

International House

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For Vanderbilt's International House—to be missed deeply, after 40 years

“Isn’t it obvious that we ‘inter-are’?” —Thích Nhất Hạnh

Thursday night and the walls bend in. The rain shudders
on its way down. Our windows gaze out onto
more windows, and the ceiling drips
into our cupped palms — arms
heavy with food, so you hold the door
open. Your plate my plate. Your worries
ours. Your hands’ veins, like the
redwoods, old and still growing, twined through mine—

Don’t we bear a duty of care
to each other? And here, is one way
of fending off the end of things
telling stories: looking, honestly, at our
selves. And outward. Windows through windows
into this blue world: the lotion you soothe
over my raw skin. Belligerent caw of a squirrel. Murmuration
of starlings, crying in the pink dusk — your

tray heavy, your dripping shoes, so I
catch the door and hold it. I pull you up
and out of the rain. Tell me love
isn’t possible, not here, not where voices
layer voices bend, and carry voices each day, in languages
not owned — and tell me again. Tell me.
Tell me our survival isn’t possible, our roof
will shudder, salt, and crack our hands
can’t possibly hold each other, while we join
together in roaring
song.