letty’s own estimation of herself as a “frail, sensitive woman.” Letty is first introduced to the wind on her voyage west by Wirt Roddy, a stranger who buys her lunch on the train, and who advises her, “’Go back to Virginia, little girl. This country’s not like what you’ve been used to’” (Scarborough 19). Not only is she portrayed as incapable of enduring the harsh environs of West Texas, but others around her see her that way, too.

Midway through the novel Letty agrees to marry a rancher, Lige, when her Cousin Beverly’s wife Cora becomes resentful of Bev and Letty’s camaraderie. Letty settles on Lige after refusing his proposals twice “not because she loved him—but because she must spare Bev—and because she was afraid of the wind!” (179). Although it is her fear of the eroticized wind that drives her into marriage, her sexual reluctance and frigidity only increase once she is installed in Lige’s tiny shack:

‘You ain’t much of a kisser, are you?’ Lige inquired ruefully one day. She flushed. “No—but I’ll try to learn,” she replied. Perhaps it was practice that counted, like making bread. (Scarborough 188)

The physical demands (both sexual and of the housework) of her marriage drive Letty to despair. She fails to keep house as competently as her cousin Cora; Letty feels the ideology of society’s demands and strictures keenly, and reviles herself for the inadequacies she cannot overcome. The wind and the landscape haunt her; whittling down her sanity and her ability to retain her pride each day. Finally, in a sandstorm, her
composure breaks when Wirt Roddy, the man on the train who first warned her of the detrimental effects of the wind, visits her while her husband is away and offers to take her away with him:

Her terror was so extreme that every muscle, every nerve, was tense as with violent action. Her fear, her wild anger against the wind, against this man [Wirt Roddy], taunted her body in a strain like that of mortal physical struggle. Her breath came fast and faster, her heart beat suffocatingly, her skin was drenched with icy perspiration, her whole form shuddered as she felt the enveloping horror of darkness added to her terror of the wind and of this man. (Scarborough 310)

At the height of this scene, Letty and Wirt Roddy have sex. The next day, Letty awakens and is suffused with guilt: she hasn't been faithful or ‘good’—her sexuality is deviant. This trauma alerts her to the contrary position she taken throughout her time in West Texas: she realizes that “she had been selfish, wrapped in her own wrongs” (Scarborough 314) and she and Lige would have been happier if “she had been brave and loving” (315-315). She blames her encounter with Roddy on the weather—“It wasn’t me—it was the wind that drove me crazy!” (320). Likewise, when she shoots Roddy in the heart, the action is described as “Scarcely knowing what she did, she blindly pulled the trigger” (323). When Letty buries Roddy under a mound of sand next to a wind-break near the shack, the wind uncovers the body of the dead man, “determined that Lige should know!” (336). Letty asks,

Why struggle against a force that was a devil, and all-powerful? 
She had known all along that the wind would get her! (336)

The evil that the wind perpetrates is pointed to by the text as the cause of Letty's downfall. Every time she reaches a crisis, the wind swoops in like a deus ex machina gone bad, as if evil intention comes from nowhere. Not only does the wind embody
everything she fears about independence and sexuality, the wind also seems to be a
driving force which enforces society's laws and constructions (thus, rather than evil
coming from nowhere, evil has a “cause” determined by societal conventions). The wind
turns her into a wife, and then an adulterer, and then exposes her. In the Gothic,

...what the woman projects, what she throws away, is her sexual pleasure, a part
of her bodily image... For the female spectator, the image is too close—it cannot
be projected far enough. The alternatives she is given are...she can accept the
image...or she can repudiate the image. (Doane 168-9)

Letty projects her desires and fears onto the wind. Projecting them, she relinquishes her
claim and control over them, and thus they become wild, unmanageable except through
drastic (evil) measures. As readers, we can allot West Texas, the appeal of Manifest
Destiny, and 20th century morality some criticism, but at the same time we implicate
Letty in her own undoing. Moreover, as readers, we can place the blame for Letty's
actions on the wind, as she has, or we can locate it elsewhere: on society's emphasis on
women as the bearers of familial morality, and insistence on women's victimization when
they can't conform to the expectations placed upon them. Thus, in one sense, evil does
arise without causality, coming from nowhere as does the wind, yet, in another sense, the
reader can locate a cause of this “evil” through the confrontation between women's
desires for freedom and the social conventions which constrain this freedom. The
appearance of “evil” within the text is caused by this confrontation.

In du Maurier's Rebecca (1938), the opposition between the protagonist (the
unnamed Mrs. De Winter) and the elements which disturb and threaten her in the
house, Manderley, are split. First, there's Mrs. De Winter's distant husband, Maxim. Then,
his intimidating housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, and finally the novel's namesake, Maxim's departed wife Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers represents the most direct menace. She resents the new Mrs. De Winter, begrudging her new status as Maxim's wife and undermining her attempts to assume control over the operations of Manderley. Mrs. Danvers harbors an abiding affection for the deceased Rebecca which traverses the boundary of devotion and sexual lust. Unlike Rebecca, who was gorgeous and proud and deceitful, Mrs. De Winter occupies the space of the innocent, inexperienced girl. She feels powerless against Mrs. Danvers's bullying. Mrs. Danvers's psychological warfare on Mrs. De Winter sends her into a spiral of self-doubt and inadequacy. She feels like she can’t stand up to the memory of Rebecca, particularly in Maxim's eyes.

Mrs. Danvers came close to me, she put her face near to mine. ‘It’s no use is it?’ she said. ‘You’ll never get the better of her. She’s still mistress here, even if she is dead. She’s the real Mrs. De Winter, not you. It’s you that’s the shadow and the ghost. It’s you that’s forgotten and not wanted and pushed aside. Well, why don’t you leave Manderley to her? Why don’t you go?’ (Du Maurier 295)

“In Gothics,” Tania Modleski wrote in *Loving with a Vengeance*, “the reader shares some of the heroine’s uncertainty about what is going on and what the lover/husband is up to. The reader is nearly as powerless in her understanding as the heroine” (53). Yet, in *Rebecca*, Maxim is often markedly absent, and it is this void that allows Mrs. Danvers to slip in and cast doubt upon Mrs. De Winter’s bond with her husband. It isn’t what Maxim is up to that is the problem, but what the housekeeper has up her sleeve. The four of them make an uneasy, uncanny family, with Mrs. Danvers standing in for the mother. Indeed, says Modleski, this “substitution [of the mother for an aunt, older female, etc.], one might speculate, provides a means by which ambivalence toward the mother can be worked through while it simultaneously prevents the mother/daughter
relationship from being confronted too openly” (Modleski 60). In fact, early in the novel Mrs. De Winter recognizes vulnerability in Mrs. Danvers: “I had pictured her smiling as she had smiled last night, cruel and evil. Now she was none of these things, she was an old woman who was ill and tired” (du Maurier 289). Later, despite Mrs. Danvers’s malicious actions (tormenting Mrs. De Winter, burning down Manderley, etc.), Mrs. De Winter returns to this estimation of Mrs. Danvers—Danvers’s power is castrated by Mrs. De Winter’s assertion of her identity as Maxim’s wife. Still, the apprehension remains in its insistence—

There was nothing to worry about at all. Mrs. Danvers had gone... It was going to be very different in the future. I was not going to be nervous and shy of the servants any more. With Mrs. Danvers gone I should learn bit by bit to control the house... Soon it would be as though Mrs. Danvers had never had command. (du Maurier 452)

Mrs. Danvers’s hold over Mrs. De Winter has been neutralized through the exposure of Rebecca as an unfaithful wife, and replaced by Maxim as a potential source of agony (Maxim shot Rebecca after she revealed her infidelities—rather than mourning Rebecca’s loss, as Mrs. Danvers wanted Mrs. De Winter to believe, he was mourning his own conscious). Instead of Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers or Maxim clearly embodying “evil,” Rebecca makes the case for cause and effect under emotional grounds. Though Mrs. Danvers’ persecution of Mrs. De Winter appears to come from nowhere, in fact it is directly related to Mrs. Danvers sexual desire for Rebecca. Here we have sense conferring rationality upon supposedly evil actions (lesbian desire, infidelity, murder, psychological torture, blackmail, arson).

For Gothics probe the deepest layers of the feminine unconscious, providing a way for women to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially toward the significant people in their loves—mothers, fathers, lovers. (Modleski 75)
Indeed, the Gothic acts as an analyst, attempting to rectify trauma and reclaim the heroine’s identity as whole and stable. In the case of Rebecca, this resolution requires the destruction of the house which at first seemed to Mrs. De Winter a haven, and became the site of her agony, persecution, and recovery.

Hitchcock’s film adaptation of du Maurier’s novel (Rebecca 1940) wraps Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) in a gauze of black (fig. 1). Indeed, Mrs. Danvers’s shadow casts a black stain over the pristine beauty of Mrs. De Winters’s face (thus foreshadowing that her own “reason” will be clouded when Mrs. De Winter sides with Maxim in covering up the circumstances around Rebecca’s death). Certainly, Mrs. Danvers’ evil is indicated by “the habitual choice of black for dress” in contrast to Mrs. De Winter’s (Joan Fontaine) ruffled lace and youthful beauty. Yet, are Mrs. Danvers’ actions given the same consideration and explanation as they are in du Maurier’s novel? Or does Mrs. Danvers fall into the category of evil which has no relation to causality? The “cause” of Mrs. Danvers’ torture of Mrs. De Winter is still linked intimately to her obsession (taboo, as it goes against the marriage contract/nuclear family) with Rebecca, but the pernicious influence of Mrs. Danvers over Manderley is more palpable on the materiality of film. Indeed, Mrs. Danvers infects the household like a disease:
…a light in a window—in this context, moving from window to window—signifies a fairly localizable danger [in Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*, Mrs. Danvers] which threatens to exceed its spatial limits…The image exhibits in condensed form the specificity of the gothic narrative in its activation of a dialectic of internal and external and the effects of a transgression of the barrier between them, manifested most explicitly in the paranoid mechanism of projection. (Doane 125)

So much of *Rebecca* occupies this liminal space, and Hitchcock often underscores this through the use of lighting, layering a complex web of shadows over emotionally taught scenes. These images embody the “transgression of the barrier” (between “internal and external”, as Doane says, but also good/evil, masculine/feminine, etc.) and manifest the evil intentions of Mrs. Danvers. Particularly in the scene in Rebecca’s bedroom where
Mrs. Danvers attempts to coax Mrs. De Winter into jumping out the window (fig. 2) and the scene at the end of the film where Mrs. Danvers vanishes into the inferno of Manderley (fig. 3) the “paranoid mechanism of projection” (from Mrs. Danvers to Mrs. De Winter and of the film to the audience) is visible in the fog/smog which spreads to fill the screen, almost obliterating the image (and ending Mrs. Danvers’ life). Like the light in the window that Doane described, these visible manifestations are not so “clear” signs of evil, a kind of murky miasma that comes from nowhere and seems to be made of nothing. Indeed, rather than signs of an unfathomable evil, the fog and the smoke are mysterious markers of Mrs. Danvers’ sexual abjection, a wretchedness which emphasizes

Figure 2. Rebecca, 1940. Hitchcock.
Figure 3. Rebecca, 1940. Hitchcock.

…the ‘fragility of the law’ and that exist[s] on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction. But abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free--it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses. (Creed 10)

Here, lesbian desire is positioned as the abject, where the law breaks down and the significance of marriage and family come under threat. The Gothic creates anxiety about the social function of marriage, and the “evil” that Mrs. Danvers displays is the stereotype of the lesbian as a demon from hell. Mrs. De Winter is almost always solidly on the side of good (her decision to stand by Maxim in covering up the circumstances of Rebecca’s death is questionable, yet conversely this is exactly what a “good” wife does). Both Mrs. Danvers and Mrs. De Winter slip over the boundary between good and evil in these
instances: their actions that could be read as evil are instigated by their fealty to the person they love. Their encounters with this boundary trouble their relationship to the boundary itself: although Mrs. De Winter claims her identity as Maxim’s wife more forcefully than she had in the beginning, she still has no name, which indicates a disturbed relationship to the self which both the film and the novel seek to mend. Again, evil emanates from troubled social/sexual relations (homosexuality, infidelity) which are the ultimate determinations (or causes) of evil in this text. Rebecca attempts to cloak evil in the guise of smoke and fog, but in the background the true causality stands out. Both the film and the novel speak to the impossibility of stabilizing the self on either side of the border between good and evil, thus illustrating women’s discontent with the demand that they embody one or the other.

In Shirley Jackson’s We Have Always Lived in the Castle, eighteen year old Merricat Blackwood tells her Cousin Charles, “‘You are evil…You are a ghost and a demon’” (92). Charles is an interloper in the Blackwood house, there to take advantage of his crazy, wealthy relatives after the mysterious deaths (by poison) of Merricat’s mother, father, younger brother and aunt. Only her sister Constance, Uncle Julian and Charles remain. It is revealed towards the end of the book that it is Merricat who poisoned her family, perhaps in a bid to seize control from patriarchal power (the father) and place herself and her older sister Constance at the head of the household (Uncle Julian is elderly and in a wheelchair). Merricat is devoted to Constance (the lines “‘I love you, Constance’” and “‘I love you, my Merricat’” are repeated over and over again in the text, a bond which strengthens the ties between Merricat and Constance and places them at the top of
their inverted familial hierarchy). The arrival of Charles at the house asserts an imbalance that Merricat longs to eradicate.

He knocked, quietly at first and then firmly, and I leaned against the door, feeling the knocks hit at me, knowing how close he was. I knew already that he was one of the bad ones; I had seen his face briefly and he was one of the bad ones, who go around and around the house, trying to get in, looking in the windows, peeling poking and stealing souvenirs. (Jackson 55)

Here, Merricat experiences the assault on the house as an assault upon her body—“the knocks hit at me.” Charles is unwelcome (at least by Merricat; Constance, older and unmarried, is less resistant to his charms) and Merricat identifies him immediately as one of the “bad ones,” like the townspeople who revere and revile the Blackwood family.

Constance’s acceptance of Charles and the intimacy that grows between them irritates Merricat—he becomes more and more like the father she’d already cast off.

I hope Constance would not open the study for Charles; he already had our father’s bedroom, after all, and our father’s watch and his signet ring. I was thinking that being a demon and a ghost must be very difficult, even for Charles… (Jackson 83)

Merricat seems to suspect that Charles is the ghost of her father—he has, after all, taken her father’s place in the house (he tries to give orders and control Merricat’s actions, even suggests sending her away) and her father’s possessions (bedroom, watch, ring).

Charles’s presence in the house upsets the Merricat’s strict observance of personal spatial boundaries; he upsets the magic rituals she practices in order to keep the house “safe.” Merricat’s rules are absolute: outside stays out, inside stays in, without mixing.

Charles’s appearance and “ghosting” of the father create an uncanny doubleness that sets Merricat’s world out of order. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* that while

…the three main elements (what’s inside, what’s outside, and what separates them) take on the most varied guises, the terms of the relationship are
immutable. The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making. The inside life and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners, the relationship between them one of parallels and correspondences rather than communication. This, though it may happen in an instant, is a fundamental reorganization, creating a doubleness where a singleness should be. (Sedgwick 13)

Charles’s interference blocks Merricat from occupying the space she previously claimed her own (head of the house). He attempts to reassert patriarchal order by positioning himself as Constance’s lover and Merricat’s father. In order to cleanse the house of his presence, Merricat burns the house down—she succeeds in flushing out Charles, but the house is destroyed, reflecting the trauma that Charles’s interference instilled. Constance and Merricat continue to live in the house, which has become “a castle, turreted and open to the sky” (Jackson 120). Although the house is altered, Constance and Merricat are “very happy” now that the power dynamics in the household have reasserted themselves in women’s hands, with Charles now out-of-reach. Merricat may attribute Charles’ appearance and personality as evil, but it is clear from her descriptions of him that unsettled and ambivalent feelings towards male authority are what prompt the accusations.

In the Gothic, evil is given the outward appearance of absent causality while outlining the origins of evil in bold relief: the trouble of “perverted” desire, the trouble of assuming gender roles, and the trouble of the patriarchal household. Although the symptoms and manifestation of evil changes from text to text, the function of the Gothic endures—to produce a confrontation between the manifestations of evil and the social norms these “evils” threaten to destroy.
POSTMODERN GOTHIC

In Brautigan’s Hawkline Monster, Straub’s Ghost Story and Coover’s Briar Rose the female characters are positioned as embodiments of the textual process; the female figure acts as the interruption and the condition for self-reflexivity. In these texts, the constant interruption of narrative flow, figured through female characters, causes a positive reflection on the gender relations of authorial production. Masculine, transparent, smooth narrative, the “invisible purveyor of meaning” is interrupted by the feminine characters, causing reflection about the gendered nature of the novel’s production. Finally, while the stories of Coover, Brautigan, and Straub use female characters as signifiers of disruption, Muriel Spark offers a different use of the feminine as interruptive force in The Comforters.

The title of Brautigan’s The Hawkline Monster refers both to the eponymous monster and the materiality of the book itself. This is revealed by passages that describe the monster and its shadow, two entities who act independently of each other, yet who are inexorably linked:

It was a shadow that just barely existed between forms. At times the shadow would almost become a form. The shadow would hover at the very edge of something definite and perhaps recognizable but then the shadow would drift away into abstraction. (Brautigan 125)
The Hawkline Monster was basking in confidence as it drifted and flowed down the stairs. What did it need to worry about because after all, did it not have the power to change objects and thoughts into whatever form amused it? (Brautigan 189)

Like the material text of the novel, the shadow is vague and undefined. It tends towards incoherence, “abstraction;” between itself and the monster, it is the more
poetic. On the other hand, the monster is confident and powerful: it contains the narrative and is in control of the characters and events; it behaves more like a story, or in particular a Gothic or Western narrative formula. Both are absurd, but the monster instigates and drives the narrative of the novel, particularly in regard to Magic Child and Miss Hawkline, who begin the novel as two distinct entities. Eventually, under the influence of the monster, Magic Child and Miss Hawkline become the same person: together, they have no identity other than “Miss Hawkline.”

Ever since they had arrived at the house, Magic Child’s personality had been changing. She was rapidly becoming more and more like Miss Hawkline…. Magic Child was going to die shortly in that kitchen and a second Miss Hawkline would be born and there would be two Miss Hawklines and you wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between them. (Brautigan 86-7)

Only once the monster is destroyed does this doubled Miss Hawkline break into two distinct individuals (Susan and Jane, 212). With the monster goes the shadow—unlike the Misses Hawkline, the monster and the shadow are inseparable, like the chronological story and the manner in which the story is relayed. At the beginning of the novel, the first Miss Hawkline is waiting in the house for the events of the story to unfold:

...Miss Hawkline continued to wait, naked on the floor of a room filled with the shadows of musical instruments... There was something else in that room. It was watching her and it took pleasure in her naked body. She did not know that it was there. She also did not know that she was naked. (Brautigan 16)

There’s something sinister about the shadow: it has a speculative, voyeuristic eye. The shadow’s “role in life was only to follow” (Brautigan 179), like narrative events must follow the chronological story to some degree. This bond becomes broken when the shadow claims the causal power and “obscured the vision of the Hawkline Monster for a few seconds, knowing full well that if the monster were destroyed it would be destroyed,
too” (Brautigan 202). The Hawkline Monster is a text which suggests that narrative needs to be sabotaged in order for characters (particularly female characters) to regain their stable identities. This is reinforced by the fact that in the beginning of the novel, Miss Hawkline is waiting, naked. It is as if

...man aspires; woman has no function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning. (Carter 4)

The surface of the text becomes distorted by the fragmented identities of Jane and Susan Hawkline. Rather than pronouncing this division a sign of meaning, the split and sutured identities are absent of meaning once the monster and its shadow are destroyed. Brautigan’s text points towards something beyond the traditional narrative modes that the story and its discourse, or method of transfer, enforce: it is clear that what is left in the end is female autonomy, where woman’s “negative…zero” becomes a name without ascribed meaning (hence, the common names Susan and Jane, which dissolve a stable, assignable identity).

Another metafiction, Peter Straub’s Ghost Story (1979) self-consciously refers to its own fictionality not only in the title, but within the text itself. Early on, the men in the Chowder Society (they get together once a week to drink and tell stories) discuss a book by a member’s son, Don Wanderly. The description might be alluding to Ghost Story itself: “A nice exercise in genre writing. More literary than most. A few nice phrases, a reasonably well-constructed plot” (Straub 50). There are other texts-within-the-text
that contextualize this intersection, such as one that has a “desire for nightmare. For to imagine a nightmare is to put it at one remove” (Straub 187). The agent of this nightmare, and of the self-referential impetus of the novel is a mysterious woman (sometimes) named Alma. The figure of Alma is unstable and threatening, the danger she poses most readily displayed by the variations of her names and guises: she’s a film star (Eva Galli), a little girl (Angie Maule or Angie Mitchell), a college student (Alma Mobley), and a secretary (Anna Mostyn). But what is she? Don Wanderly asks the child version of Alma:

He insisted. ‘What are you?’
[Angie] smiled all through her amazing response. ‘I am you’
‘No. I am me. You are you.’
‘I am you.’
‘What are you?’ It came out in despair; and it did not mean what he had meant the first time he asked it. (Straub 33)

Wanderly’s hopelessness stems from the meaninglessness that Alma infects him with: at first, when he questioned her, he knew the answer he wanted (she is a ghost, a demon, a villain, a femme fatale). When she declares “‘I am you,’” his desire for an answer that makes sense is thwarted: How can Alma be Wanderly? The phrase “‘I am you’” also implicates the reader in a direct address—a boundary crossing that sets the limits of the page awry. She is

Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. (Kristeva 2)
Our expectations of the narrative [are] constantly obstructed by Alma’s refusal to occupy a stable identity in the novel. Her subterfuges, lies, time, space and shape shifting alienate those around her and place the reader in an uncertain position. We become “abject” because we cannot solve the problem of her presence. Ostensibly, Alma appears in the novel as a kind of Fury, out for vengeance against the Chowder Society who murdered her almost 40 years in the past. Alma is not, as one of the members of the Chowder Society insists, “just a woman” (Straub 266). A quote from Alma acts as an epigraph to part 3 of the novel—“‘Could you defeat a cloud, a dream, a poem?’” she asks (Straub 403). This statement seems to answer Wanderly’s question, “What are you?” She is an abstraction, something tenuous and ephemeral.

For one sign of Alma’s abnormality, one indication that she was no one else I had ever known, was that she suggested a world in which advisory ghosts and men who are disguised as wolves could exist… I do not mean that she made me believe in the paraphernalia of the supernatural; but she suggested that such things might be fluttering invisibly about us. (Straub 205)

Alma’s unfixability poses a “threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (Kristevea 1). Her nefarious exploitation of the rules of fiction (that her “being” should occupy one body, one name) make her uncontainable by narrative. In the end, Waverly severs her in half (at this point, her body has become a wasp’s) while she screams, “NO! YOU CANNOT DO THIS!... NO! NO! NO! NO! CANNOT!” (Straub 482). Whether this to be read as a positive outcome or not is unclear: Wanderly ends the book under the influence of a tenderness for “all that could give birth and would die, everything that could live, like these men, in the sunshine” (Straub 483) (unlike Alma, who doesn’t exist...
under the same biological conditions as the rest of humanity). *Ghost Story* favors the
canonization of the Chowder Society (a group of old, white, upper middle class upstate
New Yorkers) over the preservation of the novel's only female protagonist.

Like Waverly asked of Alma, the heroine of Robert Coover’s *Briar Rose* asks the
crone who attends her, “Who am I?... *What am I? Why* this endless plague of kissing
suitors?” (12). This time, the answer is asserted:

> I will tell you who you are. Come here, through this concealed passageway,
through this door that is not a door. You are such a door, accessible only to the
adept, you are such a secret passageway to nowhere but itself. (Coover 12)

*Briar Rose* is retelling of the classic Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, and as a retelling it repeats
itself within itself: the prince is always heading up the spiral staircase to a multiplicity of
results.

Sometimes there are walls, doors, ceilings, sometimes not. Sometimes she drifts
in and out of this room alone, or it appears, in its drafty solitude, around her, but
sometimes familiar faces greet her, if none she knows to name, like all else ever
changing. (Coover 6)

Coover’s insistence on this multiplicity suggests that Beauty is “such a door;” a
multicursal labyrinth of infinite variety (of experience) that will always return to the
beginning, an endless cycle where the journey is its own reward. Like Brautigan’s *The
Hawkline Monster*, *Briar Rose* playfully performs the difference between story (a woman
falls asleep and is woken by a kiss) and the ways in which that story can be narrated. This
disruption of linear narrative suggests that experience itself is legion: there is no one,
identifiable reality. As Carter wrote, “the notion of a universality of human experience is
a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick” (12). The exposure of this trick through the repetitive relation of events in the Sleeping Beauty narrative reveals the architecture and artificiality of narrative. This repetition, rather than creating meaning, exhausts the possibilities of meaning; the story devours its own tail.

Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet wily and interminable pursuit (of ‘something’—be it a domain, an emotional movement, a concept, impossible to determine yet variable in its form, intensity, quality, and content). Nor does anything prove more fleeting than this search whose movement constitutes the labyrinth which instigates it; the sense of strangeness imposes its secret necessity everywhere. (Cixous 525) This search for ‘something’, the strangeness, the labyrinth, etc., are figured as women in these texts. This is a common trope: the great feminine mystery, the “secret” unknowable meaning of the women for the man.

At first, Muriel Spark’s The Comforters (1957) follows the conventions of a mystery novel—Laurence Manders suspects that his grandmother (Louisa Jepp) is involved with a pirating operation, and he enlists his girlfriend, Caroline Rose, to help him investigate. Their attempts to uncover the participants and schemes of Louisa’s smuggling ring are frustrated by interruptions that originate from beyond the text’s diegetic space—non-narrative interstices that halt the progress of the novel. At first, Caroline begins to hear a typewriter tap-tap-tapping where there isn’t a typewriter; and then she hears voices narrating her actions and thoughts in the third person. Rather than attending to the sleuthing adventure that was driving the narrative, Caroline begins to fight back against the text itself. She says,

‘I won’t be involved in this fictional plot if I can help it. In fact, I’d like to spoil it. If I
had my way I'd hold up the action of the novel. It's a duty... I intend to stand aside and see if the novel has any real form apart from this artificial plot.' (Spark 115)

At this point Caroline is injured and disappears from the proceedings of the text. The effects of these divergences distract the reader from the novel's narrative (in fact, they erase the narrative) and the artificiality (as Caroline says) of the novel-as-plot.

The typewriter and the voices that intrude on the text are tied explicitly to the character of Mrs. Hogg, a devout Catholic and Leonard's former nanny, who is often described as uncanny and unnatural. Of particular interest is her bosom: one character describes it as “pairs of vegetable marrows, of infant whales, St. Paul's Cathedrals, goldfish bowls” (Spark 150). Mrs. Hogg's body is grotesque, unfathomable; composed of unnatural combinations (like The Comforters itself). Indeed, Caroline says that Mrs. Hogg is “not a real-life character...only a gargoyle” (Spark 152). It is intriguing that the OED defines gargoyle as “A grotesque spout, representing some animal or human figure,” so that not only is Mrs. Hogg grotesque, she only represents a human figure rather than being a human. Mrs. Hogg, like the voices who narrate the novel that Caroline discovers she is in “can know the thoughts in your head” (Spark 154). Mrs. Hogg attributes her prescience to her religiosity and convent attendance (Spark 154). In fact, twice in the novel the phrase “God knows where she went” is used to indicate that once Mrs. Hogg has stepped outside the realm of the narrative, she ceases to function, like a robot that has been turned off (or a gargoyle returned to stone).

However, as soon as Mrs. Hogg stepped into her room she disappeared, she simply disappeared. She had no private life whatsoever. God knows where she went in her privacy. (Spark 170)

It was not until Mrs. Hogg opened her mouth finally to the inrush of water that
her grip slackened and Caroline was free, her lungs aching for the breath of life. Mrs. Hogg subsided away from her. God knows where she went. (Spark 214)

Unlike Caroline, whom the narrator allocates a “private life” even after she is injured, Mrs. Hogg is pure character. Once her function in the novel (the climax, where she drowns, nearly taking Caroline with her) ends, Mrs. Hogg also vanishes. Caroline, on the other hand, has agency that Mrs. Hogg does not. She is aware of the surreal nature of her situation:

[Caroline’s] sense of being written into the novel was painful. Of her constant influence on its course she remained unaware and now she was impatient for the story to come to an end, knowing that the narrative could never become coherent to her until she was at last outside it, and at the same time consummately inside it. (Spark 197)

Caroline’s position as a character in The Comforters is linked to the reader’s position: in order to interpret the actions of the novel, we both must be cognizant of the artificiality of the text and conscious of our own experience reading—that is, both inside the novel and outside of it. Only then is coherence possible, which doesn’t support meaning—it only indicates that the elements which make up a work of fiction are faithful to each other and cleave together. Angela Carter, in The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography, wrote that

…the text has a gap left in it on purpose so that the reader may, in imagination, step inside it. But the activity the text describes, into which the reader enters, is not a whole world into which the reader is absorbed and, as they say, ‘taken out of himself.’ It is one basic activity extracted from the world in its totality in such a way that the text constantly reminds the reader of his own troubling self, his own reality—and the limitations of that reality… (Carter 14)

The transparent text allows the reader to step into the text; recognition of the text-as-construct allows the reader to break the illusion of narrative and step out of the text.
However, although the constraints of the diegetic world of the text point the reader back towards “his own reality,” that reality is also a construction. This is what Baudrillard meant when he said that “simulation is infinitely more dangerous than the real… since it always suggests, over and above its object, that law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation” (38). The jeopardy posed by texts like Spark’s *The Comforters* is that they posit their own unreality in order to foreground the synthetic nature of our own world.

Indeed, none of these texts send the reader into a reassuring stupor—on the contrary, they are constantly interrupting the reader’s predictions and undermining their confidence they will be able to figure out what comes next. Nothing is given, and what is left is often bewildering, threatening, “dangerous and inviolate” (Coover 13). This remainder emerges as an opaque vehicle for language, in which the machinery is visible, and in which the author’s intentions and manipulations become more significant for the interpretation of the text, more “meaningful” as a form of critique than plot, characterization, or setting. Every element arrives at a snare from which extraction is difficult, and this difficulty places the reader in the troubling but necessary position of making sense of the reality of the text as well as of his or her own life.
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