

## The Flats

*Leontia Flynn*

In the first flat, up a flight of dingy stairs,  
there was a sunlit room in which dust danced  
and half a dead bee lay by a sash window  
(where, we intoned with awe, was the other half?).  
Four or five boys smoked joints on the brown carpet.

In the second flat there was also an air of decay:  
– damp on the ceiling, cigarette butts in the hearth –  
but someone had wistfully added a vase filled with flowers  
and a colourful throw, as though by an effort of will  
the existence of rooms beside this one might be known.

In the third flat, something had gone obscenely wrong.  
The plaster and paintwork were new – but a sharp smell  
hung near the unpacked goods in a choked alcove.  
Who, furthermore, was the figure beneath that sheet  
moaning in anguish. Who watched from the lamp-less chair?

## Reminders

The bin collections and the times of Mass.  
The names and dosage of prescription drugs.  
My parents measure out their hours,  
in this small back kitchen, regular as tides,  
soothed by a filling kettle and a radio.

A fly completes a quick Grand Prix-style circuit  
around the room, then rests against the pane.  
'Don't leave key in lock'  
reads a note, in capitals, pinned to the back door  
above the key, in the lock.

*Biography*

Leontia Flynn was born in County Down in 1974, and recently completed a PhD at Queen's University, Belfast. In 2001 she won an Eric Gregory Award. Her first collection, *These Days* (Cape, London 2004), won the Forward Poetry Prize (Best Collection of the Year) in 2004, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award. In the same year, she was named as one of the Poetry Book Society's 'Next Generation' poets.

Leontia Flynn lives in Ireland and is Research Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. Her second collection of poems is *Drives* (Cape, London 2008).