

IN THIS HOUSE only the latch gleams—the latch on the front door. The faucet drips incessantly. The doors open at the slightest breeze. The rain has rotted the weathering on most of the windows. Water seeps in through cracks in the foundation. Ever-extending fissures have torn the wallpaper carefully hung on the chalky, waxen walls. With each gust of wind, dust falls from the attic above. The metal frame for the awning is thoroughly rusted and bent. One by one the windowpanes will shatter—I guarantee you that. All the doors are broken, missing or off-kilter, letting cold air and light pass through. Are the hinges misaligned? Has the wood warped? It all happened at the

same time, each element working independently, bricks weighing on lintels, lintels weighing on bricks and woodwork, woodwork spitting out its pegs and dislodging the scrap metal it's riddled with, bricks split, rain flowing drop by drop into the cracks, a gathering of fungi, cloud of spores, breeding ground for shipworms, ruins of tunnels and ancient coal pits—all one work realized in the emptiness of forgetting what should go without saying in the crevices of a house poorly dovetailed in thought.

On the other hand, the rooms are spacious and the floors level, or nearly. A little bit of air and a little bit of sun make life possible. A little bit of stubbornness as well.

Only the latch gleams, the latch on the main door. The peach trees have leaf curl and the apple trees, fire blight. There's white mold everywhere. The aphid population is exploding. Worms inhabit the blue plum tree. Sap dribbles from the feet of the cherry trees. On the ground, moss suffocates grass. There's no money to make any drastic changes.

We carry on washing the windows of the dirty, dusty house and carry on waxing the woodwork.

It came to pass that, gradually, time crept out of the house, our home; no more watches, neither on my fiancée's wrist nor my own; no more clocks—the last, battery powered, died just now, on this Thursday afternoon of this hazy October when the air brusquely soured in the broad hollowness of time. We'd been warned about it, given the way we'd begun to live, here, in the house on Rue Chevaufosse, the old hillside path. We'd begun to trust in the sound of the city and in our own warmth.

Every Saturday, if I were to write a love letter, here's how I'd begin: Why have you abandoned me? Here I am now with a bowl of red berries in my hand for you. I gathered them in the garden where I'll never be gardener, or maybe an exceedingly discreet gardener, always grumpy in his good humor. We hear the saw's sad voice as it enters the wood without playing the game, cheating, cheating, taking shortcuts, growing away from the heart by whittling it down bit by bit.

This Thursday, a strange a Thursday as Thursdays can be, a Thursday that I'll never forget as I never forget any Thursday, any Tuesday, any Friday, any Monday, any Saturday, any Sunday and especially any Wednesday. This Thursday, I made it. I put all the apples from one tree in one basket. But it wasn't an aroma of apples that reigned in the garden. It was more subtle still.

What a shock we had when we noticed that all the water we had used up over such a long time had not flowed far from us, but had accumulated somewhere in a hidden dry well in the garden! It's a good thing that that thick sandstone pipes dispatch the family crap to the big communal collectors. It's helpful to know by heart the precise pathways that these precious channels follow. It's unwise to live in complete ignorance of channelization. In these buried and forgotten pipes there's a kind of clogging of collective history and personal memory. But it's beyond time, in oblivion, far from the light, where the famous foxtail amaranth forms. On Saturday, I was wont to pull a handsome specimen from the least overrun section of

the system. The shrewd and sly fox had surely passed by there and left a conspicuous sign of his finest ruse—a blockage measuring three feet long, a natural obstacle to the sewage flow, having become (in a hundred years or more) impregnable. Having lived in the hope of extraordinary events, we'd forgotten ourselves and in this oversight—the void of this oversight—the right order of things becomes self-evident, the unheeded roots grow at a quickened pace and break through the pipes, dams form, turning back the flow of time. Something reverses, turns upon itself. It was only when the odor of shit rose from the dry well that we knew what, for a hundred years, we'd left beneath our feet.

There's a doormat whose use is plain and simple. In summer, it's perfectly enjoyable as a pillow, the rest of the body putting up with the hardness of the concrete. Two cats have already died on this humble litter. It will be burnt in the first fire of spring or else devoured by the flames where we throw dead wood, dismantled crates and various scraps before winter's arrival. In winter, sod-