

FLORA FINCHING, WAKING UP IN 2012, IS OFFERED A LIBRARY BOOK

No war if that's all right. I never  
did like war. I saw two or three or more  
since my life and that's more too many.

Kings and queens would do, but peaceful ones;  
anything where anyone comes out of poverty,  
prison, sickness, famine, pain, not that I was

ever in any of them. How was it that my young man,  
not young now, you know, turned out to be so, hic,  
scuse, straight-faced. Not a laugh in him.

Where was I? Marital stress, sibling rivalry  
or all seven but not war or more, enough to turn  
a girl to the glassy solace

of the spirit, hic, excuse me. The bad word  
and all its relatives if used in speech  
but not gratuitously, you appreciate. Bodies?

You couldn't count how many layers we wore  
to cover up our bawdy thoughts. Did I tell you  
my erstwhile lover grew grey and overgood and solemn?

And me? The only way to grow was outwards  
when in the room below there was a father  
and in the room above an aunt. God save me

if I speak ill of either. Today, ah yes, hic  
excuse me, you use the word "internalise".  
I swallowed them whole, you see, a bad Dad

and my late husband's aunt's cant, no wonder  
I grew so – comfortably built – hic scuse.  
Did I go to the wedding? you want to know,

of the young man now grown so grey and grave  
with not a little laugh left in him –  
and the girl – I need to mention it to Chas D,

but what if it's too late to shout down  
a double century: SUCH HOUSEHOLD ANGELS DON'T EXIST!  
Will he hear? I doubt it, not where he is

hobnobbing with Queen Victoria's literati.  
He always was a party animal. (Do you know,  
I quite fancied Tennyson when he was young.)

Yes, Chas D sent me to my ex's wedding (page 763)  
having given me already a pompous father,  
a cantankerous aunt from my first marriage,

obesity, a liking for a secret tippie, verbal diarrhoea,  
a place as a minor character in the canon of his works;  
where was I? No, I don't want war as well.