

At the Post Office.

I'm in line at my branch to post a gift I haven't
quite described on the custom declaration for
a friend across the sea who also spends time
mailing things to me, but says it could be worse:
'in Bucharest one waits for hours, only to have
the window crash down an inch from your
fingers—"smoking break" says the sign,' or
so he thinks. Well, not only is there a long
wait here, the man in front of me and the man
behind me are shouting at a woman who's
packed three boxes of books, which the clerk
suggests she pack as one so she's untying the
string now, while time slows. Three clerks where
there used to be nine and the woman's shouting
back now. I'm not sure what angers them more:
because she's hesitating or because she's foreign.
The man behind me, foreign too, manages abusive
English nicely. Anyway, if my gift fails to arrive,
the receipt proving it was posted may track it down.
I hope you'll be pleasantly surprised. I'm next in line.

Women Dressing and Undressing

When my mother, trying to shame me into eating,
told me about children starving in India, I spaghetti-
tied the brown balls on my plate to send to them, but

she sent me to bed instead. So when the woman at
the mirror asks me how she looks in the one size fits
all jumpers, I don't remind her of the starving. Shame's
the problem in the first place. I say, that doesn't suit
you. I do not say, nothing will unless you lose six stone.

The master painters, who liked their women fleshy, knew
to paint them nude or fully clothed, not in their underwear.

Too few mirrors, a woman had said, and we all in the common
changing room had a similar thought. But we were patient,
waited our turn to look, unaware, perhaps, that shame's the cure.