

## Died in the Wool

Cut in the style of her familiar mood,  
Hanging heavy on the hook,  
Mother's black coat seemed to be  
Custodian of her pathology.  
Glinting blue-green crow-feather colours  
Impenetrable, wiry stitches,  
Curled in tight whirlpools of malevolence.  
She'd put it on, and we would know  
How she would feel -  
How she would act -  
The warp and weft of the coming day,  
Texture of brillo-pad,  
Don't ever touch it!  
It separated us perfectly.  
But when she put it on  
The hours ahead decayed.

## Hell-bent On Happiness

On some days you would find yourself released  
From the cycle of anger and despair:  
When, suddenly freed from the man-hunt  
Of your own soul, you'd take off in pursuit  
Of yet more elusive prey:

A creature whose paths you never could track down.  
Whose habits you never could predict,  
Today, though you don't dare admit it,  
Your quarry is happiness.

Your children stare at this laughter,  
Watch it streaming down your face,  
Transfixed by its velocity, its tone:  
Almost outraged by its loveliness.

We grin stupidly as it rings out over our heads,  
Though it is beautiful, it goes on too long.  
Our own hounds yearn to join your pack,  
How we would love to let them go!  
If only we could be quite sure  
That you were coming back.

## Fall From A Window

Playing in the garden, bored,  
One uneventful summer day, age ten.  
Adults dozing somewhere in the indoor shade,  
Had an idea to dramatise the afternoon:  
Sister to stand at a top floor window and shout "Help!"  
Then I would yell a long diminuendo from below,  
Sister to send a heavy cushion thudding down into the garden,  
Then I would hide the cushion in a bush,  
Lie spread-eagled on the grass outside, and wait.

It all went perfectly, terrifyingly well:  
Our new stepfather ran out into the garden first,  
Then mother, screaming "Oh my god...!" upon his heels.  
Frightened by the horror in her voice,  
I scrambled to my feet,  
And assured them immediately it was a game,  
And that we hadn't meant to upset them in the least.  
They told me off and went inside,  
Satisfied that we'd been playing out  
Some imaginary incident, (silly girls),  
Quite unaware that others, in the house, might hear...

My pounding heart sent a potent mix  
Of guilt, remorse and shock around my veins:  
The terror in her eyes, when she ran out,  
Revealed to me an underworld of loss  
I knew no child was ever meant to see.

## Doctor Doctor

The specialists huddle in groups, like sportsmen,  
Muttering stratagems in low voices,  
(The electrical equipment hung up around the walls,  
Reassures them of easy access to their last resort).

On metal shelves stark with fluorescent light,  
They register your extremes in neat files:  
A gloved hand tracks alphabetical case-histories  
And stops at yours.

(My imaginary files, meanwhile, I picture  
Stacked, untended, in mildewed vaults  
Marked "Childhood").

## Tables Turned

In the record of our conflict, I recall the first time  
I remained dry-eyed, cold, detached.  
At first, you were astounded,  
Our encounters had strict rules, drawn up by you.

In normal circumstances, my tears would signal  
That you'd done what you'd set out to do:  
Add some new and grievous allegation  
To the compendious dossier of your disdain,  
Convincing me that everything you'd listed there was true.

But, on this inaugural occasion, I felt your anxiety,  
Fear - dare I say - terror, hiding, like another person,  
Somewhere in the room,  
And suddenly it struck me you'd never taken on  
An adversary your size before:

I confess, exultation is too weak a word...

Of course, the skill would be, to judge the time  
To shed the terrible power of this hate,  
And, for the sake of life and love and sanity:  
Not to leave disarmament too late.