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Upstairs

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Upstairs · Marlene Leamon

Why do you always live upstairs? she asks, showing the same mother's care she always has. I tell her it's the view, seeing everything spread out and in proportion, the people eating meals or leaving home, small dogs escaping traffic, even the arc of news hitting a neighbor's porch.

Up here, her face can be large or small, its lines like the wires in my sky, carrying messages to strangers, calls for help, maybe just supporting birds.

She can be anything I like, a small woman in a gingerbread house, quite harmless, simple, really. She will touch me the way that fairy tale figures do by standing outside her door, offering to let me in, to warm me with stories of her life.

There once was a man on a hill, someone who relished views. He is the man I most clearly resemble, our eyes the same steely blue, our heartbeats irregular. She tells me of his love of reduction, how he would squint in the scope of his gun, lining up hearts and brains.

He gave her the kill, something even now she can see. On her hearth, the soft bodies of rabbits, of deer, maybe pheasant, the wealth of a hunter's wife. It was never just food, but a kill bringing marriage to life.

Here in her gingerbread, in her house close to the ground, everything lives out of time. The stories are real, the hunter gone, and she an old woman making peace with herself.

She will die
negotiating stairs, perhaps to my house. I will wait
for her here, composing the sky, the absence of clouds, the view
from the hill.