



## palimpsest

1

when my mother speaks there is a sieve  
in front of my ear, a cupped seashell echoing. only the childish sounds  
slip through. what is lost in such an amputation? i felt my phantom  
limb gesticulating in the dark. in the air

2

tiny bridges half-built or empty: distances for which i had no speech.  
i let the water

3

empty out of the room. i crossed a desert to come home and ask  
about her plants—how are the roses leaning, did the rabbits eat the lavender  
sprigs, where is the green onion you ripped from the ground? the question  
i can never ask

4

is not why she never held shadows of dictators in the heat of her hand  
as she jump-roped in the alleys as she sewed a square to fill with rice  
never wondering over her mislaid siblings who might have been

5

hungry. *i don't know. where i belong?* to fill a gap i traced a shape into the air.  
her sounds washed in milk & wind, so i listened for it thick & falling  
i couldn't help but fold mine in. *i feel*  
*lost.* it could have been the air half-there it could have been her sleep

6

growing in the skin & bones. asleep, one never speaks of dreams effaced.  
her father out at sea & in the absence of grief, a child will think him a stranger  
hide behind the furniture. to outline her grief, a stack of playing cards in the  
floordust & if she lost she had to call him *ba ba*. history is

7

a field of broken parts one does not notice: sleep, a memory missing.  
never having been remembered, it could not be forgotten. she said *in my heart*

8

her face all shadow & in the afternoon sun i closed my eyes  
beneath the membrane were tiny outlines of minnows swimming, lurching for  
the surface. *everyone had a story like this, everybody misses home, war is like this.*  
her mouth formed in english: *i cry*. when my mother sleeps i start to feel

9

there is a longing that has no language. a faint shape holding in the background  
like a weather system

10

i will not know how to recognize but long to name: tall unshapely clouds, clingy  
breaths, a fragrant shape on its side. when i was a child, i was always afraid  
i clung to my mother's skirt as if it were a sail that carried me. every morning  
history splits

11

loved ones like a ritual of fruit: a fact. to stitch two hearts, i cut an imprint

12

of two ghosts. on the side of a house, the stamp of another structure  
once gone: if not the heft, then an angle i take for lung or spine. what is left

13

in the undergathers? to tell a story, i listened to the sky growing dark.  
to observe her body, i opened my own

14

up. crept dust, unwieldy knots, heavy-eyed roots, or something to line up by  
the corners. history makes a ghost of all of us. rather than a hollow  
there are spaces beside those between her body & mine: her body, her  
shadow, the swell of sleep—