

First Love

I knew it had to come. I couldn't bear
it then; can't take it now. I'll make amends.
I'm willing to agree, now. So - be fair,
There's no need to split up. We'll just be friends.
Like you suggested. Not see quite so much
of each other. Please! I agree. You're right.
I made too much of what we had. Been such
a fool. I'll take the blame. We'll start tonight
- The New Improved Regime*. We'll both be free
to do just as we want - the adult way.
I'll do just as you want me to. You'll see.
I'm willing to do anything you say.
I promise. I won't make a scene. Won't cry.
If you'll do just one thing. Don't say goodbye.

Mick Gowar

**regime – system*

Rejection

Rejection is orange
Not, as one might think,
Grey and nondescript*.
It is the vivid orange of
A council worker's jacket.
A coat of shame that says
'he doesn't want you.'
Rejection tastes like ashes
Acrid, bitter.
It sounds
Like the whisper of voices
Behind my back.
'He didn't want her.
He dumped her.'
It feels
Like the scraping of fingernails
On a blackboard,
Not ache or stab of pain
But like having
a layer of skin missing.
Rejection looks like - me,
I suppose.
Slightly leftover
Like the last, curled sandwich
When all the guests
Have gone.

Jenny Sullivan

** nondescript – ordinary*

Acrid – unpleasantly bitter

Autumn

Autumn arrives
Like an experienced robber
Grabbing the green stuff
Then cunningly covering his tracks
With a deep multitude
Of colourful distractions.
And the wind,
The wind is his accomplice
Putting an air of chaos
Into the careful diversions
So branches shake
And dead leaves are suddenly brown
In the faces of inquisitive strangers.
The theft chills the world
Changes the temper of the earth
Till the normally placid sky
Glow red with a quiet rage.

Alan Bold

Slow Reader

He can make sculptures
and fabulous machines,
invent games, tell jokes,
give solemn, adult advice –
but he is slow to read.
When I take him on my knee
with his *Ladybird* book
he gazes into the air,
sighing and shaking his head
like an old man
who knows the mountains
are impassable.

He toys with words,
letting them go cold
as gristly meat,
until I relent
and let him wriggle free:
a fish returning
to its element,
or a white-eyed colt – shying
from the bit * – who sees
that if he takes it
in his mouth
he'll never run
quite free again.

VICKI FEAVER