

INDIAN SUMMER

By

Suzanne Shane

Each word in a poem gropes toward the next moment, then the next, until the waves of moments create a space not unlike the space of a dream. And if a poem is true to the pull of the next moment, each time it is said aloud its unique space unfolds like a recurring dream, which surprises even as the dream is recollected.

—Suzanne Shane

Last Call

Everywhere in fields,
 along roadsides,
 purple asters celebrate
 September's close—
 each stalk boasts its own bouquet—
 a gift profuse and delicate and wild
 as spring.

And you
 who worked all summer
 planting cultivars,
 composing color, texture,
 carving plot,
 accept this call
 to reverie—

To glorious goldenrod,
 to purple aster's majesty,
 to Queen Anne's lace—
 this all-over breadth of brush and spray—
 this brilliant anarchy and ecstasy
 of chance—
 this wayward grace.

Late Summer's Night Kingdom

All night in my dreams
I was the great propagator
transplanting lilies
and so many more
angels of the field.

With supreme gentleness
I lifted them up
separating the crowded roots
carrying the light-starved
to full sun,
protecting sensitive astilbe
and bleeding hearts

and speaking the whole time
in a trance of verse
the gods would approve:
Multiply and give glory
through all the seasons
still to come.

If there was a soft rain
it fell indistinguishable
from my tears.

But when night was done
and the crows cried
my immortal heart
turned back into flesh—
the hillside quarry
again littered with bones.

O unlucky humans!
unrootable hearts—
degradable dreams.

Blackberries

Each plump black
globe glistens
like a jewel,

and you—
stalker, thief,
lover's fool—

swim among brambles
under noonday sun—

tangled, scratched
and all but trapped—

dipping deeper,
breathless
toward the next

exploding
irresistible
midnight kiss.

Indian Summer

To think the world was ever only this—
lake fringed with sumac in ceremonial dress,

sumac rippling in the wind, mimicking
jungle birds painted tangerine and pink,

females waving ruddy wands, hypnotically;
the deep lake murmuring low, reflectively

until you too sense it, this dormant prayer
feathered like a seed tumbling over air,

carried with the lost tribes moving always on,
erasing their paths to the shaggy horizon—

and whispering: Sumac keep dancing
to the Great Spirit passing.

Maple

All summer
a full house,
polite applause.

But delicate wind
that stroked, cajoled
turns cold,
slaps and whips
resilient green—
all changed, changed utterly.
Rouged and rustling, the clamorous fans
seize the sunset's glory from the sky.

And then the dream—
the silent snap and drift
to grass, the dance of scarves
and painted fingers done,
the show a crumpled apron on the ground.

The trunk knows nothing.
Stripped, there's no apology.
Come hail, come snow—
earth's upright, solemn
citizen
is mum.

November

There is a moment
soft and burnishing
just fluttering
beyond the flaming stain
of passion

when all in the distance
is gilded
with a delicate ache
for all that is lost
and going going

gone, and hope
is a ragged emblem
set at half-mast.
At this exact second
the crow squawks its scorn

at the human condition,
at you, caught
in the act of pity
and penance, simply
because color has drained from your world.

Even now, the late golds
and coppers, the glinting bronze
of the Old Masters' canvases
that sustained your vistas, have darkened.
Soon, you will look to the cold stars for comfort.

Ice Princess

Sometime before winter
knowing the hard
misshapen heart
is a miracle,
you bury it deep
as an act of faith.

When earth stiffens to rock
wind and snowdrifts
erase the old scars,
field and plot mix
in an act of amnesia.
You too are benumbed
and thick to the core.

Somehow a small flame
appears to sustain you—
bright cardinal!
blood flower in snow
trills a shock to the pulse—
alive! alive!

When the rains come
you too wish to be washed
clean. Your lungs are buoys
pulling you to the surface.
New light slaps you to laughter!

Put on your crepe slip,
your velvet dress with pleats,
black silken underthings.
You are shuddering open
slowly, loosening—

then dancing,
losing your senses
one petal at a time.

March Thaw

Today, every robin has its wish—
the matted grass springs back! Networks
of worms are chewing their tunnels.

The watercolorist has come, spreading
a thin green wash. Willow wands
grow plush with yellow tints.

In perfect synchronicity, bulbs
burst from their fixed orbits—
the flame-tipped stalks nosing through leaf mulch,

petals invisibly tucked within seams
all winter dreaming this surprise.

Already the crocuses

are hatching like sunspots on the back hill.

Circe's Art

(an excerpt)

1

The moment sky holds both the moon and sun
is now. A cosmic pause, the closing kiss
that seals fire in its ring of passion.

Call it sorcery or divination—
this gift to lock and unlock energies—
when evening sky floats both the moon and sun

and we can stay the drift of dissolution.
Poppies in the field unfurl bright goblets,
bees dip and fumble in their sooty passion—

frantic to move on. Our predilection
is to lounge, and laugh, and stretch— listless
as evening sky that holds the moon and sun.

Think of what you've left, the work half done—
commitments, blame; the proven drag of stress.
When you accept this offering of passion

regret and guilt are lost in sweet persuasion,
tomorrow's news will never go to press.
This moment sky holds both the moon and sun
and seals fire in the sting of passion.

It all depends on what we don't expect—
rain, an uninvited guest, the quiet way
that cause may come unbuckled from effect.

And meaning? Who could possibly detect
the smile behind the smile, the plot in disarray
when everything is not what you expect?

She's driven by the prospect of a wreck,
and winds pick up—you feel foundations sway,
perspectives change with dizzying effect.

You ply her to confess, admit, reflect—
she laughs and shuffles into shades of gray—
veils that lead you where you don't expect.

Exiled, a sailor without ship, inspect
the sky: no stars, no sun, just barely day—
her twilight-dawn illusionist effect.

You settle in. At last, it's her neglect
that moves you. But she has other parts to play,
that all depend on what you don't expect—
now cause has come unbuckled from effect.

3

Obvious, devious, a beautiful liar—
seamless as night she enters your dream,
filters your memory through screens of desire.

Her voice clears a path in the forest choir.
Rising from thickets, the high notes careen
and finger your nerves like a magical lyre.

What you were, you are not — leader for hire,
manager, maker, arranger of means—
strung up, conflicted, cocooned in desire.

So maggots are mumbling deep in their mire
and daybreak's a rumor on butterfly wings.
If water or sky, which twin's the liar?

Your past becomes form her touch can inspire—
your plots to escape the favorites she sings.
Still her voice moves you to the brink of desire,

where you arrive numb, a stone without fire
and sink among many washed by the stream—
of the oblivious, beautiful liar
who filters memory through screens of desire.