the collector

once more I search for stones
in this autumn time
that hammer a lake's skin
to pewter
rejecting sharp weapons
useful for slicing a rival's shin
and those of the right kind that I find
I shall not lay out prettily
on my window sill
the time
has gone for all that morning
fun
now mostly evenings
leave them where they lie
still
in their accustomed places
outlasting the human faces
that imitate them
some shift
uneasy in their splashing rill
watching and waiting

fish scuff their ridges
or hide
in their moving shadows
snakes curl in rocks' dried-out hollows

I turn some small smooth pebbles
over and over in the shallows
of my pocket
where they rub
soothingly
yes — they comfort me
seem to match the mottled bruises
on my skin
they have grown
heavier with age as my bones
(at least they take more energy
to lift) yet they're more brittle
too
yet they stay lovely
veined or pitted striped or honed
with little bits of all
earth's colors in

as fall days
shorten I look for stones
they wait there patiently
and will not run away
**humming birds**

it was very sudden

buds were slowly turning back
their petals when the birds descended
out of the sun
darted in straight swift jabs
and oblique angles
then stopped
treading air beaks extended
their snaky throats pulsating
their wings a blur of light

two aerial motor-bicycles
that hummed and buzzed and jazzed
they sucked
like small refuelling
space-craft coupled to parent ships
then backed away hovered
then sipped some more
(they can go off
in any direction like exploding
fire-crackers on quick rays of flight
in vertical or reverse take-off

and they can put out their brights
dimming to olive-dun jade
flash again into life
then vanish)

two pairs of jewel thieves
ruby and emerald dive-bombed
my fuchsias
and
after the attack
the only sign a slight wobble
of purple and red flowers

as if a wearer of ear-drops
shook her head

**paddy webb**