Colette

The day Colette died, the worst thunderstorm in sixty-seven years hit Paris. Her last conscious act was to gesture toward the lightning and cry out, “Look! Look!”

—The World of the Short Story
edited by Clifton Fadiman

It was a day of divinations.

Like the land,
the sky was stained with gray.

The trees shivered
in the stillness of Paris.

No birds
held the wind in their beaks.

But on her deathbed,
Colette knew that lightning

would fork in the sky—
the steel rods listening
to the sound of water,
incandescent,
in all that darkness.
Poem for Amon Goeth

*after watching* Schindler’s List

He picks them out
with the eye
of a hawk,

Amon, in earliest morning,
his mouth still full
of last night’s
dream.
He slings a rifle
on his shoulder

(eyes narrowing
into the points
of knives)

all his energy
on that forefinger
and as the morning

Shatters,
in his memory
splinters the sad

and beautiful face
of a Jewish woman
he could not

love.
Flowers

News item: Khmer Rouge guerrillas, whose 1975–78 rule cost the lives of a million Cambodians, are shipping flowers to beautify a Western Cambodian town before the visit of Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Say it with flowers:

Carnations and hibiscuses
vivid as blood.

Orchids hanging
as held breath.

Petals of roses
tender as an ache,

Throbbing in the mind,
blooming into a million

Thorns. And in the air,
the leaves releasing

Precious oxygen—
the air turning green,

Pure, tingling
with expectation.
Black Silk Pajamas

for Zack

Those black silk pajamas become you.

They began with worms spinning filaments from their very lips,

Then woven into cloth by the most delicate of hands.

Mirrors gleam darkly from the pajamas’

Most secret folds, while I stand

Before you, astonished at the sight

Of so much pure black water rippling over your body

Like a wave or a caress.
Voices

Now we only hear
each other's voices,
our ears strained
on the phone,
listening
like ears on a sea shell
for the call
of wind and water.

But it is enough
to fill my veins
with blood and longing,
to make my skin
hum,
to push the stone
of my grief
down a cliff,
into the sea's
shivering joy.
Rain

This morning, it is raining
in my country.
Water slides down
the leaves,
like tongue on skin.
The sound of their falling
collects
like breath on the lobes
of ears.

You are a continent away.
There, the leaves are beginning
to turn.
Soon, night will steal hours
from day,
and snow will be whirling
in drifts.

But you are here,
in the country
of my mind,
wiping away the maps
of mist
on the window pane,
lying in bed beside me,
as the pulse of the pillows and sheets—
even the very throb of rain—
begins to quicken.
Autumn

for B.

Outside, a chill wind
blowing, tearing leaves
from twigs.

But you are here, beloved,
standing on the foot
of my bed,

your hair damp
from your bath,
your skin tingling with autumn.

When you begin
moving
toward me

(Rilke's panther
graceful and lithe
in the half-light)

I fall
very slowly
into a region

where limbs turn
to water
and all fears scatter

like so many dead
leaves.