

Saturday: One Version (Fourth Week of an Unidentified Illness)

Dixie Partridge

Tired of enclosure, I sit near what view
of trees and sky my house will give.
Across the back fence, my neighbor
who can hardly walk
lowers herself painfully to a white deck chair.
She closes her eyes, turns her thin face
toward the sun, and is still.
From my glass doors, why do I feel
an unwilling seer?
So often beauty and pain are too equal a mix.
Our fears and sorrows leak out,
deposit on the memories of others,
negatives that may or may not come to light.
And what does the past teach us
but to see the future already bearing
such layers.

I hear my youngest son drop his bike
and come in from piano lessons,
stop at the fridge—his next hours
beginning to take shape in the sky of his mind.
Perhaps he is already surrounded
by the scent of his treehouse—
redwood above raspberries.
Or perhaps he is simply standing up straight
against his mother's daily fevers
and the mid-life glooms I hoped were hidden.

And why do I feel the need
to make up an ending to my neighbor's day—
that image of her struggle into the chair
demanding something. . . .

A flock of birds lifts,
as if one body, from the birch:
my son is in the treehouse.
I want suddenly to join him, but
excuses are necessary—brownies,
the mail, maybe some word
from his siblings who left him stranded here
while they finish college and their lives.

Strange, how all the years of planning and doing
have led to a moment that seems pre-filmed.
The woman next door still lies in the spring sun,
not moving. I slide open the door and listen—
legs like paper. . . .
And I see myself from my neighbor's view:
in a shuttered light, ready to step out.