

JANET BARKHOUSE

AN EARTHQUAKE EVERY DAY

Minos, Pasiphaë, Minotaur, Theseus, Daedalus, Phaedra—
names seep from grey and gold stone like souls leaving the dead.
Knossos, April, 2012. Olive trees, fruit just beginning; cypress
fragrant in spring sun. Tourists are few, tour guides keen. Ours,
dark and slim, dressed for business, smiles at our fumbled *Kalimera*;
her English is fine. *Imagine this ruin a palace,
city of a thousand rooms, mythic labyrinth of King Minos.*

A mural of acrobats: girls and boys soar, somer-
sault over a long-horned bull, offer their lives to Poseidon,
Earth-Shaker. Sacrifice youth for mercy,
or so the scholars think. *Maybe yes,
maybe no. Four thousand years past,
how can we know? Still earthquakes here,
an earthquake every day.* Startled, we eye the ground
beneath our tourist toes, sip our bottled water. Echoes—
footsteps, screams, indecipherable words on shifting rock.
Notes arc and slide on a staff of light.

Bull-leapers,
what did you see, flying high above scimitar horns—
the face of your god, glorious beyond daring,
or only the bull's hot back? Meat smell, crowd roar,
earth shudder.

We stand on your rubble, bull-leapers, guessing
your life. Who will guess ours? We own our ancestors
by name and date, celebrate
births by blowing out flames, mark deaths by cutting
flowers. Will we melt away like Minoans
before we extinguish the great blue whale?

LEAVING I SEE

from the window's other side
the same line of shadow cut by blinding light
as on the day we claimed this house.

In late afternoon up a rough country road
we chanced on it: roof tired of sun and wind,
concrete step crumbling. We peered
through that window, entranced
by our shadows on gold fallow floor—
or on *sable surround*—a new coat of arms.
Certainty of home washed over us,
the watercolour wash that shapes all choice.

The pond we dug will fill with sedge,
our garden run wild; showers of blossoms and stars
will fall in empty air, sun in an empty room.

After Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963)

REAL ESTATE

Stand in the parlour of this empty old house.
It smells of must and of maybe. Sun
welcomes itself in through dirty twin windows,
continues its slow, silent work of bleaching wallpaper roses
from gaudy yellow to dingy white. The floor
you stand on slopes away from the sun
toward a dark inner corner, its surface raw
pine boards, as if another woman,
fed up with cheap linoleum,
tore it up, turfed it out, and walked away.

You're crazy, you tell yourself,
to have this pervasive sense of knowing, of naming,
of rolling the small round "my" over your tongue like a warm marble.
There's a phone on the wall by the kitchen sink (the counter
barely comes up to your hip—crazy, you repeat).
You pick up the receiver. There's a dial tone.