Ox-Head Dot

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Ox-head dot, wasp waist, mouse tail, bamboo section, water-caltrop, broken branch, stork leg, a pole for carrying fuel: these are the eight defects when a beginning calligrapher has no bone to a stroke.

I have no names for what can go wrong: peeling carrots, a woman collapses when a tumor in her kidney ruptures; bronze slivers from a gimbal nut jam the horizontal stabilizer to a jet, make it plunge into the Pacific Ocean; “Hyena!” a man shouts into the darkness and slams shut the door. Stunned, I hear a scratching, know that I must fumble, blunder, mistake, fail; yet, sometimes

in the darkest space is a white fleck, ox-head dot, and when I pass through, it’s a spurt of match into flame, glowing moths loosed into air, air rippling, roiling the surface of the world.