



## HOUSE

We find it very difficult to leave the house. It's a place of sinister resonances, dripping water (the source of which has never been found), traumas, chills and pockets of air so foul they'd stun a canary. But, for all that, it's Home Sweet Home – a plaque above the hearth says so. The great sagging bed in the master bedroom has played host to thirty-nine births and almost fifty deaths, most of them natural but by no means painless, and everyone who has ever lived in the house remains here, in essence.

When the pale sun shines in this northern clime, as occasionally it does, it favours our house over those nearby. The neighbours who've noticed this are resentful; they scowl and shake their fists in a comically threatening manner. Traps are set for our animals, stones crash through windows in the dead of night. Despite which, and the sinister resonances, traumas, chills, etc., we are comfortable and at times even happy (something we've read about in the instruction manual that came with the house).

Yet at the first opportunity we try to leave, and continue to do so, and are

constantly thwarted. Despite our best efforts we don't fare well in the world. Those who do not die, return. The returnees are pitiful to behold – spindly as winter seedlings decoyed into growth by a handful of frost-free days. Some are so delicate a sneeze can send them rocketing into a far corner of the room. Bones shatter; fatalities occur. We sweep the remains into a dustpan and deposit them in the basement.

The house makes no distinctions: it accommodates us all, the quick and the dead. It's a vast repository of memories we can't do without. The roof sags, the walls bulge, windows and doors stick fast in their twisted frames. The fabric of the house is under constant repair and the work to be done is never-ending. A lifetime won't even begin to suffice. We flee from all manner of commitments but especially from one as demanding as this; always to return, albeit reluctantly. It's what our days consist of. We're as inconstant as oceans, changeable as the weather.

## GARDEN

One hot summer night, when windows are flung open to capture the merest hint of a breeze, the garden peers into the room, observes the humans clustered round the television set, their faces lit by its unearthly glow, and watches a programme about the Amazon rainforest, the jungles of Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Burma and Madagascar, all the vast, gloriously untamed wildernesses scattered throughout the world, and hatches its secret plan.