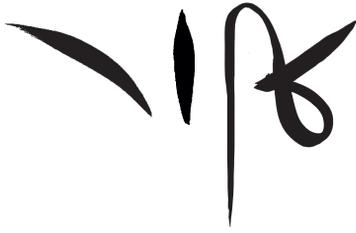


## DREAMING OF EXILE

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### 1. Light

*I love the afternoon light in my parents' bed-room, now mine. Not only because it's an unusual shade of yellow, as it comes off the Bay water through the old lace curtains, but also, because I only saw it on special days, when I was home from school. Holidays, or days when I was deliciously sick, too sick to go to school but not sick enough to stay in bed all day.*

*I could sit in the kitchen with my Mom and help her bake an apple cake. In the afternoon, while it was baking, we'd go upstairs, lay down in her bed and watch The Mike Douglas show. The light would come in as if it were a guest with a straw hat and a basket of raspberries and we'd lie there and smell the light mingle with the baking apples.*

*About fifty minutes after, I'd follow Mom down the stairs, her heavy familiar steps shaking the house in her pink slippers, the ones she'd use to kill crickets in the middle of the night when their chirping would keep her awake. Mom placed a huge mitten on my small hand and slowly opened the oven door. She pulled out the rack and handed me a toothpick so I could test to see whether the cake was done. I could barely see the top of the cake. I remember slipping the toothpick into the center of the cake. It had to be done with great delicacy so as not to leave a hole. I felt like a surgeon. Mom would instruct me to look at the color too. It should be a deep golden brown. This dough, pressed with our own hands atop the apples, had become a hilly landscape.*

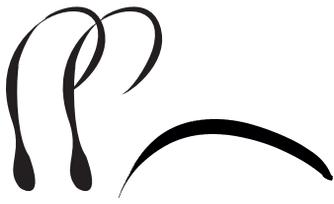


## 2. order

every time I turn round the dead end that leads to my street I, a Jewish woman, make the sign of the cross. I'm hoping my house hasn't burned down.

once, I had convinced myself it was gone because I had stayed away too long. In my prolonged absence I had betrayed it. I pulled over before the final turn and rebuilt the house from basement to attic, filling it with everything I could remember to save.

I vowed to clean it up if it were still standing when I pulled in to the drive-way. But this was a lie, for secretly I liked the explosive clutter of it. How it seems to stretch like a woman's womb to contain my life and memory. Ghosts and erasers, pencil sharpeners, old checkbooks and the sewing machine I use as a nightstand. The house is in a constant state of birth, a disordered order, and I'm feeding it things, adding sugar to the yeast. Or, I'm like a nursing mother drinking an extra glass of milk.



### 3. Space

I worked at the King's Palace Diner on Old Country Road in Hicksville when I was eighteen. Five years later they had moved the Diner down to the corner where the gas station used to be. I always imagined buildings had roots, were permanently affixed to a particular place.

When I was in kindergarten my teacher called my mother complaining that I didn't know my address. My mother was appalled. She said to me, "Lisa, where do you live?" I told her "18 Arden Road." I think I began to recite my phone number right after, as though they belonged together, were a song, with lyrics and refrain. "18 Arden Road. And 599-7486" The problem was, I hadn't mastered the word address.

When I returned the light was different. The way it struck the bakery counter with its jumbo chocolate chip cookies, raisin rugelach, poundcake, lemon meringue pie, and Russian coffee cake. Eating my spinach-feta omelette in a booth in the corner, I felt like I was floating in space. Like the booth would soon levitate.

Everything seemed out of proportion, because of the light.



#### 4. Embrace

Sometimes when I pull into the drive way and the house is still there, painted peach over the old teal blue, I want to run up to it and hug it, to lay my cheek against its bricks and shingles like a lover. To spread my arms out as wide as they'll go and take it all inside me, all inside me. To imprint it on my body, in my body.



#### 5. Director

Both my parents died inside this house, in the bedroom, in my arms. Sometimes I think if I moved it (and here I see myself as a director) -- they'd return. "Yes, guys, one, two, three - LIFT!" I can hear the tearing, like lifting a jumbo band-aid off an open wound. And plop it goes to East 9th street. Parents enter stage left. "They look like immigrants. Make-up! Make-up! Jeez. Fix them up. They look like they've been through hell."



6. Voice

*You see, I'm pregnant with them. They loved me into being and I house them in their own music. Star's music. I am a ventriloquist and a dummy. Who's lap will you sit on tonight? Whose voice will you throw? Into whose body will you breathe life?*



7. Breath

*By night-fall, my strings are tired. I have remembered much, moved the pieces around, directed, danced, shovelled, prayed. Time to sleep in the bed they died in.*

*I know the music of this house, the way a mother knows her child's cry. Its croaks and moans, heat gurgling through the pipe's veins, refrigerator buzz. But I've never heard my own breath as I sleep, as a part of this symphony. Tonight I shall record it. It will change everything.*



8. Morning

*In the morning I discover my breath sounds like apples bubbling beneath a sandy crust pressed with mine and my mother's hands. It is good.*

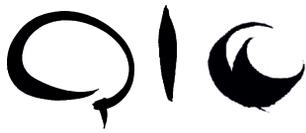
*1 sit at the kitchen table drinking coffee, eating raspberries. 1 listen to my recorded breath, like seeing yourself in a mirror for the first time.*



9. Name

*1 rewind the tape. Begin again. This time 1 feel her quick, efficient fingers pressing into me, kneading me, shaping me.*

*1 name the breath Apple.  
It is my secret.*



10. Secret

*1 imagine with whom 1 will share it, how will 1 move it, uproot this secret, spread it like jam onto the body, the bread of someone else's breath?*

*into which lover's sea-shelled ear will 1 whisper?  
which one will 1 lie in bed with on one of those delicious afternoons, to witness the light pouring through the curtains? To whom will 1 tell my story, the story of the burning house? The story of the apple breath, that kills and creates with one brush-stroke, always one toothpick away from crumbling.*