

Language As House

Niam txiv tuag, vaj tsev ntuag—

In the bedroom a furnace
supplied by the maker
the window shrouded
in bed sheets
then in the hall the haunted closet
where imagined bodies lived—
in all manner of the word
—in the attic. The black widows
were the first homemakers
& by summer the peaches grew within reach
the mulberry silkworms churning in storm
& the apricots joined in this lonely endeavor.
I am searching still for the word
belonging to the garden
that was sung by my mother—
the yearly grief which often took
altar in the house.
“My mother & father
were my first house,” she told me,
“to which I carried out of Laos—”
In shelter we changed our clothes
& slept beside them.
We laid down our scythes
& taught the birds
to slice our fortunes—
to bring out the rain.
No one ever mentioned
the roof was made of flesh
or that the father is the one
who weathers the sun
until there is no more sun
to wear down the father.
How often did I eat