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Prologue

LILIANE



Liliane strains to hear the falling water. She closes her eyes to open her ears to hear the water falling, for that is the point of the house, the architect had explained, to live with the waterfall. It was too plain merely to see the waterfall. One had to live with it, hear its voice, feel its pulse. But Liliane, in her bed, in early September, with the terrace door open despite the threat and scream of late-summer insects, cannot. She opens her ears wider but no waterfall. Insects. Ting ting of dishes downstairs. No waterfall.

And what of Stoops? Must one hear Stoops? Must one live with Stoops?

Grace. Grace is the name Liliane's husband calls Stoops. Grace is across the world in California, but Liliane can hear her. Liliane can hear young Stoops Goldilocksing through the rooms of the California house, claiming what's not hers. Liliane doesn't care a whit about the commissioned California house, which, all glass and chrome, is like an oversized display case

at the department store. (No wonder her husband likes it so.) But a stooping nurse? Liliane hears her so clearly she wonders if Stoops is here now. It is easy enough to hide someone away at Bear Run. Liliane hardly recalls where all the servants scurry off to at night. Not that Stoops would stoop to servants' quarters; Stoops would stow herself away in the husband's room. Liliane winces, takes another pill for her pain.

Stoops handles her husband's pain. "Where does it hurt, Mr. K? Here? Is that better?" Liliane hears Stoops nursing her husband, hears her husband say, "Yes, Grace, there, yes." Liliane hears the first time Stoops calls him by his first name, hears the silence that follows, hears the knowing smiles.

The sounds are too much. Liliane is supposed to live with the waterfall, not with Stoops. She lifts herself to a sitting position and plants her feet on the floor until the room stops Stooping. Stop. Another pill. A drink of water. The pill and the water fall together through her throat. She clutches the edge of the nightstand to pull herself up. Her body sways like a late-summer cattail in a gentle wind. Steadied, Liliane clasps the door's latch and steps onto her balcony.

She must have floated across the stony platform. How else could she be here at its edge, so far from the door she thought she was still clutching, leaning her torso over the low parapet to hear the waterfall. And there, below her, not so much like an old friend (of which she has many) but a best friend (of which she has none), yes, there it is: a moving surface, a moonlit

triangle, hypotenused by the rock's edge. That edge marks the point of transformation from stream to spray, from slipsong to scream. *Schäumt er unmutig / Stufenweise / Zum Abgrund*. She can hear Goethe's words, Schubert's chorus, but she can't hear it, the water. Darkness covers sight, not sound, yes? She looks up, away from the silent water, and hears the sharp whistle of a hawk perched somewhere in the surrounding fortress of trees, upside-down brooms that sweep the sky.

The sky is a constellation of pain pills. Liliane reaches out her hand and squeezes a cluster into her fist. She puts one in her mouth, swallows it, and thinks of water. Where is the voice?

The architect had strutted about the house as it neared completion, and, with the workers adding to the audience, pointed with his cane to this feature and that, informing them of each detail and design function. The one that always stuck with Liliane, that she experienced more deeply as the years passed, was the relationship between outside and inside. The inside's floors and walls are made of rough outdoor stone, quarried just downstream, and the rock of the fireplace (strange to remember how it was once outside, how they used to picnic on it) could not be contained; it spills into the main room. The "basement" is the stream itself. The low ceilings, the architect had said, create a feeling of protection and comfort from the outdoors, while the overhanging terraces can only be compared, he declared, to the cliffs of the Romantic sublime. (*Ragen Klippen!*) How he proclaimed about his design. Would anyone tolerate a painter

who explained his own paintings so? She forgave him because he'd been right about all of it. Yes, she'd quibbled with him over the lighting, a few pieces of furniture, a rug here and there; it was her house, after all. Still, she wanted to tell him: *Don't you know? The house speaks for itself.*

But its language was not language at all. Music, perhaps, chords of concrete, stone, glass; the melody: falling water.

She nonetheless understood his need to define the house for the workers, the press, the visitors—those who had to absorb its details quickly, those who could not live with the waterfall but only admire the house floating above it. Over the years she would pause to consider the fact that she and her husband and son were the only ones in the world who experienced the house as a house. The servants experienced it as a workplace. Visitors experienced it as temporary guests; photographers as photographers; scholars as scholars. She experienced it weekend after weekend as home.

After the scaffolding was removed and the house was complete, Liliane could imagine that it had simply grown up from the water's edge like a living thing, like one of her rare orchids back at Fox Chapel. Her husband preferred to think in terms of violence, of the rumble of rocks at a fault line. (As if an earthquake does anything but destroy.) The architect said: *Think of a bird's nest. Organic order, he said, dramatic refuge.*

She is at the farthest edge of the house. Her white linen gown flaps in the wind, and a September chill reaches up and

grabs her legs. One question she has always pondered: if one is on the balcony, is one inside or outside? The breeze says outside. But the balcony is not an exposed rock's edge; it's part of the house, designed by the architect. Behind her is her room, its warm glow. The French doors are open and the light spills onto the stone patterned ground. The architect had been so clever at dissolving the boundaries of the two.

But what, she would like to know, does one do when there is a Stoop at the entrance to a house? When a very prominent Stoop divides the indoors from the outdoors? Is there an architectural solution to that? She hears a bullfrog, but no answer, no waterfall. It is the contrast between inside and outside that she can no longer abide. Her inside, her outside. Outside, she is the proud Mrs. K—, who owns a department store, travels the world, patronizes the arts, and rules over the famous house. Inside she is withered, neglected, scorned.

Even when she returns to Pittsburgh, attends board meetings, assesses inventory, and sleeps in the downtown flat, she hears the white noise of the waterfall. Is that what the architect meant when he said you will live with the waterfall? Had he meant it will never leave you, no matter where you go? *Des Menschen Seele / Gleicht dem Wasser: / Vom Himmel kommt es, / Zum Himmel steigt es, / Und wieder nieder / Zur Erde muß es, / Ewig wechselnd.* Where has it gone?

The cantilevered balcony stirs and settles, presses an indiscernible measure heavier on the living room below. Liliane

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knows that gravity will get the better of it someday; it will Stoop.  
Even houses such as this are not immortal. She plucks another  
pain pill from the sky.

*You will live with the waterfall*, the architect had said.

At last, at last— as if someone has switched on the amplifiers—  
she hears its familiar voice cry out to her.

*And die with me*, the waterfall says.

One