

## my rival's house

is peopled with many surfaces.  
Ormolu and gilt, slipper satin,  
lush velvet couches,  
cushions so stiff you can't sink in.  
Tables polished clear enough to see distortions in.

We take our shoes off at her door,  
shuffle stocking soled, tiptoe—the parquet floor  
is beautiful and its surface must  
be protected. Dust—  
cover, drawn shade,  
won't let the surface fade.

Silver sugar-tongs and silver salver  
my rival serves us tea.  
She glosses over him and me.  
I am all edges, a surface, a shell  
and yet my rival thinks she means me well.  
But what squirms beneath her surface I can tell.  
Soon, my rival  
capped tooth polished nail  
will fight, fight foul for her survival.  
Deferential, daughterly I sip  
and thank her nicely for each bitter cup.

And I have much to thank her for.  
This son she bore—  
first blood to her—  
never, never can escape scot free  
the sour potluck of family.  
And oh how close  
this family that furnishes my rival's place.  
Lady of the house.  
Queen bee.  
She is far more unconscious  
far more dangerous than me.  
Listen, I was always my own worst enemy.  
She has taken even this from me.

She dishes up her dreams for breakfast.  
Dinner, and her salt tears pepper our soup.  
She won't give up.

Liz Lochhead.

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