

Debbie Bennett / TWO POEMS

ILLNESS

You recall being ill
morning and cold air, later
a sleepy sun banging
in your eyes,
light and dust, you remember the smell
of warm velvet and oily
chairs poking into
odd corners: they are enormous
swathed like your father
in unfamiliar colours

in the kitchen, your grandmother is switching on
the sudden static
of the radio and a voice coughs out
the progress of the war,
weather comes later
but in your half-sleeping dream, all the trees
outside flare up, feverishly red
then black
and into them, one by one
parachutes drop
sizzling like snowflakes
but it's only the squeal
of the water-taps
the crackle of the radio; impatiently
your grandmother snaps it off.

Now your mother
comes toward you with a tray
of medicines and cool cloths

before she too
vanishes into another
dark corner

and only much later
you will recall her standing there
looking through the window
her fingers pulling lightly at
the buttons on her dress or her heart.

LAST MORTGAGE PAYMENT

And there is this man
gathering shadows each time he moves
in the half-light
his face collecting thoughts
steadily near the window:
pants, shirt, buttons,
the belt-buckle snaps
briefly, decisively,
his mind made up and
he goes out for his first slow smoke,
the sun ticking down
on empty aluminum
boats, spacious green lawns,
everywhere around him he's supposed
to breathe it in
that leathery inconspicuous smell
of space and money because
he's paid for it, it's his
he can break it apart
like puzzle pieces now or
he can keep it together, he can even
sell it, buy something else,
a real-estate picture

of a white house, a lawn, the people behind somewhere
hidden in curtains and upholstery
bickering gently, quietly and never quite
cutting up their wrist, or
getting divorces;

he thinks this must be some version of
expensive suburban despair,
even his son strolling, casual in his
sex, his jeans won't
smash up the family car
won't get his girl knocked-up
as in the fifties,
ending up with a
three-piece suit
and a dying carnation
in his button-hole, ending up
walking down those aisles forever.
Not going to University.
And being sorry.

Now there's the Pill his son tells him,
and besides,
nobody knows who all these kids belong to,
anyway, so

this man thinks maybe
he'll keep it
won't even get another mortgage, buy something more
keep it for himself, maybe

He looks at the immaculate roses
along his borders:

thinks that
in the morning
they shine
like good skin.