

Lisa Feinstein

IRENE'S HOUSE

I went through your house last night,
opened the unlocked door,
torn screen flapping
like laundry-line delicates,
climbed down cellar stairs
so much like my own, a mirror image
of wooden steps cascading

to the old, cinderblock basement,
your rich Carpathian voice,
grey curled hair
and your solitude so late in life.

I stood quiet in the kitchen,
my neighbor,
my friend, half smoked cigarettes,
a Hungarian newspaper
still on the table, four years
after they carried you
through the front door, past the summer
sleeping porch.

I crept through hallways, stumbling
over floorboards in the dark,
spinning slowly
in rooms where your children grew,
yellowed curtains, no claw-foot here,
reaching for my glasses to see
scratchy records, Zorba the Greek,
chicken wing bones.
An old telephone
sitting on a box,

no cord, no outlet, barely a wall
between us – the things
your family left for the mice, the vestiges
nobody came for, never packed in boxes or bothered
to cart off when you died,
leaving your home shallow,
vacant, empty-eyed, hollow, but remarkably clean

despite broken windows,
attic pigeons,
peeling paint, crumbling plaster,
and the city closing in,

growing about your abandoned home,
like vines on a fairytale castle.