

October Evening

is enchantment

paling sun leans faintly
rays angling away
shadows grown thin
clouds pulled ribboning out

(so many strands
so many skeins)

and everywhere
the silver litter of spiders
like fine hair
whisped in shimmered light

(leans angling thin
pulled ribboning out
so many strands)

to enter it
is to approach Eve's temptation

feel how broken
it lingering clings

(so many skeins)

and in the morning has taken up
new places, new perfection

and innocence hangs on air

(fine lingering clings)

conspires seduction everywhere

(approach temptation
enter perfection)

Landscape Painting

witnessed in

road-mauled hares
whose fresh torn guts twitch nervously

towers of foxgloves
stabbing spears against the sky

ox-eyed rosettes
stiffly held beneath grazing rains

trodden buttercups
whose underneaths stream silent gold

burnished oaks
aching into life, dying to live

razored thrushes
sharing worms' warm blood

evening's wounded suns
spilling into pink clouds

sharing one scene

Still life till end.

No Laughing Matter

There was this woman, this man named Percy, and this parrot...

Not parrot, actually, but macaw some wag had called Micawber; not Percy's either though he'd motored miles to bring it back, but Great Aunt Annie's who always had stacks of ready cash.

Just like Giles' cartoon Granny, with manky fox-fur wrap that snapped our worming fingers, she was a one for jokes: could pull almost all herself apart. Had those tricks with sliding thumbs and stolen noses; would let her false bun fall then jig it in our faces; sat on her stocking stuffed leg-like with rags, then bullied us to pull, till off it flopped lolloping in our hands.

(Remembering this, I understand why my childhood dreams were littered with dismembered limbs.) Her only certain things were those amber glass door-pulls, and even they dissembled – not jewels, or warm to touch, at times coming adrift in your mitts.

That parrot-cum-macaw Annie had Percy place down her yard, behind the arch, so when you passed it squawked till ready to explode, thrumming on its perch, some feather-weight warming for a punch.

Most of its joke was colour: bursts of scarlet, amber, gold that blazed against gate of Sherwood-green and lime-washed wall – Brazil in England. Try as he might, Percy couldn't make it talk. Once he'd belted it so it never pecked his hands, but if strangers leant to stroke, it squared them in the eye, crooked head – once, twice – then struck. I dared it once: my sisters stared on petrified.

When Great Annie died, Micawber went (not dead, just sold) and Percy took up bulldogs, thumping their plug-ugly weight to rectangled coffee-tables with Queen Anne legs. True to form they terrorized and grinned fixedly at their own gruesome jokes.

It must have been his job that made him fierce with things at home. A placid man, he earned his keep for thirty years and more by grinding down piles of bone to hoof and horn.

Even his nasturtiums – gleaming in scarlets, ambers, golds – were bullied glorying up the wall, like parakeets among the white and green. They never talked, or pecked, just held their mouths in silent mocking grins: more dissembling jewels colding to the touch, or coming adrift in uncertain mitts. Another joke?

There was this man named Percy, these flowers, and this poem...