

## Rented rooms

Night stole away my reason to be there –  
that routine note which missed the post. I came  
out of the throaty mist, the New Year's air,  
stared, at the dim house which showed no name,  
called to a girl, who rattled past her bike,  
blowing her fog-damp scarf, winter's hot cheeks.

The first door I pushed open from their hall  
gaped a conservatory, shadowed: full  
of spoiled ferns once, sweet geraniums.  
now it help bikes, askew. It breathed back all  
the cold of first streets, lingering on stairs –  
the outside door blows opens – no one cares  
to clean: from Christmas, ivy curls in sprays,  
dark, in rolls of dirt. Who went away  
leaving this television blank above  
a rolled-up quilt? Quick; drop the printed note  
on the hall's floor.

It echoes back again  
the deep sea chill of fog, the waves of dust,  
my wonder at a room's dimmed lights.  
need, then:  
the stairs to silence; not to own, but love.

From *Selected Poems* (Carcenet, 1991) by Alison Brackenbury.