

HAMISH GUTHRIE  
**MRS. GILLMOR**

She was a landmark, like her house,  
widow, progenitor, eccentric, Scotch,  
beloved warm old lady, who made  
her big house our revolving residence;  
Cairncross who taught French, two girls  
from Kalandar, and I, like a waif,

from the train, to work the summer in town.  
She was Presbyterian  
and categorical, a clamp on her Bible  
and its commandments, generous  
to confusion, kind, gentle,  
adamant, and when she locked

her door, the wind came in.  
Her white fridge in the kitchen  
swelled like a full-bodied whale,  
and sickened with frugality;  
cheese bits she saved, half-apples,  
pickles, meats well-wrapped for tomorrow,

turned the colours of disease. There were  
disgorgings, questions put to all of us,  
disavowals; meals for the grave.  
Her husband's hardware store  
had sold the town necessities.  
Hooks, hampers, hinges

turned a profit from his shelves;  
pipe, ladders, paint, wire, hammers, glass,

advice and measurement.  
Her memory rattled like a box of nails.  
She fabled the nights her son  
climbed out of his room to meet

the Ukrainian girl fear wouldn't bring home  
to meet his Scottish parents.  
She laughed at herself and her principles,  
and her beloved son married his secret.  
Booze at the end was revelation,  
a translation,

dressed in her best for the purchase,  
walking the cracked pavement stones  
as if for church, and briskly,  
to meet the nice man at the store.  
Scotch tipped the house.  
Cairncross and I heard her

rummage in the cupboard  
for the bottle that defeated  
absent sons.  
She poured herself downstairs  
to the bottom where she did not know  
us or the reason for the ambulance.

We called her son in Minneapolis  
for help, to the house where years  
had whitened her laughter,  
and would not let her sleep.