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E. R. Turner

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## THE IRIS HOUSE

E. R. Turner

### I. Her Garden in San Francisco

She has arranged iris from those years,  
and forsythia, roses into fads,  
territory of photographs, clasped  
jewels, shades of henna. Cataracts  
of the eye, never deep, array surfaces:  
raveled terracotta, scrim, pale birds  
on the window, persistent fogs,  
pinafores laundered many times—  
all clouded tan and tincture of pastels.

Inquiry behind many panes. Frosted  
fleur-de-lis, Victorian effervescence,  
vine curled glass falls like slow liquid,  
unperfects the iris. Leaf, vine, dot, line.

Time touches brittle jointure of forces.  
Crystalline mist, tiny imperfections,  
felt undulations. She waits for what  
the iris knows, nothing more than age.  
Widow, house, window.

### II. Who She Has Become

She watches from inside her frost of shapes,  
acid marked. Color streaks and blurs her  
iris bed, tinged, unsteady, reflecting parts—  
yellow stamens, orange petals etched  
at an indent. She is the iris, miniature  
of her memory. She escaped the house,

translucent egress, etched gray, ash-copper,  
 full flowered, before the borders disappeared.  
 Insistent beauty. Strong life. Weak life.  
 Her design—first, make small, in her eye  
 her image, shaped exactly for a key.

Spring brings prolific iris, earth-born,  
 raises variety of blue, stops passersby.  
 Iron wrought to a fence, no more  
 immune to rust than she who hides  
 among the many purples, escaped  
 from bordered beds through all the yard.  
 Hand, trowel, root, line, leaf.

### III. Iris of the Eye's Desire

I knew a girl whose eyes flecked magenta.  
 Other times, were mere green. I would  
 like to say we made love. When  
 the lover dies, the iris shrinks the pupil  
 to one black dot. Seeing is not believing.  
 She loved a woman named Fleur, who wore  
 chiffon, who prided her blue eyes beyond  
 all reason, but would trade them for violet,  
 dusky sienna, emerald, lavender.

Behind her frosted window she owned  
 an old-fashioned name—Maude, Cora,  
 Agatha. I declare nobody knew her name,  
 the Iris Lady, except her former lovers.  
 Each told love in a special word.  
 She colored their gazes with desire.

I say her name is Fleur, which unwinds  
 her bunned hair and blossoms her lip

with coral, lifts her breasts, repaints  
 her aureoles a deep pink, sets her running  
 to the front gate, her soft hand on new-black  
 wrought iron, her bodice demure, straining  
 against the binding cotton, a signal the boys  
 can read and love to dream of after prayers.  
 Marriage, birth, flower, death, sun.

She waits to meet Ephraim, Clifford, Elihu.  
 Presbyterian boys with a glint of softened  
 blue in the iris of their eyes, gun-metal  
 gray during work when they sell their goods  
 at the emporium. She has skated on ice,  
 laughed as swinging in the park she heated  
 them to white desire. She once sat  
 in the rumble seat of a yellow motor car  
 and let the pale wind ruffle her hair,  
 pick up her chiffon as picked up shame,  
 something she delves into as years  
 and years push her behind glass.