

Orange Poppies

HELEN WICKES

They do their best to deceive you,
the satiny sheen of their petals
fluttering on skinny leek-green stalks,
odorless as a gas leak.
Each spring I bring a wild one home,
watch it from across the room
until its petals wither, plop off
one by one. Its color floats back
to the hell it came from.

Orange is the color of madness.
Not the dark, slow, *bury-me-alive* kind,
not the bright, loud, *I'll-buy-ten-charge-*
them-to-the-gods kind.
See for yourself. Orange poppies,
mockeries of real flowers,
lounge in the field by drifts of blue:
larkspur, lupine –
blue's the color of thought,
of windows thrown open.
Orange poppies are unchosen thoughts.

Try to approach blue lupine.

Poppies, burning with jealousy,
glowing with envy,
won't allow you.
Lower your face to them.
Not one will pull you underground.
Poppies aren't a doorway plant,
and grant neither transport, nor trance.

Try to regress them back
into primary red or primary yellow,
and you will fail; theirs is an original color.
By June they look dead but do not relax.
Glossy black seeds in dry husks,
quietly plump themselves all summer.
They are patient flowers. They will return.