

Marianne Burton

The Woman Who Fitted In The Sydney Opera House

Earlier this evening she sprayed on perfume,
clasped a favourite neck-chain round her throat;

there would have been a mirror to check
her outfit was presentable from all angles.

Everyone is stoical. Nobody cranes impatiently
from the balcony. No announcements are made.

Ushers smile, the conductor stands motionless
on his podium, the cellists hold their bows.

Emotion waits behind the lowered curtain
in greasepaint and fin de siècle costumes.

This is not that same high-water tragedy,
merely a moment of pity and embarrassment.

Still, for her, a previous existence ends here.
All goings out and comings in have altered

between Café Momus and the snow of Act Three.
All further nights will be counted from this.

The perfume will speak of it, and the chain,
and the peacock dress with appliquéd feathers

held firmly under the armpits by two strong
ambulance men while her husband walks behind.