

An Ordinary Morning in Woodbridge

Priscilla Atkins

From around the corner in the next room
arrive my eighty-five-year-old mother's Oh shits,
each aspirated hiss an attempt to answer the raw ache

that quakes like a knotted fist in the chest, or hovers
like a giant ominous glove of tree-deafened sky, while
below, an old woman struggles to retrieve

a fallen Kleenex. How did this happen?
this unsettling re-settlement from Illinois
to her middle daughter's five bathroom house

in a New Haven suburb? Every morning
she re-remembers: these are the dogwood sheets,
peach comforter; there is my maple dresser. The light

seeping in the window is not ample, not prairie-morning
bright. Now, widow of a life she never had the chance
to mourn, she gazes out on trees grown thick, a certain distance

from the house—the kind of distance once noted as correct
at her eldest son's rural dwelling. These days, she says
she does not care to ever see another tree:

too dark, too many leaves.
Blossoming peach, delicate dogwood exist on another planet.
Her eyes, as if pressed with coins, able to reflect

the dappled light, but unable to perceive it,
or the squeezed April trees. Narrowness itself
circumscribed by privacy, distant tumults of adolescent

grandchildren whose television habits
and abnormally long weekend sleep-a-thons
give rise to clucks and mumbled perturbations.

Hiss or cluck, sun or rain—it's all the same.
Here where was is always more than is
nothing strikes the brash upbeat chord

of gaudy dailiness save, perhaps, this noon's
bark-less stray, in need of grooming,
a warm meal, who slinked in

through an unlatched side-door,
ducked the alarm,
pressed his damp nose against her knee.

