

## *Dream House as Memory Palace*

From the street, here is the house. There is a front door, but you never go in the front door.

Here is what lines the driveway: all the boys who liked you as a girl. Colin, the dentist's son, who told you in a soft voice that your dress was beautiful. You looked down to confirm for yourself, and then skipped merrily away. (A diva, even then! Your mother told you this story; you were so young you did not remember it on your own.) Seth, who, in sixth grade, bought you the brand-new *Animorphs* book—the one where Cassie transmogrifies into a butterfly on the cover—and had his mother drive him to your house so he could give it to you. Adam, your beloved friend who worked at the local movie theater and brought home garbage bags of day-old popcorn so you could watch movies your parents would never let you see: *Memento* and *Dancer in the Dark* and *Pulp Fiction* and *Mulholland Drive* and *Y Tu Mamá También*. Adam burned you so many CDs. Some of them were too weird for you. There was one band who just destroyed instruments into microphones, and you rolled your eyes and said, "This is stupid." But then Adam's mom took both of you to Philadelphia in January to see a Godspeed You! Black Emperor concert. The band started late, and you huddled together in a shared hoodie. The music was byzantine, kaleidoscopic, inexpressibly beautiful. You didn't know how to even talk about the mix of audio and sound, the way the symphony of it washed over you, vibrated every part of your body. Once, Adam wrote a story about you and later, a song, when you went away to college. You did not know what to do with Adam's love, the steady and undemanding affection of it. Then, Tracey, who had a twin brother, Timmy. They were Mormon and sweet, and you had a crush on Timmy, but Tracey had a crush on you. You once ordered a free Book of Mormon from the internet and ended up having a two-hour-long conversation with a young guy—he sounded so handsome—who was calling from Salt Lake City to gauge your interest in their religion. You couldn't say, "I ordered

it because I am in love with one half of a set of Mormon twins and the other half has a crush on me." So instead, you bantered about theology for two hours before you regretfully got off the phone. Anyway, those boys. You were suspicious of their feelings because you had no reason to love yourself—not your body, not your mind. You rejected so much gentleness. What were you looking for?

The back patio: college. So many unrequited crushes, and—ultimately—the worst sex. You once drove across four states to sleep with a man in upstate New York in the dead of winter. It was so cold your drugstore-brand astringent face wash froze in its tube. The sex was bad, obviously, but what you remember most clearly is what you *wanted* from that night. You wanted that drive-across-four-states desire. You wanted someone to be obsessed with you. How could you accomplish that? You were awake all night staring at the streetlight in the parking lot outside his bedroom window. Why did men never own curtains? How do you get someone you want to want you? Why did no one love you?

The kitchen: OkCupid, Craigslist. Living in California and trying to date women, but failing because Bay Area lesbians proved to be pretty testy about the whole bisexual thing. So then, a parade of men: sweet men and terrible men and older men. Professionals and students. An astrophysicist, several programmers. One guy with a boat in the Berkeley marina. Then, moving to Iowa and going on a bunch of terrible dates, including with a man you kept seeing later in the waiting room of your therapist's office. He played piano. A med student, maybe? You can barely remember.

The living room: the office, the bathroom: boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, ...