House of Clues

Nance Van Winckel
squared-off corners were not so splendid. Besides, I've seen what's going up down the block: a village of workers moving in behind a facade of little doors, and on the block beyond that, a steel ball sending the bricks of an old building everywhere. Besides, I keep asking, Which sun do you mean? She just answers something about my father. What can he do that takes all day? His shoulders go out into light and bring back dusk as far as the doorstep. I've seen his maps crumpled on the car seat, his inked lines wavering across the cornbelt, which he says strangled the breath last year out of all of us. Besides, I can't listen any more to the supper music—violins skipping their best notes in the scarred grooves of slow-falling twilight in the edges of the room I want only to be out of, out amid the jazz of crickets, my mouth filled with the firm gristle of night, the pop and fizz of traffic, headlights and dark roads colliding.

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After dinner there are board games on the floor. Our hands push the tin pipes, the knives and crowbars, in one room and out another. Although not a part of the game, we reward ourselves with money. How well we know each other—faces, hands—the lucent
images that fill memory
with what fingertips have felt,
memory that lies like some larger
board between us,

large enough for a thousand rooms.
We roam them easily, though unsure
of a single door. Here
we enter, and here leave,
all of us at once—now in our young
bodies, now in our old. We step
into bedrooms and kitchens and call
each others’ names into the dim light.

Finally it is my turn to drag
a heavy thing into the library
where the odor of death is a little nudge
of déjà vu. Is it not inevitable
that I must open my heart, that friends
will stumble over one
or another of my many crimes?

I may as well turn up my cards,
those vengeful faces I’ve held too long.
Let them be taken, shuffled
together with the others’, as if truth
puts an end to such play, as if at last
we might walk out of this busy house.