Adam’s Song

Tommy was the first pet I had in Eden, "par’a-keet" seemed to fit—small parrot with long tail, the color of apple, new leaf, and lemon; harsh, irritating song. I called it “screaming” at first, but my softer side said, “Song, Adam, song.”

Eve taught me about mu'sic—a medley of sounds and tones, as of the wind. Cain taught me that some music is hard to hear: “Father, I have killed Abel and buried myself in a darker earth where frozen stars draw black flowers from my grave.” That was a song.

I clipped Tommy’s wings that day, with scis’sors—a cutting instrument, two pivoted blades. I gathered the yellow, green, and dark red shadows in the valley of my palm. Eve sang a music I could hardly hear. I inserted one by one into the warm earth of Abel’s grave the cool feath’ers—lighter than flowers, less afraid of flying; colorfast and hardened by a harsh song.

—James Richards

This poem won first place in the BYU Studies 1999 Poetry Contest.