Dirt and Chaos No.1 : 57 Fragments

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1- Introduction No. 1

The 1930s had just begun. I left Rome and all of Italy that summer to travel north. Sweeping through Switzerland and France in a few weeks, I lost months in Germany. In every German town, large or small, I heard the same rhythmic undercurrent of sound. A labored breathing that seemed to come from under the street paving itself. The sound of marching feet, carrying the world forward to another great disaster. Once I heard this, I felt I had no excuse to continue wandering around Europe, delighted with foreign landscapes, people, and languages. The pleasure of drawing close to what had been remote, and becoming fond of what was distant, left me. I made plans to leave by sea.

The SS Berlin was a small 'cabin class' liner. I asked the ship's captain what we carried on this trip, and was told that the passenger list consisted mainly of university professors leaving Germany for teaching posts in North and South America. And in the belly of the ship's hold, songbirds from the Black Forest. All of us in the ship's pocket-world, its cups of broth, its heel-clicking waltzes on deck, its songbirds and its refugees below, sailing a well-charted course toward the port of New York.

2

The steamer chair beside hers is occupied by a man with no special distinguishing features. Since the start of the trip, he has appeared on deck for an hour or two every day. He smiles and makes a few comments in English or German, speaking both with a foreign accent. Aside from his glasses and his air of benign detachment she is entirely at a loss to describe him. He is perhaps in his early fifties.

3

“Do all Americans insist on happy endings?” His voice is not loud, but clear as he continues, “I tell each patient the truth about their condition, based on my experience as a cancer specialist, and to the best of my ability. They usually accept the facts. A friend of mine practicing in America has had a very different experience. His patients believe that everything possible should be tried and done
to prevent something or someone from ending. Is this what you believe?"

4
She admires his studious observations, his beautiful way of revealing to her the descriptive sciences. Before now she had valued only ideas and metaphors. Facts were leaves on a tree, they were mute: who cared how many there were or just what they were like? It was the tree that counted, its life and its form, its inspiration to those meditating beneath it. As this man spoke, she came to understand the dignity of faithful, fact-based description, the beauty of the concrete, perfectly stated. She began to look for him on deck daily, and after ten days she had changed her own course.

5
She is alone in the dark University laboratory. It is early afternoon on a Saturday, late autumn, mid-1940s. She rests her eyes from the harsh light glancing off the slide under her microscope, a sample of damaged kidney tissue. She wonders how this patient, a middle-aged woman, let an infection overcome her. The extent of the woman's nephritis has caused her to go irreversibly blind. Now she would appear as a warning to other patients, perhaps a chapter in a book. The doctor listens to the quiet sounds of the only other present staff member in his adjacent office packing to leave. The men marched from the battlefields back into the operating rooms and laboratories, and for the first time in years the Northwestern University Medical Center's hospital is adequately staffed. She happens to look down at her hands resting on the table.

She has never considered them idle, but over the weekend that's what they are. Two days too many in every week, she thinks. The burden of free time.

6
She leaves the medical complex, crosses the wind-swept parking lot and slips into her car. Frail leaves slide off either side of the hood as she travels down the road, picking up speed. Maybe I'll stop for some coffee, she thinks. Then I'll head home. Her eyes don't list to either side of the road, where people circulate in and out of the open stores in a steadily peripheral stream of beige.
Maybe I'll pick up some flowers for the apartment, I'll make it to the store, buy groceries and go home, call up a friend for dinner, make phone calls, go back to the office, just have a quiet dinner alone, stay in, read the paper because there isn't anything except the on-ramp to the interstate. Wide, gray, and beautiful.

She passes black cars, dark and staggered pearls on a concrete strand.

Changing lanes often, she takes note of the activity in each car she passes. The same husband appears in all of them, a man in a dark gray flannel jacket and hat, his square hands grafted to the steering wheel. And women. Women riding passenger-side, only and always passenger-side. Sometimes, in the back, children. Riding comatose behind their parents, heads turned rakishly toward a window, their faces pushed up to the glass, alternately cherubic and grotesque as she drives past. Each car seems to slow as she approaches, or maybe that's a trick of speed and timing.

A routine pilgrimage westward. For five years she has been driving to the same piece of land, and she knows today that she will purchase it from the reluctant farmer. Surely all the rest of the throng, these other bright black cars have equally uncompromising reasons for going this direction, she thinks. She is trying to articulate hers. What first drew her to this site? The beautiful sugar maple. The heron flying west. Almost nothing at all.

Is this really a river? Most rivers are fast, efficient, sweeping debris off their gritty banks as they move forward. They grow deeper as they mature, and spill into a greater body. This river is slow, silted and wide. A fat, meandering thing. Occasionally, it runs backward, a river repeating itself. It swallows the brittle shadows of overhead trees as it moves, cold and deliberate. She hurls the stone she's had in
the deep pocket of her wool jacket, watches it disappear under the shallow, boiling surface. The sound of the river is not loud, but relentless, a white noise ringing in her ears hours after she has left.

12
Finding her way from the car to her apartment in the dark, everything familiar begins to feel old and worn. She climbs the same forty-odd steps to the top floor of the comfortable brownstone and enters her apartment. Parting her living-room drapes, she cracks one of the windows open. The street below is streaming with the tangled cadence of light and voices.

13 - Introduction No. 2
Now they suggest that I move. I do not want to move. I made one very large move in my life, and that is enough, crossing the ocean, away from the Nazis. I do not care to move anymore. When I first arrived here, I lived in one hotel for maybe five weeks. Then, I moved across the street to another hotel, where I stayed until I took this apartment. It is large enough. I once lived in an apartment with a mattress in the bathtub, that was my bed. It was enough. This is enough.

14
Lora does not answer her phone. She had told him she wouldn't, but he had not really believed it. He stands at the window smoking quietly, the tip of his burning cigar a faint orange blur reflected in the glass. It is the only light in the still, dark room. Rising up in the back of his throat, along with the taste of the Havana, is a longing to speak in his own language. He is old, he thinks, but he is not afraid of what is new. Just unwilling to start over.

15
There was a brief pause in his life, beinahe nichts, between Germany and America. Very brief, a pause of hermitage weeks, most of them spent tangled up in language. Ludwig Mies, miserable, a name maternally adorned van der Rohe. Architects are to make order in the world. Things by themselves create no order. It must be breathed into them.
Nothing about the room suggests negligence except the stack of unanswered letters on the far edge of his desk, bound together tight with string from another package. Thick, guilt-heavy letters, lines buried in lines that plead with him to help her start the school again. Lilly Reich, in pearls and skirts and manly shoes. He thinks about his current students. Everyday, he gives the same critique. Work harder. Try it again.

Under his desk, that's where his mind is, where it wants to be. When opportunities to build evaporated, and all modern designs were curtailed by Nazi suspicion, Germany had nothing to offer him but endless hours in a still office. He sketched and drew and made models and dreamed only houses. Small houses, for one occupant. The Mountain House for the Architect. The House on a Terrace. The Glass House on a Hillside. Regular domestic temples. Sketches he keeps in black folios under his desk.

The American landscape. There is no searching through the design process for a delicate balance between what to enclose and what to reveal. In rural America architecture could be total blowout, a material spectacle of glass and steel. Stanley Resor took a chance, hired the German émigré to finish the design of his house in Wyoming. There was no mention of the last architect, only traces of him in the form of concrete foundation piers rising not far above the churning surface of the river that the house was still meant to span. Mrs. Resor eyed the architect's proposed drawings of the house. "All of this is...glass?" None of her concern mattered, the design progressed almost to construction. Then the river rose up and washed away the piers, the foundations. The Resors apologized for the bad luck, but never called him back. He put the sketches in another black folio, slid it under the desk. Washed away. Still, they could have found another site.

One idea continues to appear on the paper. A room with no interior support, clear span. A room of pure, uninterrupted space, the infinite house. "Beinahe nichts," he says to the black window.
Almost nothing. Snuffing his cigar on the desk’s edge, he walks heavily to his bedroom.

20

The air is thick with smoke, her lungs feel leaden. She is relieved to see a colleague opening one of the generous windows at the far end of the room full of University professors, researchers and local physicians. Each year, she is surprised at the density these New Year’s parties take on. Shoulders and sequins in every direction. Her fellow doctors are locked in conversation with each other, all having arrived hours before she did. Their small groups fill the room almost completely, leaving little space to move among them. They speak to each other in that combination of professional familiarity and dark humor. The kind of small talk that is wasteful at best, harmful at worst, she thinks. If she is clever about it, she could probably ease her way through the smoke and bodies to the door and have a quiet evening at home. A quick rustling behind her snuffs this thought. “Dr. Farnsworth, have you had a chance to meet Mr. van der Rohe?”

21

Part question, part informal introduction. She cannot turn around without brushing against at least two other people, and she apologizes as she does so. The architect (as he is introduced, ‘the architect’ becomes an appendage to his name, Mies van der Rohe the architect) looks warm in his dark suit, the collar on his white shirt wilting, the loose flesh in his face shot with red. It is as though he has come directly from the office to this celebration. He begins searching his jacket for something. “No,” she says, “I...I would not care for a cigar...”

22

Ruth and Georgia. So well-meaning, she thinks, as she climbs the stairs. She tells herself that her shortness of breath stems from her anxiety about running late. She reaches the door at last. Before she’s caught her breath, it opens. Ruth, wearing an odd smile. “Hello, Edith, you’re just in time. Have you met Mr. van der Rohe?”

23

The architect. Who is seated across from her at the dining
room table, who does not say a word during the meal, who speaks in English-riddled German and answers most questions with bold gestures, not sentences. Georgia owns a bookstore that the architect frequently orders German books through. The doctor had once studied in Germany. The common threads between guests at this small dinner gathering are thin, and becoming weaker as the night wears on, the doctor thinks. Uncomfortable, she indulges in talking endlessly about herself and smoking one cigarette after another. The architect sits across from her, politely listening as talks about studying violin as a young woman in Italy, how close she really came to becoming a concert violinist.

24

Hours have elapsed at the dinner table. She has talked her way through her twenties and thirties, and is just beginning to talk about her life as of late when the two hosts excuse themselves to clear the table and start the after-dinner coffee. “I have been taking these beautiful weekend drives...” she tells the architect, and her hands extend into shapes that have grown familiar, the curve of rural Fox River Road, the abandoned farmhouse, the prairie and the river. As she speaks, he works methodically at a cigar, his face disappearing behind fat plumes of smoke. This time, he replies easily in English, “Ja, I will build any kind of house for you. As I would build it for myself.”

25

She wonders what strange courtesy brought her to walk him home. From here, she will only have to walk a few blocks alone, but it is late. He is busy turning on a lamp here and there, leading her into the living space of his bare apartment. “You would like to see something?” She nods vaguely at the walls. They are painted white. The floor is a dark wood, very smooth, and the furniture looks like it could repel bullets. “One minute, then.” He disappears into his bedroom, and she remains sitting in the living room, perched in the taut leather lap of a Barcelona chair. She waits for a minute, then five more. She draws her breath, gets up and walks to the threshold of the living room, just before the dark corridor. “Edith, come in. Please.” With each step, the heels of her shoes ring against the wood floor. She stops just short of the bedroom. A number of paintings lay on the mattress. He is pulling one more out from under his bed, as if removing a perfectly starched
They are both quiet on the drive out to the river. The car is more balanced with two people in it, the road less pocked and marred. He responds briefly to any and all questions, but for the moment she hasn't anything to ask him. He doesn't hurry to make small talk. He watches out the window, seems fascinated with the land rolling by the car, swelling and falling away as they drive. He has dressed the same for this occasion as he had to celebrate the New Year, something more suited to a formal client meeting or a business occasion than to a drive into rural Illinois. The car follows the road's familiar bend and curve.

She guides the car to a stop, and they get out. He leaves his door open, wandering behind her toward the river. She is eager as they pick their way to the shore. “Can you see yet what the house should be?” she asks him. “What materials?” He stands near a black sugar maple. “It would be a pity to close off the outside from in. Most of the house can be glass, you have privacy in the land.” The black sugar maple rattling in the March wind. The river flowing south, the choppy sound of the ice being wrested from the shore. She could believe that.

Everything seems to align in this tangle of isolated woods and water. He cuts the silence, “Yes. I will build this house for you, as I would build it for myself.”

In the office of the architect, there is a large drafting room. The boys, his interns, sit at their identical desks in the open space just beyond his private office. They must have absorbed every word of the meeting between the architect and his new client, the doctor, because instead of working, they flap their tongues. They clap each other on the back, saying, “This is the most important house in the world.”

“The concept for your house, for the design, is to be beina-
"he nichts," he said.

"Say that again?" she asked.
"Beh-nah-hey nee-kts. Almost nothing."
"Again, what does that mean?"
"It means, Edith, that your house will frame nature, will not disturb the land."
"A place I can escape to, on the weekends?"
"Yes," he answered.

"You could use it too, if you wanted."
He does not answer, but coughs a few times.

"Which materials?" he asks, "The best. The most beautiful and pure stone, the rarest wood. Windows?" he continues, "No. For you, the walls are windows, pure expanses of glass." And when she raises concerns about the rising cost of building this simple weekend retreat, he alleviates her worry. "The question of cost is nothing, is not a question at all, really... One's house is as personal as one's own skin."

Site visits to Plano are road trips and picnics, client meetings occur over drinks and at parties, napkin sketches pile up on her dining room table, in her purse, migrating to all parts of her life. Marianne rarely calls her sister, for fear that she'll lose another hour or two listening to the woman talking endlessly about the house, or more likely, the man designing it. She's infatuated, and I think she's having an affair with him.

In 1949, five years after the first drive out to the site, excavation for it begins. At first, there is the matter of building in a flood-plain. "You say you don't care if you have to wade into it in the spring?" he laughs hard, and coughs for a full minute. "Then we elevate the house," the architect proposes. There are deep lines under his eyes, and around his mouth the creases and folds of loose, soft-looking skin. He is sixty-three years old, she remembers.

It is late at night, but one light in the building is visible.
from the street, and the doors are unlocked. Philip Johnson, director of the Museum of Modern Art's Architecture Department and a newly-minted architect himself, enters the office of Mies van der Rohe, striding in his usual distracted way past rows of identical desks. “Hello? Mies?”

“Hello, Philip. When did you get into Chicago?”

Mies is sitting at his low, industrial desk. With the windows closed against the rain, the cigar smoke he expels takes on more than the normal, ethereal presence of smoke. It's thick, like another body, a shapeless form hovering above him.

“I got in...last night. Mies? Mies, what is this?”

Philip, picking his way across the office, has stopped to look at a very rough model that one of the interns has left sitting on a desk, on top of a few loose sketches. Philip sifts through his sketches. “Looks a bit like the Resor...”

“It is a house for Dr. Farnsworth!” Mies stands, the steel feet of his chair scraping across the floor.

“Oh, a doctor? Finally, a private patron with deep pockets? Well, good for you. Who's this Farnsworth? He sounds familiar.”

“A woman, a kidney specialist, with Northwestern University.”

“Ah...internal medicine. I don't suppose she's acting as your physician, too? It seems quite the opportunity for a professional bartering of services.”

“What? What do you know of that?”

Oh, enough. That isn't what I'm here for.”

“Yes, what do you want?”

A one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art. A retrospective of Mies, from miserable to van der Rohe, an exhibition to span continents of work, to tie the body of projects, realized and imagined, all together.

Less than two years to gather the photographs, drawings, models, and to design the exhibit. Philip's distracted hand brushes the model of the little house, almost knocking it onto the floor. “Hell, bring this if you want.”

The architect leads his client, the doctor, through the open-plan office. He is slightly embarrassed in her presence. At six feet,
she is half a head taller than him even in flat shoes. Thank god, she only wears flat shoes. The interns say nothing, productive when the architect is in the office. The two of them stop at one of the intern's desks. The young man remains un-introduced. The doctor observes that his features are badger-like, more closely resembling those of the architect than any of the interns his age. She thinks that he looks unhealthy. The intern hands over a model he has produced. The architect juggles the delicate model, seems to weigh it in his hand, and turns to give his client a closer look. Reminiscent of a Greek temple, she thinks, but stripped bare. Two planes, the floor and the roof. Columns outside the facade.

"Is it missing something?" she asks.

"What?"

"Walls. Where are the walls?" She puts her hand through the model, from one side, through the inside, to the other. She waves at the architect with the captive hand.

"The walls are glass. For glass, usually we do not represent it with any material at all. We just leave it open."

"But, surely it isn't supposed to be this way," she balks.

"No? Why not? We will take a trip tomorrow to the site again. You will see how your house frames nature. Like a painting."

A life-size photo mural of the interior of the Barcelona Pavilion draws her attention. The King and Queen of Spain stand within, drinking champagne and receiving guests at the Barcelona International Exposition. Glass and steel, Mies at his most Miesian. She runs her hand over the dark leather of the chair in front of her, a direct replica of the one in the photograph, and thinks about how the building exists now only in the form of image and text.

"Edith, have you met Philip Johnson?"

"No, Mies, I haven't. I think you look a little familiar, though," she says.

"Philip is the curator of the department of Architecture at this museum, Edith.

And he's an architect."

From out of the corner of his eye, Mies sees Lora Marx unfurling from a crowd of suits and gowns near the door. He steers his client quickly to the model of the house as though obliv-
ious that Lora has entered the room.

"Hello, Philip."
"Lora."
"Where is Mies? I thought I saw him a moment ago."
"Off with that love-sick doctor."
"What?"
"Have you heard about this? He's designing a home for her. There they are."

Philip nods over to a corner of the exhibition space, where Mies has tilted back the model and is pointing to something in it. Edith is laughing too loud, her eyes shut tight as though if they weren't, more noise would pour out.

Lora turns away. "Maybe she's just a bit...eccentric?"
"Yes. Eccentric. Well said. Wine?"

A man with a tray walks slowly by, and Philip lifts two glasses off.
"I've already had...yes. Thank you."

"Dr. Farnsworth."
"Yes?"

Edith smiles at the thin woman in black that wavers a little in front of her. She is so thin, and swaying back and forth so subtly that it seems to her this woman is more vapor than flesh.
"My name...is Lora Marx. I am a friend of, of Mr. van der Rohe."
"Oh...Nice to meet you. You've seen his design my house?"
"Yes, I did see this earlier."
"This is the most thrilling time of my life. Working with him on this project...I believe it could become the prototype for new American homes."
"Working with him? But he is the architect."
"Yes. But it is my house, of course, and he asks me my opinion on everything. I stop by the office often."
"You do."
"We meet for dinner frequently...how do you know Mies?"
"We've been friends for, well, for quite a long time, frankly. Almost since he arrived in America."
"He's never mentioned...what is your name?"
“Lora Marx.” “No, he's never mentioned your name. You must be from New York, then?”

“Chicago. Excuse me.”

40
Leaving the exhibition, she stops for a moment to sign the guest book. In careful but shaky writing above hers, she reads Negation is not enough-FLIWi.

41
An inheritance for the doctor, an ailing relative translated into a moderately healthy sum of money. She goes to the architect's office immediately, walks past the secretary, and back to his desk. He is sitting there with his back to her. She steps around him, and writes in pencil on the sketched plan of her house that is always sitting on the desk, exactly how much she would spend on it. $40,000. Startled, he turns around laughing, and congratulates her. They exchange words, and she runs back to her own office at the University without thinking more of it. Within a few days, the Architect has ordered her steel. She knows this because the secretary calls to tell her.

42
Some nights, she leaves the University late, knowing that she will catch him at the office, and they might be able to head out for a drink or a late dinner. This evening, she sits at one of the intern's desks, waiting for the architect to finish working.

“What are you doing?”

“The apartment buildings for Greenwald...” he mutters.

“Are there drawings yet, for my house?”

“No, too many problems to solve.”

“What problems?”

“Details, on the interior. I cannot go into it now.”

“Can't you use details from the apartment house?”

“No, that is very different.”

“We've been talking about this house for three years! Where are the construction drawings, the definite building plans? A model I can read?”

He sighs, puts his pencil down and turns to face her.

“I spend more time on your house than on any other project in this office.”
"I don't believe you. Show me what you have produced!"
"Please leave now. Come back tomorrow, we'll talk about the house." He leads her to the small lobby of his office. "Tomorrow," he says, and sends her out.

Another weekend pulls time taut, and she can't stand the painful wait. They have come to the site to discuss the spatial arrangement of the house. She is frustrated with trying to read the models and drawings, differentiating this fine line or that thin plane from all the others. The architect and his client walk away from the gravel road and into the wild prairie, dry this time of year, a field of kindling. She stops.

The frame of the house has landed. Steel columns shoot up out of the ground, making vague gestures of the floor, the ceiling, and the walls. The floor of the house is suggested at a height five feet above the surface of the meadow. The stairs are not yet framed. It is something like an insect, she thinks, with eight straight steel legs...a long-bodied spider, its feet landing in points that drive down into the soft earth. No wonder, she thinks, that there is a local rumor about it being a tuberculosis sanitarium.

Although it is warm for October, her face and hands sting from exposure. Rural Illinois feels nothing like Chicago. "Well, progress. Good," she begins, "Now...where are the rooms?"
"You enter from the terrace. And the living room and fireplace face the river."
"And the bedroom?"
"The sleeping area is here, on the east."
"And the bathrooms."
"Bathroom. There is only one. In the core next to the sleeping area."
"I need two, one should be for guests."
"Well, this is a house for just one person, Miss Farnsworth."
He ducks under the framing and walks within the structure, the top of his hat just visible over the framing of the floor. "See, Edith? There is room for one person to move rather gracefully...but with two people you would always be colliding."
She says nothing, then shouts, "This is not a house!"
He continues pacing within the white-framed space.
“Calm, Edith. What do you know of construction? Soon you will see what I see.”
She is quiet, then puts her hand out for his arm.
He stands, suddenly out of reach.
“It will look different with the glass in place. Wait.”

45
When she calls the office to discuss her most recent invoice, the secretary answers after one prompt ring, and with the same excuse. Mr. van der Rohe is unavailable. He is in a meeting. His schedule is tight this afternoon, where can he reach you Thursday?

46
Driving home from the laboratory, she watches the slow movement of early evening crowds and thinks for a moment that she sees the architect walking with the beautiful vapor-woman.

47
She finds a note in her mailbox, Must meet soon about the house! Please call. Mies. She puts it on the table in the hall where she keeps her key, and walks around her apartment, feeling the carpet under her stocking feet, appreciating the warmth of the deep cushions on her couch, waiting for the misfires in her mind to quiet and disappear. She calls the office, and his voice is a live wire over the phone, asking her to his office, now. He has a question for her, she must approve his final drawings. Yes, now…and how did she know to find him there?

48
“What do you mean, a closet?” Mies asks her. “What do you need a closet for? This is a weekend house.”
He puts down his pencil, and holds up one finger. “You bring one house-dress. You keep it on the back of the bathroom door, that way your guests do not see it. They use the other bathroom.”
“I need a closet. Some sense of privacy, a place to store things. Where are the closets? This is my house!”
“And I am building it. Stick to your nephritis, Edith, and leave me to do the design.”
Some mornings, it is the secretary who calls the client first. We need to reschedule your appointment, Miss Farnsworth. I'm sorry, but there's been an unexpected interruption.

This is true.

Architect and client visit the construction site while the lower horizontal slab—the patio—is being finished. The long run of it is being fit with sheets of travertine marble. The skeleton of the rest of the house waits naked behind it.

“Edith, would you please stand up there, on the patio?” Mies asks of her, “I need to get a good look at you.”

Flattered, she walks to the shell of a house. The men laying travertine stop for a moment to assist her in climbing up the half-finished stairs to stand on the patio, not quite three feet from the ground. Balanced on the edge of the house's perimeter steel framing, she clutches an I-beam to keep from toppling over.

She has just barely straightened herself out when he addresses her loudly, “Good. I just needed a scale figure.” The architect heads back to the car, and waits for her to drive him back to his office in Chicago. The workers pretend not to have heard his embarrassing comment, and she feels the flesh around her collar growing warm.

The architect might be out of town. Or hustling for more work. Or teaching. Whatever the case, her messages are taken studiously, and repeated back to her in a mechanical tone. When she stops at the office in person, she receives a small, secretarial smile, and watches her words translated into sterile shorthand script on a slip of pink paper, 'While You Were You Were Out.'

The phone rings. After a curt greeting, one of the boys from the architect's office tells her that the furniture for her glass house is to be delivered that afternoon. He rattles off the list, “Two Barcelona chairs, a glass coffee table and...”. She interrupts him to say that she had not ordered the pieces and by no means does she intend to have them. A brief pause follows before he replies. “You'll be sorry.”
It is almost winter, and early-morning dark as she drives out to the site by herself for the first time in years. The doctor wants to know what the house looks like without the architect present. In her mind, she replays their last argument. Just the idea of spending a night without an open window makes her feel as though she is suffocating. Her case must have been convincing, he had called the night before to assure her that the drawings were being modified, and that two small hopper windows would be installed in the 'sleeping area.'

She had thanked him and promptly hung up. Italian marble for the floors, custom-built everything. Oh, the price. Thank you, she repeats to herself, and then laughs out loud, remembering what he had told her, in all seriousness, when she finally saw a compilation of the final material costs. “But, I do not charge for the idea.”

Approaching the house from the road, she is blinded by something that reflects and magnifies the day's first light. It is the glass, fully in place now. Her home, a glass and steel envelope to contain almost nothing, and it hovers before her on stilts five feet above the ground. The silence he had promised is tinged with a sound she imagines, water spilling over its banks and onto the expanse of prairie grasses and small trees that separates the house from the river. The river sings to the house, soft and constant.

Nearing the house, she hears something. A murmuring, but it is not the river. She continues up to the house until she sees two silhouettes in the glass. Why had she thought that it would be more transparent than this? The figures are shadowed.

She wonders which curious neighbors have wandered in for a closer look at the 'sanitarium.' As she takes the sharp right turn inside from the patio she prepares to ask them politely to leave. Once she enters the room, the two silhouettes take their natural form--Mies. And that woman from the exhibition. She only manages to make some inarticulate animal sound before she starts shouting.
Get out. You said I could use your house, that I could come here anytime. Get out. Get out.

It was easier to call what happened an accident, to simply have the blame placed on the contractor who had allowed the glass walls to be installed when temperatures were very low, and the glass was a very close fit. When the weather warmed up, suddenly and unseasonably, of course it was the steel's expansion that caused the glass in four panes to crack in that way. The contractor listens to this explanation from the architect's office, looking over sketches and measurements he himself had made during that morning's visit to the site. Somebody had removed all but one of the panels before he had arrived, so it was only this one panel that he was able to examine. Fractures radiated from its center in long, clean lines that were almost nostalgic, ornamental against the severe clarity of the white steel. He stood behind the panel and, at his six feet, noted that the only portion of the window still intact occurred at roughly the height of his raised fist.