

Morning Song

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

1961

1966

Lady Lazarus¹

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it—

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,²
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify?—

1. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus (John 11.1-45).

2. In the Nazi death camps, the victims' skins were sometimes used to make lampshades.

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?
 The sour breath
 Will vanish in a day. 15

Soon, soon the flesh
 The grave cave ate will be
 At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
 I am only thirty. 20
 And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
 What a trash
 To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments. 25
 The peanut-crunching crowd
 Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot—
 The big strip tease.
 Gentlemen, ladies 30

These are my hands
 My knees.
 I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.
 The first time it happened I was ten. 35
 It was an accident.

The second time I meant
 To last it out and not come back at all.
 I rocked shut

As a seashell. 40
 They had to call and call
 And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying
 Is an art, like everything else.
 I do it exceptionally well. 45

I do it so it feels like hell.
 I do it so it feels real.
 I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
 It's easy enough to do it and stay put. 50
 It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
 To the same place, the same face, the same brute
 Amused shout:

'A miracle!' 55
 That knocks me out.
 There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
 For the hearing of my heart—
 It really goes. 60

And there is a charge, a very large charge
 For a word or a touch
 Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
 So, so, Herr³ Doktor. 65
 So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,
 I am your valuable,
 The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek. 70
 I turn and burn.
 Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash—
 You poke and stir.
 Flesh, bone, there is nothing there— 75

A cake of soap,
 A wedding ring,
 A gold filling.⁴

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
 Beware
 Beware. 80

Out of the ash⁵
 I rise with my red hair
 And I eat men like air.

1962

1966

3. Mr. (German).

4. The Nazis used human remains in the making of soap and scavenged corpses for jewelry and gold teeth.

5. An allusion to the phoenix, a mythical bird that dies by fire and is reborn out of its own ashes.

Daddy

You do not do, you do not do
 Any more, black shoe
 In which I have lived like a foot
 For thirty years, poor and white,
 Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
 You died before I had time—
 Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
 Ghastly statue with one grey toe¹
 Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
 Where it pours bean green over blue
 In the waters of beautiful Nauset.²
 I used to pray to recover you.
 Ach, du.³

In the German tongue, in the Polish town⁴
 Scraped flat by the roller
 Of wars, wars, wars.
 But the name of the town is common.
 My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
 So I never could tell where you
 Put your foot, your root,
 I never could talk to you.
 The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
 Ich,⁵ ich, ich, ich,
 I could hardly speak.
 I thought every German was you.
 And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
 Chuffing me off like a Jew.
 A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.⁶
 I began to talk like a Jew.
 I think I may well be a Jew.

1. Plath's father's toe turned black from gangrene, a complication of diabetes.

2. Massachusetts beach.

3. Ah, you (German): the first of a series of references to her father's German origins.

4. The poet's father, of German descent, was born in Grabow, Poland.

5. I (German).

6. German concentration camps, where millions of Jews were murdered during World War II.

The snows of the Tyrol,⁷ the clear beer of Vienna
 Are not very pure or true.
 With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck
 And my Taroc⁸ pack and my Taroc pack
 I may be a bit of a Jew. 40

I have always been scared of you,
 With your Luftwaffe,⁹ your gobbledygoo.
 And your neat mustache
 And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
 Panzer¹-man, panzer-man, O You— 45

Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through.
 Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you. 50

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
 In the picture I have of you,
 A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
 But no less a devil for that, no not
 And less the black man who 55

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
 I was ten when they buried you.
 At twenty I tried to die
 And get back, back, back to you.
 I thought even the bones would do. 60

But they pulled me out of the sack,
 And they stuck me together with glue.²
 And then I knew what to do.
 I made a model of you,
 A man in black with a Meinkampf³ look 65

And a love of the rack and the screw.
 And I said I do, I do.
 So daddy, I'm finally through.
 The black telephone's off at the root,
 The voices just can't worm through. 70

If I've killed one man, I've killed two—
 The vampire who said he was you
 And drank my blood for a year,

7. Austrian Alpine region.

8. Variation of Tarot, ancient fortune-telling cards. Gypsies, like Jews, were objects of Nazi genocidal ambition; many died in the concentration camps.

9. The German air force.

1. Armor (German); refers to the German army's tank corps in World War II. Hitler preached the

superiority of the Aryans—people of German stock with blond hair and blue eyes.

2. An allusion to Plath's first suicide attempt.

3. A reference to Hitler's political autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written and published before his rise to power, in which the future dictator outlined his plans for world conquest.

Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

75

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

80

1962

1966

Words

Axes
After whose stroke the wood rings,
And the echoes!
Echoes traveling
Off from the centre like horses.

5

The sap
Wells like tears, like the
Water striving
To re-establish its mirror
Over the rock

10

That drops and turns,
A white skull,
Eaten by weedy greens.
Years later I
Encounter them on the road—

15

Words dry and riderless,
The indefatigable hoof-taps.
While
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars
Govern a life.

20

1963

1966

Blackberrying

Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries,
Blackberries on either side, though on the right mainly,
A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea
Somewhere at the end of it, heaving. Blackberries
Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes
Ebon in the hedges, fat
With blue-red juices. These they squander on my fingers.

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