Chaos In Nine Parts

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I
The ironing board has been open weeks now and the winter clothes on the armchair never made it to the box in the attic though it’s August. My childhood bear propped on the windowsill doesn’t blink, remembers. Adulthood didn’t take chaos from me, only added bounced checks, lost keys, and a nagging desire for order. The Lamb’s Ears in the yard, so soft and small when we planted, sprouted like Jack’s beanstalk after a week of rain. We keep saying we should cut them, pull weeds, mow the lawn. Yesterday, I yanked moldy shoes and jackets from the hall closet: Ski pants for someday, instructions for a heater we no longer own, a plastic bag with smoke detectors bought when we moved in, and paper bags full of words.

II
On my way to the farm, down a dirt road, I turn the corner and drive into sun. My hand flies to my face, shields my eyes. The visor is broken, pulled from its yoke by my husband angry that it wouldn’t stay up. I drive the whole way, hovering hand over face, fielding the sun.
III
I can tell by the stance of your body,
the stiff set of your jaw, the way
your right foot juts slightly forward
as if to push me away—
I don’t measure up to the image
your mother carefully packed
inside you like a starched white shirt.

IV
Laundry I asked you to do
still in the bedroom
it’s been weeks and I can’t
do more so you left me
with laundry never put away
so everything gets mixed
with what’s dirty.

V
You look for the lost lure, your favorite,
in the fishing-line nest the mice made.
Complain about what you are missing
as if it were my fault.
I decide to help. Untangle the lines.
But your words keep tying the line
around my neck, tightening, tightening…

VI
There is just my small intake of breath.
Words slide out of you in rivers,
slime then mud. There is a seed
cought in my throat but I can’t
hack it out. It has grown bigger
than you and almost as old.
VII
You tell me
I have oil on my chin
in that tone I recognize
when I have gone too far,
done something that shows
not the wife you chose
but another, ill-bred,
unloved.

VIII
I cannot bless you
any more than I can
curse you even here
under my breath when
all my evil thoughts of you
have stacked themselves
into a wall still a house
of cards to blow down
turn my curses to kisses
or they just blow back
to me leeches sucking
away no fortress
no shadow no shield
I open myself again
and again with stupid
hope not amnesia
but knowledge the fruit
you bear I bite again
spit out the bitter
swallow the sweet.

IX
In the moss-turned reprieve between
mud and water, the deer bolt
at the clump of your stained footsteps
bringing in the frozen sausages.