

ENCOUNTER WITH THE SHADOW

The dark rider comes thudding along
the grassy track towards me
I force myself to open my eyes . . .
And all around spreads the peaceful afternoon sunlight.
Quietly we get to our feet
and walk away from the sacred circle of stones.
Trembling and in anguish, I busy myself
with superficial conversations
Foolishly I turn away
from that terrible vision of evil.

Spring comes much sooner than you might suppose.
Before the last leaves are fallen
The new buds are pressing through
Pushing the dead stuff aside.

Are you too the new bud, my awful friend
Galloping with such dread into my memory?
I cannot send you packing now
But must grasp you by the hand
and say 'welcome my enemy!'
Before you ride me down.

Is this the face of my shadow
That death-dealing hooded figure?
The horse's flanks are heaving
and its hot breath steams onto my cold cheeks.
Fearful I shrink back, pretending to be a stone.
All my energy drains from me
I am sleepy and full of dread.

I must make one last effort
weak as I am
I leap forward and jump . . .
Into your arms, familiar.

This is my own smell, warm and stuffy,
And you are my crimes, my awful deeds:
my cheating and cruelty and going for second-best
my maiming of little defenceless creatures
with the harsh lash of my tongue and hand,
- the terrified snarling of a wounded child at bay - .

I, who have thought myself so wronged,
I too have hunted and destroyed.

O dark face haunting me through all the nights and days
Give me rest, give me peace, give me forgiveness.

Antonia Boll