

ELIZABETH BURNS

*A Homecoming*

*i.m. Duncan Glen*

—‘and a forekent intelligence of licht | explodes the sadness’  
from ‘Amethyst’, *Duncan Glen*

As if the ward were an underworld—no daylight, no fresh air,  
one small window onto a courtyard, no telling where the sun  
would rise or set—and leaving it an entry back up to the earth;  
earth with its soft September light, its lovely—even in the carpark—  
lungfuls of air, green of the field by the roundabout, newly yellowed leaves.

And home—being home felt like being held in light, the way the windows,  
facing east and west, fill the room with it. Gazing out at trees,  
drinking tea of fresh lemonbalm my sister’s made, while my daughter  
shows me words in her new dictionary; eating home-made food  
round a table with a family—things that have become extraordinary.

Or, in the afternoon, to sit on the garden bench—the last of the roses,  
the washing blowing on the line, a basket of windfalls, the autumn air.  
And so on, through this day where everything is brushed with newness,  
miracle; a sense of light and lightness, a kind of gentleness—  
and Duncan, I’m wondering now if this was what surrounded you

that same day in late September, when both of us shifted from one world  
to another. Your damaged body, held by those who love you,  
grown weightless, *near translucent*, maybe, as you saw your father  
when he drew close to death. And then the spirit lifting  
from the tired, failed flesh, taken off into another element—

not rowed into a dark cave by some hooded figure, but carried  
in a vessel filled with light and air, like a white-sailed felucca  
on the Nile. Both of us released that day, into life, into an afterlife.  
Death and rebirth, the oldest story; pomegranate seeds  
brought out of darkness, a glistening handful—

but again, I come back to the way you wrote of your father,  
singing as he tended his chrysanthemums  
though he knew he wouldn't live to see them flower;  
and it's how I see you too, tending to poetry, the song going on,  
things still coming into bloom, long after this long day has ended.