

# Red is the Color of Blood

By Conrad Aiken

Red is the color of blood, and I will seek it:  
I have sought it in the grass.  
It is the color of steep sun seen through eyelids.

It is hidden under the suave flesh of women,—  
Flows there, quietly flows.  
It mounts from the heart to the temples, the singing mouth—  
As cold sap climbs to the rose.  
I am confused in webs and knots of scarlet  
Spun from the darkness;  
Or shuttled from the mouths of thirsty spiders.

Madness for red! I devour the leaves of autumn.  
I tire of the green of the world.  
I am myself a mouth for blood . . .

Here, in the golden haze of the late slant sun,  
Let us walk, with the light in our eyes,  
To a single bench from the outset predetermined.  
Look: there are seagulls in these city skies,  
Kindled against the blue.  
But I do not think of the seagulls, I think of you.

Your eyes, with the late sun in them,  
Are like blue pools dazzled with yellow petals.  
This pale green suits them well.

Here is your finger, with an emerald on it:  
The one I gave you. I say these things politely—  
But what I think beneath them, who can tell?

For I think of you, crumpled against a whiteness;  
Flayed and torn, with a dulled face.  
I think of you, writhing, a thing of scarlet,  
And myself, rising red from that embrace.

November sun is sunlight poured through honey:  
Old things, in such a light, grow subtle and fine.  
Bare oaks are like still fire.  
Talk to me: now we drink the evening's wine.  
Look, how our shadows creep along the gravel!—

And this way, how the gravel begins to shine!

This is the time of day for recollections,  
For sentimental regrets, oblique allusions,  
Rose-leaves, shrivelled in a musty jar.  
Scatter them to the wind! There are tempest. coming.  
It is dark, with a windy star.

If human mouths were really roses, my dear,—  
(Why must we link things so?—)  
I would tear yours petal from petal with slow murder.  
I would pluck the stamens, the pistils,  
The gold and the green,—  
Spreading the subtle sweetness that was your breath  
On a cold wave of death....

Now let us walk back, slowly, as we came.  
We will light the room with candles; they may shine  
Like rows of yellow eyes.  
Your hair is like spun fire, by candle-flame.  
You smile at me—say nothing. You are wise.

For I think of you, flung down brutal darkness;  
Crushed and red, with pale face.  
I think of you, with your hair disordered and dripping.  
And myself, rising red from that embrace.