

John Betjeman (1906-84)

2 *Death in Leamington*

She died in the upstairs bedroom  
By the light of the ev'ning star  
That shone through the plate glass window  
From over Leamington Spa.

Beside her the lonely crochet 5  
Lay patiently and unstirred,  
But the fingers that would have work'd it  
Were dead as the spoken word.

And Nurse came in with the tea-things 10  
Breast high 'mid the stands and chairs —  
But Nurse was alone with her own little soul,  
And the things were alone with theirs.

She bolted the big round window,  
She let the blinds unroll,  
She set a match to the mantle, 15  
She covered the fire with coal.

And "Tea!" she said in a tiny voice  
"Wake up! It's nearly *five*."  
Oh! Chintzy, chintzy cheeriness,  
Half dead and half alive! 20

Do you know that the stucco is peeling?  
Do you know that the heart will stop?  
From those yellow Italianate arches  
Do you hear the plaster drop?

Nurse looked at the silent bedstead, 25

At the gray, decaying face,  
As the calm of a Leamington ev'ning  
Drifted into the place.

She moved the table of bottles  
Away from the bed to the wall;  
And tiptoeing gently over the stairs  
Turned down the gas in the hall.

30

*1932*

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