

**(a kind of floor plan)**

Seascapes, mostly, a different smell of different bodies, the smell of old skin, ceramic frogs, pictures of flowers, lemon slices from a packet of lemon slices, movies about dogs, he says what he wants is someone to congratulate him for loving courageously and enough, too many windchimes, trays with wheels for biscuits, biscuits, ducks, one of them asks him if he is okay and the other says nothing is happening it's okay it's okay he is okay, monks, just once, and their silence scared him, he is throwing a tantrum, someone else is throwing a tantrum, mostly children are throwing tantrums, children are ripping up the carpet (it is graceful and elegant to feel like this), cushions that were made to feel uncomfortable, cushions with birds on them, cushions that smell like people, flowers from a bucket outside a petrol station, a piano?, mugs with birds on them, movies about dogs finding their way home, movies about dogs working together, a pond?, a garden?, talking about dead dogs?, something is growing somewhere and, probably, on the other side of the world, something shrinks.

I

Afternoon, and fancy mozzarella sticks. Something is happening in this room and in a thousand other rooms like and unlike this one. It begins with a conversation about sickness and nobody interrupts anyone else. Two people are sick in different ways. She is sick in a way that needs organising. A house needs to be sold, things packed up, moved somewhere. Her son is sick in a boring way. There are appointments to keep, radiation, bowel movements to report.

He is her son's son. Her son and her son's son cover their mouths when they talk and her daughter-in-law tries to interpret. It is hereditary. It is annoying. There are pauses. Things take time to land. They talk about having to sell paintings to keep her where she is. About a lifetime of acquisitions and losses. How expensive it all is. He looks up the paintings on his phone, tells them they might be worth about \$300.

II

His love is in doubt. This, he decides, is what it means when one asks if he's okay and the other says of course he is. He's not worried. He's not to worry. It isn't happening to him. He takes an inventory of everything he can remember about her house. It is partial. He makes a list of everything he still needs from her: What is Wales? What should worry feel like? How does she know?

### III

He calls her. He forgets to ask about Wales. He asks about breakfast. She says she had eggs. He asks how she's doing. She says she wants to go home and she had eggs.

### IV

A third person becomes sick in a different kind of way. A few weeks later his mother texts him and says, 'I had my colonoscopy and gastronomy this morning. They are treating me for a stomach ulcer and hernia.' He thinks this might be good news. He thinks gastronomy is the wrong word. He says, 'sorry to hear that how are you feeling?' He sends the message twice and wonders if this makes him sorrier.

### V

He goes out walking. He wants to make a habit of walking. To feel better. He follows a stream up from the point at which it goes underground, under a suburb, and then a city, and then probably the sea. He keeps crossing the stream, looking for sure footing and lines between fallen leaves. He thinks he should count how many times he crosses. He thinks as long as he stays close to the stream he can find his way back. It is peaceful but he thinks about finding a dead body. Eventually it becomes too steep.

### VI

He loves doubt. He loves in doubt. He loves in the moments he lets himself imagine things ending badly. Car crashes. Hangings. Drownings. Sometimes he is the subject of

these visions. Sometimes he enters the stage after everyone has left, sweeps up, leaves again. Sometimes he is writing to give his love a shape, a texture, lines and shading. Sometimes he is writing because the weight of 'I love you' never seems to have room for a subsequent clause and this subsequent clause is, 'I imagine us dying.' Sometimes he is writing to find out if he loves courageously and enough. If he keeps writing, he might find someone to blame.

**(somewhere else, a garden)**

She planted an apple tree when he was born. He left the continent before he saw it fruit, but he makes a decision one day to keep the tree alive. He wills fruit. Tart and small. Full of pectin to set what needs to be set. When he was small, she would tell him he was being watched by tiny creatures. He could never see them. They did not come from the tree but they lived in wood. Cupboards, the mantelpiece, an arrangement of pine cones in an unused fireplace. They were snitches. They reported bad behaviour to whoever would listen and he would wait for punishment from her or God or someone else. He lives in a house made of wood. He lives with tiny, invisible creatures concerned less with his movements than with eating the house. He sweeps up piles of sawdust every other morning. He wipes it out of pans before cooking. It is a problem, but he is waiting to see how bad it will get before fixing it.