At Its Proper Volume

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I learned the house by its silences:
which stair would tell on me,
which door required a careful hand,
how quietly a person
could disappear
while still setting the table.

For years, I made an art of it.

I softened every sentence
before it left my mouth,
folded anger into napkins,
called the small place left for me
enough.

Then one evening,
I pulled my chair out
without lifting it.

The legs scraped across the floor.
The sound ran barefoot
through every room.

I let it run.

I sat down,
elbows on the table,
and tore the heel
from the warm bread.



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The window was open.
The wind put its hands
in everybody’s hair.

When someone asked
what had come over me,
I said my name
at its proper volume.

There was a silence
I would once have filled
with an apology.

I buttered my bread
all the way to the edges.

I took a drink of water,
felt the cold
all the way down.

Beneath the table,
I slipped off my shoes.
My toes found
a warm patch of floor.

Then I began.

My hands came with me,
telling their wild half
of the story.

