

Tung Hui Hu

LISBOA 1755

The day the earthquake came capsizing even the battleships in the bay I was watching João Manuel de Lourenço fashion a ring out of some inscrutable alloy he had fished out with a gleam in his eyes and which I secretly named adamantite. This ring I was to use to court Isabel Amorim and that she would resist my advances a fifth time was unfathomable: on this point my jeweler assented wholly. For he could feel each mineral as an organ swelling inside the earth and as we spoke had even begun to taste the metal, biting the gold as if he could feel its softness. Consequently the links and chains he fashioned were not to bind the neck or the ankle but for the sadness and melancholy that one carries like a worn passport. But even as he worked I heard the bells of the church outside give a terrible groan and burst, and I thought Senhor de Lourenço had fallen off his chair, only it was the earth that gave way, the drawers splaying open to reveal a strange light of metals. And as he fumbled around on the floor as an overturned tortoise flails its legs it was then I realized the man was blind, this man whom I had grown to trust better than my own hands.

FIVE DOLLARS

She tells you to bring her five dollars. You go home. You look for change in the couch. You bring it to her. She turns off the light. You lie in the dark with your clothes off. Nobody moves. You have seen geese stunned after flying into a glass window: it is the same thing with your bodies. You hope something will change color. You hope it is something uprooted inside of you. You start to worry someone will find you still there the next morning. Your neck is beginning to get sore. You say Is that it? She says Yeah, that's what it is. The lights go on. You look down. It is the dew that appears after a summer night.

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Walking outside was strictly forbidden. So was running, crawling, swimming, and all the other motions we devised to get around this rule: the circumflex, the hand-skip, the foxtrot. Yet how were we to run errands or visit our friends who knew nothing of our situation and offered no sympathy? We had no choice but to extend the lines, first with boxes and tunnels, then, as we got older, divots of steel and plexiglas. Out from our house warbled limbs, fragile limbs that snapped in and out of being, cradling us wherever we went.