**Mad Girl’s Love Song**

"I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;  
I lift my lids and all is born again.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)  
  
The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,  
And arbitrary blackness gallops in:  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.  
  
I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed  
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)  
  
God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:  
Exit seraphim and Satan's men:  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.  
  
I fancied you'd return the way you said,  
But I grow old and I forget your name.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)  
  
I should have loved a thunderbird instead;  
At least when spring comes they roar back again.  
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.  
(I think I made you up inside my head.)"

**Demon Lover**

Here are two pupils  
whose moons of black  
transform to cripples  
all who look:

each lovely lady  
who peers inside  
take on the body  
of a toad.

Within these mirrors  
the world inverts:  
the fond admirer's  
burning darts

turn back to injure  
the thrusting hand  
and inflame to danger  
the scarlet wound.

I sought my image  
in the scorching glass,  
for what fire could damage  
a witch's face?

So I stared in that furnace  
where beauties char  
but found radiant Venus  
reflected there.

**Cinderella**

The prince leans to the girl in scarlet heels,  
Her green eyes slant, hair flaring in a fan  
Of silver as the rondo slows; now reels  
Begin on tilted violins to span

The whole revolving tall glass palace hall  
Where guests slide gliding into light like wine;  
Rose candles flicker on the lilac wall  
Reflecting in a million flagons' shine,

And glided couples all in whirling trance  
Follow holiday revel begun long since,  
Until near twelve the strange girl all at once  
Guilt-stricken halts, pales, clings to the prince

As amid the hectic music and cocktail talk  
She hears the caustic ticking of the clock.

**Family Reunion**

Outside in the street I hear  
A car door slam; voices coming near;  
Incoherent scraps of talk  
And high heels clicking up the walk;  
The doorbell rends the noonday heat  
With copper claws;  
A second's pause.  
The dull drums of my pulses beat  
Against a silence wearing thin.  
The door now opens from within.  
Oh, hear the clash of people meeting ---  
The laughter and the screams of greeting :

Fat always, and out of breath,  
A greasy smack on every cheek  
From Aunt Elizabeth;  
There, that's the pink, pleased squeak  
Of Cousin Jane, out spinster with  
The faded eyes  
And hands like nervous butterflies;  
While rough as splintered wood  
Across them all  
Rasps the jarring baritone of Uncle Paul;  
The youngest nephew gives a fretful whine  
And drools at the reception line.

Like a diver on a lofty spar of land  
Atop the flight of stairs I stand.  
A whirlpool leers at me,  
I cast off my identity  
And make the fatal plunge.

**Bitter Strawberries**

All morning in the strawberry field  
They talked about the Russians.  
Squatted down between the rows  
We listened.  
We heard the head woman say,  
'Bomb them off the map.'

Horseflies buzzed, paused and stung.  
And the taste of strawberries  
Turned thick and sour.

Mary said slowly, 'I've got a fella  
Old enough to go.  
If anything should happen...'

The sky was high and blue.  
Two children laughed at tag  
In the tall grass,  
Leaping awkward and long-legged  
Across the rutted road.  
The fields were full of bronzed young men  
Hoeing lettuce, weeding celery.

'The draft is passed,' the woman said.  
'We ought to have bombed them long ago.'  
'Don't,' pleaded the little girl  
With blond braids.

Her blue eyes swam with vague terror.  
She added petishly, 'I can't see why  
You're always talking this way...'  
'Oh, stop worrying, Nelda,'  
Snapped the woman sharply.  
She stood up, a thin commanding figure  
In faded dungarees.  
Businesslike she asked us, 'How many quarts?'  
She recorded the total in her notebook,  
And we all turned back to picking.

Kneeling over the rows,  
We reached among the leaves  
With quick practiced hands,  
Cupping the berry protectively before  
Snapping off the stem  
Between thumb and forefinger.

**Pursuit**

Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit.  
RACINE  
  
There is a panther stalks me down:  
One day I'll have my death of him;  
His greed has set the woods aflame,  
He prowls more lordly than the sun.  
Most soft, most suavely glides that step,  
Advancing always at my back;  
From gaunt hemlock, rooks croak havoc:  
The hunt is on, and sprung the trap.  
Flayed by thorns I trek the rocks,  
Haggard through the hot white noon.  
Along red network of his veins  
What fires run, what craving wakes?  
  
Insatiate, he ransacks the land  
Condemned by our ancestral fault,  
Crying: blood, let blood be spilt;  
Meat must glut his mouth's raw wound.  
Keen the rending teeth and sweet  
The singeing fury of his fur;  
His kisses parch, each paw's a briar,  
Doom consummates that appetite.  
In the wake of this fierce cat,  
Kindled like torches for his joy,  
Charred and ravened women lie,  
Become his starving body's bait.  
  
Now hills hatch menace, spawning shade;  
Midnight cloaks the sultry grove;  
The black marauder, hauled by love  
On fluent haunches, keeps my speed.  
Behind snarled thickets of my eyes  
Lurks the lithe one; in dreams' ambush  
Bright those claws that mar the flesh  
And hungry, hungry, those taut thighs.  
His ardor snares me, lights the trees,  
And I run flaring in my skin;  
What lull, what cool can lap me in  
When burns and brands that yellow gaze?  
  
I hurl my heart to halt his pace,  
To quench his thirst I squander blood;  
He eats, and still his need seeks food,  
Compels a total sacrifice.  
His voice waylays me, spells a trance,  
The gutted forest falls to ash;  
Appalled by secret want, I rush  
From such assault of radiance.  
Entering the tower of my fears,  
I shut my doors on that dark guilt,  
I bolt the door, each door I bolt.  
Blood quickens, gonging in my ears:  
  
The panther's tread is on the stairs,  
Coming up and up the stairs.

**Soliloquy of the Solipsist**

I?  
I walk alone;  
The midnight street  
Spins itself from under my feet;  
When my eyes shut  
These dreaming houses all snuff out;  
Through a whim of mine  
Over gables the moon's celestial onion  
Hangs high.  
  
I  
Make houses shrink  
And trees diminish  
By going far; my look's leash  
Dangles the puppet-people  
Who, unaware how they dwindle,  
Laugh, kiss, get drunk,  
Nor guess that if I choose to blink  
They die.  
  
I  
When in good humor,  
Give grass its green  
Blazon sky blue, and endow the sun  
With gold;  
Yet, in my wintriest moods, I hold  
Absolute power  
To boycott any color and forbid any flower  
To be.  
  
I  
Know you appear  
Vivid at my side,  
Denying you sprang out of my head,  
Claiming you feel  
Love fiery enough to prove flesh real,  
Though it's quite clear  
All you beauty, all your wit, is a gift, my dear,  
From me.

**Miss Drake**

No novice  
In those elaborate rituals  
Which allay the malice  
Of knotted table and crooked chair,  
The new woman in the ward  
Wears purple, steps carefully  
Among her secret combinations of eggshells  
And breakable hummingbirds,  
Footing sallow as a mouse  
Between the cabbage-roses  
Which are slowly opening their furred petals  
To devour and drag her down  
Into the carpet's design.

With bid-quick eyed cocked askew  
She can see in the nick of time  
How perilous needles grain the floorboards  
And outwit their brambled plan;  
Now through her ambushed air,  
Adazzle with bright shards  
Of broken glass,  
She edges with wary breath,  
Fending off jag and tooth,  
Until, turning sideways,  
She lifts one webbed foot after the other  
Into the still, sultry weather  
Of the patients' dining room.

**Channel Crossing**

On storm-struck deck, wind sirens caterwaul;  
With each tilt, shock and shudder, our blunt ship  
Cleaves forward into fury; dark as anger,  
Waves wallop, assaulting the stubborn hull.  
Flayed by spray, we take the challenge up,  
Grip the rail, squint ahead, and wonder how much longer

Such force can last; but beyond, the neutral view  
Shows, rank on rank, the hungry seas advancing.  
Below, rocked havoc-sick, voyagers lie  
Retching in bright orange basins; a refugee  
Sprawls, hunched in black, among baggage, wincing  
Under the strict mask of his agony.

Far from the sweet stench of that perilous air  
In which our comrades are betrayed, we freeze  
And marvel at the smashing nonchalance  
Of nature : what better way to test taut fiber  
Than against this onslaught, these casual blasts of ice  
That wrestle with us like angels; the mere chance

Of making harbor through this racketing flux  
Taunts us to valor. Blue sailors sang that our journey  
Would be full of sun, white gulls, and water drenched  
With radiance, peacock-colored; instead, bleak rocks  
Jutted early to mark our going, while sky  
Curded over with clouds and chalk cliffs blanched

In sullen light of the inauspicious day.  
Now, free, by hazard's quirk, from the common ill  
Knocking our brothers down, we strike a stance  
Most mock-heroic, to cloak our waking awe  
At this rare rumpus which no man can control :  
Meek and proud both fall; stark violence

Lays all walls waste; private estates are torn,  
Ransacked in the public eye. We forsake  
Our lone luck now, compelled by bond, by blood,  
To keep some unsaid pact; perhaps concern  
Is helpless here, quite extra, yet we must make  
The gesture, bend and hold the prone man's head.

And so we sail toward cities, streets and homes  
Of other men, where statues celebrate  
Brave acts played out in peace, in war; all dangers  
End : green shores appear; we assume our names,  
Our luggage, as docks halt our brief epic; no debt  
Survives arrival; we walk the plank with strangers.

**Two Sisters of Persephone**

Two girls there are: within the house  
One sits; the other, without.  
Daylong a duet of shade and light  
Plays between these.

In her dark wainscoted room  
The first works problems on  
A mathematical machine.  
Dry ticks mark time

As she calculates each sum.  
At this barren enterprise  
Rat-shrewd go her squint eyes,  
Root-pale her meager frame.

Bronzed as earth, the second lies,  
Hearing ticks blown gold  
Like pollen on bright air. Lulled  
Near a bed of poppies,

She sees how their red silk flare  
Of petaled blood  
Burns open to the sun's blade.  
On that green alter

Freely become sun's bride, the latter  
Grows quick with seed.  
Grass-couched in her labor's pride,  
She bears a king. Turned bitter

And sallow as any lemon,  
The other, wry virgin to the last,  
Goes graveward with flesh laid waste,  
Worm-husbanded, yet no woman.

**Sow**

God knows how our neighbor managed to breed  
His great sow:  
Whatever his shrewd secret, he kept it hid  
  
In the same way  
He kept the sow--impounded from public stare,  
Prize ribbon and pig show.  
  
But one dusk our questions commended us to a tour  
Through his lantern-lit  
Maze of barns to the lintel of the sunk sty door  
  
To gape at it:  
This was no rose-and-larkspurred china suckling  
With a penny slot  
  
For thrift children, nor dolt pig ripe for heckling,  
About to be  
Glorified for prime flesh and golden crackling  
  
In a parsley halo;  
Nor even one of the common barnyard sows,  
Mire-smirched, blowzy,  
  
Maunching thistle and knotweed on her snout-  
cruise--  
Bloat tun of milk  
On the move, hedged by a litter of feat-foot ninnies  
  
Shrilling her hulk  
To halt for a swig at the pink teats. No. This vast  
Brobdingnag bulk  
  
Of a sow lounged belly-bedded on that black  
compost,  
Fat-rutted eyes  
Dream-filmed. What a vision of ancient hoghood  
must  
  
Thus wholly engross  
The great grandam!--our marvel blazoned a knight,  
Helmed, in cuirass,  
  
Unhorsed and shredded in the grove of combat  
By a grisly-bristled  
Boar, fabulous enough to straddle that sow's heat.  
  
But our farmer whistled,  
Then, with a jocular fist thwacked the barrel nape,  
And the green-copse-castled  
  
Pig hove, letting legend like dried mud drop,  
Slowly, grunt  
On grunt, up in the flickering light to shape  
  
A monument  
Prodigious in gluttonies as that hog whose want  
Made lean Lent  
  
Of kitchen slops and, stomaching no constraint,  
Proceeded to swill  
The seven troughed seas and every earthquaking  
continent.

**Sculptor**

To his house the bodiless  
Come to barter endlessly  
Vision, wisdom, for bodies  
Palpable as his, and weighty.

Hands moving move priestlier  
Than priest's hands, invoke no vain  
Images of light and air  
But sure stations in bronze, wood, stone.

Obdurate, in dense-grained wood,  
A bald angel blocks and shapes  
The flimsy light; arms folded  
Watches his cumbrous world eclipse

Inane worlds of wind and cloud.  
Bronze dead dominate the floor,  
Resistive, ruddy-bodied,  
Dwarfing us. Our bodies flicker

Toward extinction in those eyes  
Which, without him, were beggared  
Of place, time, and their bodies.  
Emulous spirits make discord,

Try entry, enter nightmares  
Until his chisel bequeaths  
Them life livelier than ours,  
A solider repose than death's.

**Full Fathom Five**

Old man, you surface seldom.  
Then you come in with the tide's coming

When seas wash cold, foam-

Capped: white hair, white beard, far-flung,

A dragnet, rising, falling, as waves

Crest and trough. Miles long

Extend the radial sheaves

Of your spread hair, in which wrinkling skeins

Knotted, caught, survives

The old myth of orgins

Unimaginable. You float near

As kneeled ice-mountains

Of the north, to be steered clear

Of, not fathomed. All obscurity

Starts with a danger:

Your dangers are many. I

Cannot look much but your form suffers

Some strange injury

And seems to die: so vapors

Ravel to clearness on the dawn sea.

The muddy rumors

Of your burial move me

To half-believe: your reappearance

Proves rumors shallow,

For the archaic trenched lines

Of your grained face shed time in runnels:

Ages beat like rains

On the unbeaten channels

Of the ocean. Such sage humor and

Durance are whirlpools

To make away with the ground-

Work of the earth and the sky's ridgepole.

Waist down, you may wind

One labyrinthine tangle

To root deep among knuckles, shinbones,

Skulls. Inscrutable,

Below shoulders not once

Seen by any man who kept his head,

You defy questions;

You defy godhood.

I walk dry on your kingdom's border

Exiled to no good.

Your shelled bed I remember.

Father, this thick air is murderous.

I would breathe water.

**Death of Myth-Making**

Two virtues ride, by stallion, by nag,  
To grind our knives and scissors:  
Lantern-jawed Reason, squat Common Sense,  
One courting doctors of all sorts,  
One, housewives and shopkeepers.

The trees are lopped, the poodles trim,  
The laborer's nails pared level  
Since those two civil servants set  
Their whetstone to the blunted edge  
And minced the muddling devil

Whose owl-eyes in the scraggly wood  
Scared mothers to miscarry,  
Drove the dogs to cringe and whine  
And turned the farmboy's temper wolfish,  
The housewife's, desultory.

**Virgin in a Tree**

How this tart fable instructs  
And mocks! Here's the parody of that moral mousetrap  
Set in the proverbs stitched on samplers  
Approving chased girls who get them to a tree  
And put on bark's nun-black  
  
Habit which deflects  
All amorous arrows. For to sheathe the virgin shape  
In a scabbard of wood baffles pursuers,  
Whether goat-thighed or god-haloed. Ever since that first Daphne  
Switched her incomparable back  
  
For a bay-tree hide, respect's  
Twined to her hard limbs like ivy: the puritan lip  
Cries: 'Celebrate Syrinx whose demurs  
Won her the frog-colored skin, pale pith and watery  
Bed of a reed. Look:  
  
Pine-needle armor protects  
Pitys from Pan's assault! And though age drop  
Their leafy crowns, their fame soars,  
Eclipsing Eva, Cleo and Helen of Troy:  
For which of those would speak  
  
For a fashion that constricts  
White bodies in a wooden girdle, root to top  
Unfaced, unformed, the nipple-flowers  
Shrouded to suckle darkness? Onlyh they  
Who keep cool and holy make  
  
A sanctum to attract  
Green virgins, consecrating limb and lip  
To chastity's service: like prophets, like preachers,  
They descant on the serene and seraphic beauty  
Of virgins for virginity's sake.'  
  
Be certain some such pact's  
Been struck to keep all glory in the grip  
Of ugly spinsters and barren sirs  
As you etch on the inner window of your eye  
This virgin on her rack:  
  
She, ripe and unplucked, 's  
Lain splayed too long in the tortuous boughs: overripe  
Now, dour-faced, her fingers  
Stiff as twigs, her body woodenly  
Askew, she'll ache and wake  
  
Though doomsday bud. Neglect's  
Given her lips that lemon-tasting droop:  
Untongued, all beauty's bright juice sours.  
Tree-twist will ape this gross anatomyh  
Till irony's bough break.

**Hardcastle Crags**

Flintlike, her feet struck  
Such a racket of echoes from the steely street,  
Tacking in moon-blued crooks from the black  
Stone-built town, that she heard the quick air ignite  
Its tinder and shake

A firework of echoes from wall  
To wall of the dark, dwarfed cottages.  
But the echoes died at her back as the walls  
Gave way to fields and the incessant seethe of grasses  
Riding in the full

Of the moon, manes to the wind,  
Tireless, tied, as a moon-bound sea  
Moves on its root. Though a mist-wraith wound  
Up from the fissured valley and hung shoulder-high  
Ahead, it fattened

To no family-featured ghost,  
Nor did any word body with a name  
The blank mood she walked in. Once past  
The dream-peopled village, her eyes entertained no dream,  
And the sandman's dust

Lost luster under her footsoles.  
The long wind, paring her person down  
To a pinch of flame, blew its burdened whistle  
In the whorl of her ear, and like a scooped-out pumpkin crown  
Her head cupped the babel.

All the night gave her, in return  
For the paltry gift of her bulk and the beat  
Of her heart was the humped indifferent iron  
Of its hills, and its pastures bordered by black stone set  
On black stone. Barns

Guarded broods and litters  
Behind shut doors; the dairy herds  
Knelt in the meadow mute as boulders;  
Sheep drowsed stoneward in their tussocks of wool, and birds,  
Twig-sleep, wore

Granite ruffs, their shadows  
The guise of leaves. The whole landscape  
Loomed absolute as the antique world was  
Once in its earliest sway of lymph and sap,  
Unaltered by eyes,

Enough to snuff the quick  
Of her small heat out, but before the weight  
Of stones and hills of stones could break  
Her down to mere quartz grit n that stony light  
She turned back.

**Metaphors**

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils.  
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

**The Colossus**

"I shall never get you put together entirely,  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.  
Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles  
Proceed from your great lips.  
It's worse than a barnyard.  
Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,  
Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or  
other.  
Thirty years now I have labored  
To dredge the silt from your throat.  
I am none the wiser.

Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pails  
of lysol  
I crawl like an ant in mourning  
Over the weedy acres of your brow  
To mend the immense skull plates and clear  
The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

A blue sky out of the Oresteia  
Arches above us. O father, all by yourself  
You are pithy and historical as the Roman  
Forum.  
I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress.  
Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are  
littered

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.  
It would take more than a lightning-stroke  
To create such a ruin.  
Nights, I squat in the cornucopia  
Of your left ear, out of the wind,

Counting the red stars and those of plum-  
color.  
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.  
My hours are married to shadow.  
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel  
On the blank stones of the landing."

**The Stones**

"I shall never get you put together entirely,  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.  
Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles  
Proceed from your great lips.  
It's worse than a barnyard.  
Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,  
Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or  
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color.  
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.  
My hours are married to shadow.  
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel  
On the blank stones of the landing."

**Mushrooms**

"Overnight, very  
Whitely, discreetly,  
Very quietly  
  
Our toes, our noses  
Take hold on the loam,  
Acquire the air.  
  
Nobody sees us,  
Stops us, betrays us;  
The small grains make room.  
  
Soft fists insist on  
Heaving the needles,  
The leafy bedding,  
  
Even the paving.  
Our hammers, our rams,  
Earless and eyeless,  
  
Perfectly voiceless,  
Widen the crannies,  
Shoulder through holes. We  
  
Diet on water,  
On crumbs of shadow,  
Bland-mannered, asking  
  
Little or nothing.  
So many of us!  
So many of us!  
  
We are shelves, we are  
Tables, we are meek,  
We are edible,  
  
Nudgers and shovers  
In spite of ourselves.  
Our kind multiplies:  
  
We shall by morning  
Inherit the earth.  
Our foot's in the door."

**Aftermath**

Compelled by calamity's magnet  
They loiter and stare as if the house  
Burnt-out were theirs, or as if they thought  
Some scandal might any minute ooze  
From a smoke-choked closet into light;  
No deaths, no prodigious injuries  
Glut these hunters after an old meat,  
Blood-spoor of the austere tragedies.

Mother Medea in a green smock  
Moves humbly as any housewife through  
Her ruined apartments, taking stock  
Of charred shoes, the sodden upholstery:  
Cheated of the pyre and the rack,  
The crowd sucks her last tear and turns away.

**The Eye-Mote**  
Blameless as daylight I stood looking

At a field of horses, necks bent, manes blown,

Tails streaming against the green

Backdrop of sycamores. Sun was striking

White chapel pinnacles over the roofs,

Holding the horses, the clouds, the leaves

Steadily rooted though they were all flowing

Away to the left like reeds in a sea

When the splinter flew in and stuck my eye,

Needling it dark. Then I was seeing

A melding of shapes in a hot rain:

Horses warped on the altering green,

Outlandish as double-humped camels or unicorns,

Grazing at the margins of a bad monochrome,

Beasts of oasis, a better time.

Abrading my lid, the small grain burns:

Red cinder around which I myself,

Horses, planets and spires revolve.

Neither tears nor the easing flush

Of eyebaths can unseat the speck:

It sticks, and it has stuck a week.

I wear the present itch for flesh,

Blind to what will be and what was.

I dream that I am Oedipus.

What I want back is what I was

Before the bed, before the knife,

Before the brooch-pin and the salve

Fixed me in this parenthesis;

Horses fluent in the wind,

A place, a time gone out of mind.

**The Thin People**

They are always with us, the thin people  
Meager of dimension as the gray people  
  
On a movie-screen. They  
Are unreal, we say:  
  
It was only in a movie, it was only  
In a war making evil headlines when we  
  
Were small that they famished and  
Grew so lean and would not round  
  
Out their stalky limbs again though peace  
Plumped the bellies of the mice  
  
Under the meanest table.  
It was during the long hunger-battle  
  
They found their talent to persevere  
In thinness, to come, later,  
  
Into our bad dreams, their menace  
Not guns, not abuses,  
  
But a thin silence.  
Wrapped in flea-ridded donkey skins,  
  
Empty of complaint, forever  
Drinking vinegar from tin cups: they wore  
  
The insufferable nimbus of the lot-drawn  
Scapegoat. But so thin,  
  
So weedy a race could not remain in dreams,  
Could not remain outlandish victims  
  
In the contracted country of the head  
Any more than the old woman in her mud hut could  
  
Keep from cutting fat meat  
Out of the side of the generous moon when it  
  
Set foot nightly in her yard  
Until her knife had pared  
  
The moon to a rind of little light.  
Now the thin people do not obliterate  
  
Themselves as the dawn  
Grayness blues, reddens, and the outline  
  
Of the world comes clear and fills with color.  
They persist in the sunlit room: the wallpaper  
  
Frieze of cabbage-roses and cornflowers pales  
Under their thin-lipped smiles,  
  
Their withering kingship.  
How they prop each other up!  
  
We own no wilderness rich and deep enough  
For stronghold against their stiff  
  
Battalions. See, how the tree boles flatten  
And lose their good browns  
  
If the thin people simply stand in the forest,  
Making the world go thin as a wasp's nest  
  
And grayer; not even moving their bones.

**The Disquieting Muses**

Mother, mother, what illbred aunt  
Or what disfigured and unsightly  
Cousin did you so unwisely keep  
Unasked to my christening, that she  
Sent these ladies in her stead  
With heads like darning-eggs to nod  
And nod and nod at foot and head  
And at the left side of my crib?  
  
Mother, who made to order stories  
Of Mixie Blackshort the heroic bear,  
Mother, whose witches always, always,  
Got baked into gingerbread, I wonder  
Whether you saw them, whether you said  
Words to rid me of those three ladies  
Nodding by night around my bed,  
Mouthless, eyeless, with stitched bald head.  
  
In the hurricane, when father's twelve  
Study windows bellied in  
Like bubbles about to break, you fed  
My brother and me cookies and Ovaltine  
And helped the two of us to choir:  
"Thor is angry: boom boom boom!  
Thor is angry: we don't care!"  
But those ladies broke the panes.  
  
When on tiptoe the schoolgirls danced,  
Blinking flashlights like fireflies  
And singing the glowworm song, I could  
Not lift a foot in the twinkle-dress  
But, heavy-footed, stood aside  
In the shadow cast by my dismal-headed  
Godmothers, and you cried and cried:  
And the shadow stretched, the lights went out.  
  
Mother, you sent me to piano lessons  
And praised my arabesques and trills  
Although each teacher found my touch  
Oddly wooden in spite of scales  
And the hours of practicing, my ear  
Tone-deaf and yes, unteachable.  
I learned, I learned, I learned elsewhere,  
From muses unhired by you, dear mother,  
  
I woke one day to see you, mother,  
Floating above me in bluest air  
On a green balloon bright with a million  
Flowers and bluebirds that never were  
Never, never, found anywhere.  
But the little planet bobbed away  
Like a soap-bubble as you called: Come here!  
And I faced my traveling companions.  
  
Day now, night now, at head, side, feet,  
They stand their vigil in gowns of stone,  
Faces blank as the day I was born,  
Their shadows long in the setting sun  
That never brightens or goes down.  
And this is the kingdom you bore me to,  
Mother, mother. But no frown of mine  
Will betray the company I keep.

**The Manor Garden**

The fountains are dry and the roses over.  
Incense of death. Your day approaches.  
The pears fatten like little buddhas.  
A blue mist is dragging the lake.  
  
You move through the era of fishes,  
The smug centuries of the pig-  
Head, toe and finger  
Come clear of the shadow. History  
  
Nourishes these broken flutings,  
These crowns of acanthus,  
And the crow settles her garments.  
You inherit white heather, a bee's wing,  
  
Two suicides, the family wolves,  
Hours of blankness. Some hard stars  
Already yellow the heavens.  
The spider on its own string  
  
Crosses the lake. The worms  
Quit their usual habitations.  
The small birds converge, converge  
With their gifts to a difficult borning.

**You’re**

Clownlike, happiest on your hands,  
Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,  
Gilled like a fish. A common-sense  
Thumbs-down on the dodo's mode.  
Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,  
Trawling your dark, as owls do.  
Mute as a turnip from the Fourth  
Of July to All Fools' Day,  
O high-riser, my little loaf.  
  
Vague as fog and looked for like mail.  
Farther off than Australia.  
Bent-backed Atlas, our traveled prawn.  
Snug as a bud and at home  
Like a sprat in a pickle jug.  
A creel of eels, all ripples.  
Jumpy as a Mexican bean.  
Right, like a well-done sum.  
A clean slate, with your own face on.

**Stillborn**

These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis.  
They grew their toes and fingers well enough,  
Their little foreheads bulged with concentration.  
If they missed out on walking about like people  
It wasn't for any lack of mother-love.

O I cannot explain what happened to them!  
They are proper in shape and number and every part.  
They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!  
They smile and smile and smile at me.  
And still the lungs won't fill and the heart won't start.

They are not pigs, they are not even fish,  
Though they have a piggy and a fishy air -  
It would be better if they were alive, and that's what they were.  
But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,  
And they stupidly stare and do not speak of her.

**Love Letter**

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And they stupidly stare and do not speak of her.

**Candles**

They are the last romantics, these candles:  
Upside-down hearts of light tipping wax fingers,  
And the fingers, taken in by their own haloes,  
Grown milky, almost clear, like the bodies of saints.  
It is touching, the way they'll ignore

A whole family of prominent objects  
Simply to plumb the deeps of an eye  
In its hollow of shadows, its fringe of reeds,  
And the owner past thirty, no beauty at all.  
Daylight would be more judicious,

Giving everybody a fair hearing.  
They should have gone out with the balloon flights and the stereopticon.  
This is no time for the private point of view.  
When I light them, my nostrils prickle.  
Their pale, tentative yellows

Drag up false, Edwardian sentiments,  
And I remember my maternal grandmother from Vienna.  
As a schoolgirl she gave roses to Franz Josef.  
The burghers sweated and wept. The children wore white.  
And my grandfather moped in the Tyrol,

Imagining himself a headwaiter in America,  
Floating in a high-church hush  
Among ice buckets, frosty napkins.  
These little globes of light are sweet as pears.  
Kindly with invalids and mawkish women,

They mollify the bald moon.  
Nun-souled, they burn heavenward and never marry.  
The eyes of the child I nurse are scarcely open.  
In twenty years I shall be retrograde  
As these drafty ephemerids.

I watch their spilt tears cloud and dull to pearls.  
How shall I tell anything at all  
To this infant still in a birth-drowse?  
Tonight, like a shawl, the mild light enfolds her,  
The shadows stoop over the guests at a christening.

**Suicide Off Egg Rock**

Behind him the hotdogs split and drizzled  
On the public grills, and the ochreous salt flats,  
Gas tanks, factory stacks- that landscape  
Of imperfections his bowels were part of-  
Rippled and pulsed in the glassy updraught.  
Sun struck the water like a damnation.  
No pit of shadow to crawl into,  
And his blood beating the old tattoo  
I am, I am, I am. Children  
Were squealing where combers broke and the spindrift  
Raveled wind-ripped from the crest of the wave.  
A mongrel working his legs to a gallop  
Hustled a gull flock to flap off the sandspit.  
  
He smoldered, as if stone-deaf, blindfold,  
His body beached with the sea's garbage,  
A machine to breathe and beat forever.  
Flies filing in through a dead skate's eyehole  
Buzzed and assailed the vaulted brainchamber.  
The words in his book wormed off the pages.  
Everything glittered like blank paper.  
  
Everything shrank in the sun's corrosive  
Ray but Egg Rock on the blue wastage.  
He heard when he walked into the water  
  
The forgetful surf creaming on those ledges.

**Blue Moles**

1

They're out of the dark's ragbag, these two

Moles dead in the pebbled rut,

Shapeless as flung gloves, a few feet apart ---

Blue suede a dog or fox has chewed.

One, by himself, seemed pitiable enough,

Little victim unearthed by some large creature

From his orbit under the elm root.

The second carcass makes a duel of the affair:

Blind twins bitten by bad nature.

The sky's far dome is sane and clear.

Leaves, undoing their yellow caves

Between the road and the lake water,

Bare no sinister spaces. Already

The moles look neutral as the stones.

Their corkscrew noses, their white hands

Uplifted, stiffen in a family pose.

Difficult to imagine how fury struck ---

Dissolved now, smoke of an old war.

2

Nightly the battle-shouts start up

In the ear of the veteran, and again

I enter the soft pelt of the mole.

Light's death to them: they shrivel in it.

They move through their mute rooms while I sleep,

Palming the earth aside, grubbers

After the fat children of root and rock.

By day, only the topsoil heaves.

Down there one is alone.

Outsize hands prepare a path,

They go before: opening the veins,

Delving for the appendages

Of beetles, sweetbreads, shards -- to be eaten

Over and over. And still the heaven

Of final surfeit is just as far

From the door as ever. What happens between us

Happens in darkness, vanishes

Easy and often as each breath.

**The Beekeeper’s Daughter**

A garden of mouthings. Purple, scarlet-speckled, black

The great corollas dilate, peeling back their silks.

Their musk encroaches, circle after circle,

A well of scents almost too dense to breathe in.

Hieratical in your frock coat, maestro of the bees,

You move among the many-breasted hives,

My heart under your foot, sister of a stone.

Trumpet-throats open to the beaks of birds.

The Golden Rain Tree drips its powders down.

In these little boudoirs streaked with orange and red

The anthers nod their heads, potent as kings

To father dynasties. The air is rich.

Here is a queenship no mother can contest -

A fruit that's death to taste: dark flesh, dark parings.

In burrows narrow as a finger, solitary bees

Keep house among the grasses. Kneeling down

I set my eyes to a hole-mouth and meet an eye

Round, green, disconsolate as a tear.

Father, bridegroom, in this Easter egg

Under the coronal of sugar roses

The queen bee marries the winter of your year.

**Facelift**

You bring me good news from the clinic,

Whipping off your silk scarf, exhibiting the tight white

Mummy-cloths, smiling: I'm all right.

When I was nine, a lime-green anesthetist

Fed me banana-gas through a frog mask.  The nauseous vault

Boomed with bad dreams and the Jovian voices of surgeons.

Then mother swam up, holding a tin basin.

O I was sick.

They've changed all that.  Traveling

Nude as Cleopatra in my well-boiled hospital shift,

Fizzy with sedatives and unusually humorous,

I roll to an anteroom where a kind man

Fists my fingers for me.  He makes me feel something precious

Is leaking from the finger-vents.  At the count of two,

Darkness wipes me out like chalk on a blackboard. . .

I don't know a thing.

For five days I lie in secret,

Tapped like a cask, the years draining into my pillow.

Even my best friend thinks I'm in the country.

Skin doesn't have roots, it peels away easy as paper.

When I grin, the stitches tauten.  I grow backward.  I'm twenty,

Broody and in long skirts on my first husband's sofa, my fingers

Buried in the lambswool of the dead poodle;

I hadn't a cat yet.

Now she's done for, the dewlapped lady

I watched settle, line by line, in my mirror—

Old sock-face, sagged on a darning egg.

They've trapped her in some laboratory jar.

Let her die there, or wither incessantly for the next fifty years,

Nodding and rocking and fingering her thin hair.

Mother to myself, I wake swaddled in gauze,

Pink and smooth as a baby.

**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.

The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.  
Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in  
I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly  
As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.  
I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.  
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses  
And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons.  
  
They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff  
Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut.  
Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in.  
The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble,  
They pass the way gulls pass inland in their white caps,  
Doing things with their hands, one just the same as another,  
So it is impossible to tell how many there are.  
  
My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water  
Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.  
They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.  
Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage ----  
My patent leather overnight case like a black pillbox,  
My husband and child smiling out of the family photo;  
Their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.  
  
I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat  
Stubbornly hanging on to my name and address.  
They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations.  
Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley  
I watched my teaset, my bureaus of linen, my books  
Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head.  
I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted  
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.  
How free it is, you have no idea how free ----  
The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,  
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.  
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them  
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.  
  
**Tulips**

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.  
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe  
Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.

Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.  
They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,  
Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour,  
A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.  
  
Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.  
The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me  
Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,  
And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow  
Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,  
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.  
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen.

Before they came the air was calm enough,  
Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.  
Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.  
Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river  
Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.  
They concentrate my attention, that was happy  
Playing and resting without committing itself.  
  
The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.  
The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;  
They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,  
And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes  
Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.  
The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,  
And comes from a country far away as health.

**Wuthering Heights**

The horizons ring me like faggots,  
Tilted and disparate, and always unstable.  
Touched by a match, they might warm me,  
And their fine lines singe  
The air to orange  
Before the distances they pin evaporate,  
Weighting the pale sky with a soldier color.  
But they only dissolve and dissolve  
Like a series of promises, as I step forward.

There is no life higher than the grasstops  
Or the hearts of sheep, and the wind  
Pours by like destiny, bending  
Everything in one direction.  
I can feel it trying  
To funnel my heat away.  
If I pay the roots of the heather  
Too close attention, they will invite me  
To whiten my bones among them.

The sheep know where they are,  
Browsing in their dirty wool-clouds,  
Grey as the weather.  
The black slots of their pupils take me in.  
It is like being mailed into space,  
A thin, silly message.  
They stand about in grandmotherly disguise,  
All wig curls and yellow teeth  
And hard, marbly baas.

I come to wheel ruts, and water  
Limpid as the solitudes  
That flee through my fingers.  
Hollow doorsteps go from grass to grass;  
Lintel and sill have unhinged themselves.  
Of people the air only  
Remembers a few odd syllables.  
It rehearses them moaningly:  
Black stone, black stone.

The sky leans on me, me, the one upright  
Among the horizontals.  
The grass is beating its head distractedly.  
It is too delicate  
For a life in such company;  
Darkness terrifies it.  
Now, in valleys narrow  
And black as purses, the house lights  
Gleam like small change.

**The Moon and the Yew Tree**

This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary

The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue.

The grasses unload their griefs on my feet as if I were God

Prickling my ankles and murmuring of their humility

Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place.

Separated from my house by a row of headstones.

I simply cannot see where there is to get to.

The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,

White as a knuckle and terribly upset.

It drags the sea after it like a dark crime; it is quiet

With the O-gape of complete despair. I live here.

Twice on Sunday, the bells startle the sky ----

Eight great tongues affirming the Resurrection

At the end, they soberly bong out their names.

The yew tree points up, it has a Gothic shape.

The eyes lift after it and find the moon.

The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.

Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.

How I would like to believe in tenderness ----

The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,

Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

I have fallen a long way. Clouds are flowering

Blue and mystical over the face of the stars

Inside the church, the saints will all be blue,

Floating on their delicate feet over the cold pews,

Their hands and faces stiff with holiness.

The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild.

And the message of the yew tree is blackness -- blackness and silence

**Mirror**

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
What ever you see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful---  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

**I Am Vertical**  
But I would rather be horizontal.  
I am not a tree with my root in the soil  
Sucking up minerals and motherly love  
So that each March I may gleam into leaf,  
Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed  
Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,  
Unknowing I must soon unpetal.  
Compared with me, a tree is immortal  
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,  
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.  
  
Tonight, in the infinitesimallight of the stars,  
The trees and the flowers have been strewing their cool odors.  
I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.  
Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping  
I must most perfectly resemble them--  
Thoughts gone dim.  
It is more natural to me, lying down.  
Then the sky and I are in open conversation,  
And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:  
Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me.

**The Bee Meeting**

Who are these people at the bridge to meet me? They are the villagers----

The rector, the midwife, the sexton, the agent for bees.

In my sleeveless summery dress I have no protection,

And they are all gloved and covered, why did nobody tell me?

They are smiling and taking out veils tacked to ancient hats.

I am nude as a chicken neck, does nobody love me?

Yes, here is the secretary of bees with her white shop smock,

Buttoning the cuffs at my wrists and the slit from my neck to my knees.

Now I am milkweed silk, the bees will not notice.

They will not smell my fear, my fear, my fear.

Which is the rector now, is it that man in black?

Which is the midwife, is that her blue coat?

Everybody is nodding a square black head, they are knights in visors,

Breastplates of cheesecloth knotted under the armpits.

Their smiles and their voices are changing. I am led through a beanfield.

Strips of tinfoil winking like people,

Feather dusters fanning their hands in a sea of bean flowers,

Creamy bean flowers with black eyes and leaves like bored hearts.

Is it blood clots the tendrils are dragging up that string?

No, no, it is scarlet flowers that will one day be edible.

Now they are giving me a fashionable white straw Italian hat

And a black veil that molds to my face, they are making me one of them.

They are leading me to the shorn grove, the circle of hives.

Is it the hawthorn that smells so sick?

The barren body of hawthon, etherizing its children.

Is it some operation that is taking place?

It is the surgeon my neighbors are waiting for,

This apparition in a green helmet,

Shining gloves and white suit.

Is it the butcher, the grocer, the postman, someone I know?

I cannot run, I am rooted, and the gorse hurts me

With its yellow purses, its spiky armory.

I could not run without having to run forever.

The white hive is snug as a virgin,

Sealing off her brood cells, her honey, and quietly humming.

Smoke rolls and scarves in the grove.

The mind of the hive thinks this is the end of everything.

Here they come, the outriders, on their hysterical elastics.

If I stand very still, they will think I am cow-parsley,

A gullible head untouched by their animosity,

Not even nodding, a personage in a hedgerow.

The villagers open the chambers, they are hunting the queen.

Is she hiding, is she eating honey? She is very clever.

She is old, old, old, she must live another year, and she knows it.

While in their fingerjoint cells the new virgins

Dream of a duel they will win inevitably,

A curtain of wax dividing them from the bride flight,

The upflight of the murderess into a heaven that loves her.

The villagers are moving the virgins, there will be no killing.

The old queen does not show herself, is she so ungrateful?

I am exhausted, I am exhausted ----

Pillar of white in a blackout of knives.

I am the magician's girl who does not flinch.

The villagers are untying their disguises, they are shaking hands.

Whose is that long white box in the grove, what have they accomplished, why am I cold.

**Arrival of the Bee Box**

I ordered this, clean wood box  
Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift.  
I would say it was the coffin of a midget  
Or a square baby  
Were there not such a din in it.  
  
The box is locked, it is dangerous.  
I have to live with it overnight  
And I can't keep away from it.  
There are no windows, so I can't see what is in there.  
There is only a little grid, no exit.  
  
I put my eye to the grid.  
It is dark, dark,  
With the swarmy feeling of African hands  
Minute and shrunk for export,  
Black on black, angrily clambering.  
  
How can I let them out?  
It is the noise that appalls me most of all,  
The unintelligible syllables.  
It is like a Roman mob,  
Small, taken one by one, but my god, together!  
  
I lay my ear to furious Latin.  
I am not a Caesar.  
I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.  
They can be sent back.  
They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.  
  
I wonder how hungry they are.  
I wonder if they would forget me  
If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.  
There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades,  
And the petticoats of the cherry.  
  
They might ignore me immediately  
In my moon suit and funeral veil.  
I am no source of honey  
So why should they turn on me?  
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.  
  
The box is only temporary.

**Stings**

Bare-handed, I hand the combs.  
The man in white smiles, bare-handed,  
Our cheesecloth gauntlets neat and sweet,  
The throats of our wrists brave lilies.  
He and I

Have a thousand clean cells between us,  
Eight combs of yellow cups,  
And the hive itself a teacup,  
White with pink flowers on it,  
With excessive love I enameled it

Thinking "Sweetness, sweetness."  
Brood cells gray as the fossils of shells  
Terrify me, they seem so old.  
What am I buying, wormy mahogany?  
Is there any queen at all in it?

If there is, she is old,  
Her wings torn shawls, her long body  
Rubbed of its plush--  
Poor and bare and unqueenly and even shameful.  
I stand in a column

Of winged, unmiraculous women,  
Honey-drudgers.  
I am no drudge  
Though for years I have eaten dust  
And dried plates with my dense hair.

And seen my strangeness evaporate,  
Blue dew from dangerous skin.  
Will they hate me,  
These women who only scurry,  
Whose news is the open cherry, the open clover?

It is almost over.  
I am in control.  
Here is my honey-machine,  
It will work without thinking,  
Opening, in spring, like an industrious virgin

To scour the creaming crests  
As the moon, for its ivory powders, scours the sea.  
A third person is watching.  
He has nothing to do with the bee-seller or with me.  
Now he is gone

In eight great bounds, a great scapegoat.  
Here is his slipper, here is another,  
And here the square of white linen  
He wore instead of a hat.  
He was sweet,

The sweat of his efforts a rain  
Tugging the world to fruit.  
The bees found him out,  
Molding onto his lips like lies,  
Complicating his features.

They thought death was worth it, but I  
Have a self to recover, a queen.  
Is she dead, is she sleeping?  
Where has she been,  
With her lion-red body, her wings of glass?

Now she is flying  
More terrible than she ever was, red  
Scar in the sky, red comet  
Over the engine that killed her--  
The mausoleum, the wax house

**The Swarm**

Somebody is shooting at something in our town  
A dull pom, pom in the Sunday street.  
Jealousy can open the blood,  
It can make black roses.  
Who are the shooting at?

It is you the knives are out for  
At Waterloo, Waterloo, Napoleon,  
The hump of Elba on your short back,  
And the snow, marshaling its brilliant cutlery  
Mass after mass, saying Shh!

Shh! These are chess people you play with,  
Still figures of ivory.  
The mud squirms with throats,  
Stepping stones for French bootsoles.  
The gilt and pink domes of Russia melt and float off

In the furnace of greed.  Clouds, clouds.  
So the swarm balls and deserts  
Seventy feet up, in a black pine tree.  
It must be shot down. Pom! Pom!  
So dumb it thinks bullets are thunder.

It thinks they are the voice of God  
Condoning the beak, the claw, the grin of the dog  
Yellow-haunched, a pack-dog,  
Grinning over its bone of ivory  
Like the pack, the pack, like everybody.

The bees have got so far. Seventy feet high!  
Russia, Poland and Germany!  
The mild hills, the same old magenta  
Fields shrunk to a penny  
Spun into a river, the river crossed.

The bees argue, in their black ball,  
A flying hedgehog, all prickles.  
The man with gray hands stands under the honeycomb  
Of their dream, the hived station  
Where trains, faithful to their steel arcs,

Leave and arrive, and there is no end to the country.  
Pom! Pom! They fall  
Dismembered, to a tod of ivy.  
So much for the charioteers, the outriders, the Grand Army!  
A red tatter, Napoleon!

The last badge of victory.  
The swarm is knocked into a cocked straw hat.  
Elba, Elba, bleb on the sea!  
The white busts of marshals, admirals, generals  
Worming themselves into niches.

How instructive this is!  
The dumb, banded bodies  
Walking the plank draped with Mother France's upholstery  
Into a new mausoleum,  
An ivory palace, a crotch pine.

The man with gray hands smiles--  
The smile of a man of business, intensely practical.  
They are not hands at all  
But asbestos receptacles.  
Pom! Pom! "They would have killed me."

Stings big as drawing pins!  
It seems bees have a notion of honor,  
A black intractable mind.  
Napoleon is pleased, he is pleased with everything.  
O Europe! O ton of honey!

**Wintering**

This is the easy time, there is nothing doing.  
I have whirled the midwife's extractor,  
I have my honey,  
Six jars of it,  
Six cat's eyes in the wine cellar,

Wintering in a dark without window  
At the heart of the house  
Next to the last tenant's rancid jam  
and the bottles of empty glitters--  
Sir So-and-so's gin.

This is the room I have never been in  
This is the room I could never breathe in.  
The black bunched in there like a bat,  
No light  
But the torch and its faint

Chinese yellow on appalling objects--  
Black asininity. Decay.  
Possession.  
It is they who own me.  
Neither cruel nor indifferent,

Only ignorant.  
This is the time of hanging on for the bees--the bees  
So slow I hardly know them,  
Filing like soldiers  
To the syrup tin

To make up for the honey I've taken.  
Tate and Lyle keeps them going,  
The refined snow.  
It is Tate and Lyle they live on, instead of flowers.  
They take it. The cold sets in.

Now they ball in a mass,  
Black  
Mind against all that white.  
The smile of the snow is white.  
It spreads itself out, a mile-long body of Meissen,

Into which, on warm days,  
They can only carry their dead.  
The bees are all women,  
Maids and the long royal lady.  
They have got rid of the men,

The blunt, clumsy stumblers, the boors.  
Winter is for women--  
The woman, still at her knitting,  
At the cradle of Spanis walnut,  
Her body a bulb in the cold and too dumb to think.

Will the hive survive, will the gladiolas  
Succeed in banking their fires  
To enter another year?  
What will they taste of, the Christmas roses?  
The bees are flying. They taste the spring.

**Poppies in July**

Little poppies, little hell flames,

Do you do no harm?

You flicker.  I cannot touch you.

I put my hands among the flames.  Nothing burns

And it exhausts me to watch you

Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.

A mouth just bloodied.

Little bloody skirts!

There are fumes I cannot touch.

Where are your opiates, your nauseous capsules?

If I could bleed, or sleep! -

If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!

Or your liquors seep to me, in this glass capsule,

Dulling and stilling.

But colorless.  Colorless.

**The Applicant**

First, are you our sort of a person?  
Do you wear  
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,  
A brace or a hook,  
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,  
  
Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then  
How can we give you a thing?  
Stop crying.  
Open your hand.  
Empty? Empty. Here is a hand  
  
To fill it and willing  
To bring teacups and roll away headaches  
And do whatever you tell it.  
Will you marry it?  
It is guaranteed  
  
To thumb shut your eyes at the end  
And dissolve of sorrow.  
We make new stock from the salt.  
I notice you are stark naked.  
How about this suit----  
  
Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.  
Will you marry it?  
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof  
Against fire and bombs through the roof.  
Believe me, they'll bury you in it.  
  
Now your head, excuse me, is empty.  
I have the ticket for that.  
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.  
Well, what do you think of that ?  
Naked as paper to start  
  
But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,  
In fifty, gold.  
A living doll, everywhere you look.  
It can sew, it can cook,  
It can talk, talk , talk.  
  
It works, there is nothing wrong with it.  
You have a hole, it's a poultice.  
You have an eye, it's an image.  
My boy, it's your last resort.  
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

**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 gray toe  
Big as a Frisco seal  
  
And a head in the freakish Atlantic  
Where it pours bean green over blue  
In the waters off the beautiful Nauset.  
I used to pray to recover you.  
Ach, du.  
  
In the German tongue, in the Polish town  
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, 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.  
I began to talk like a Jew.  
I think I may well be a Jew.  
  
The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna  
Are not very pure or true.  
With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck  
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack  
I may be a bit of a Jew.  
  
I have always been scared of you,  
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.  
And your neat mustache  
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.  
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You --  
  
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.

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  
Any less the black man who  
  
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.  
  
But they pulled me out of the sack,  
And they stuck me together with glue.  
And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you,  
A man in black with a Meinkampf look  
  
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.  
  
If I've killed one man, I've killed two --  
The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know.  
Daddy, you can lie back now.  
  
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.

**Medusa**

Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs,  
Eyes rolled by white sticks,  
Ears cupping the sea's incoherences,  
You house your unnerving head-God-ball,  
Lens of mercies,  
  
Your stooges  
Plying their wild cells in my keel's shadow,  
Pushing by like hearts,  
Red stigmata at the very center,  
Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of departure,  
  
Dragging their Jesus hair.  
Did I escape, I wonder?  
My mind winds to you  
Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,  
Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.  
  
In any case, you are always there,  
Tremulous breath at the end of my line,  
Curve of water upleaping  
To my water rod, dazzling and grateful,  
Touching and sucking.  
  
I didn't call you.  
I didn't call you at all.  
Nevertheless, nevertheless  
You steamed to me over the sea,  
Fat and red, a placenta  
  
Paralysing the kicking lovers.  
Cobra light  
Squeezing the breath from blood bells  
Of the fuscia. I could draw no breath,  
Dead and moneyless,  
  
Overexposed, like an X-ray.  
Who do you think you are?  
A Communion wafer? Bluberry Mary?  
I shall take no bite of your body,  
Bottle in which I live,  
  
Ghastly Vatican.  
I am sick to death of hot salt.  
Green as eunuchs, your wishes  
Hiss at my sins.  
Off, off, eely tentacle!  
  
There is nothing between us.

**Lesbos**

Viciousness in the kitchen!  
The potatoes hiss.  
It is all Hollywood, windowless,  
The fluorescent light wincing on and off like a terrible migraine,  
Coy paper strips for doors --  
Stage curtains, a widow’s frizz.  
And I, love, am a pathological liar,  
And my child -- look at her, face down on the floor,  
Little unstrung puppet, kicking to disappear --  
Why she is schizophrenic,  
Her face is red and white, a panic,  
You have stuck her kittens outside your window  
In a sort of cement well  
Where they crap and puke and cry and she can’t hear.  
You say you can’t stand her,  
The bastard’s a girl.  
You who have blown your tubes like a bad radio  
Clear of voices and history, the staticky  
Noise of the new.  
You say I should drown the kittens. Their smell!  
You say I should drown my girl.  
She’ll cut her throat at ten if she’s mad at two.  
The baby smiles, fat snail,  
From the polished lozenges of orange linoleum.  
You could eat him. He’s a boy.  
You say your husband is just no good to you.  
His Jew-Mama guards his sweet sex like a pearl.  
You have one baby, I have two.  
I should sit on a rock off Cornwall and comb my hair.  
I should wear tiger pants, I should have an affair.  
We should meet in another life, we should meet in air,  
Me and you.  
  
Meanwhile there’s a stink of fat and baby crap.  
I’m doped and thick from my last sleeping pill.  
The smog of cooking, the smog of hell  
Floats our heads, two venemous opposites,  
Our bones, our hair.  
I call you Orphan, orphan. You are ill.  
The sun gives you ulcers, the wind gives you T.B.  
Once you were beautiful.  
In New York, in Hollywood, the men said: 'Through?  
Gee baby, you are rare.'  
You acted, acted for the thrill.  
The impotent husband slumps out for a coffee.  
I try to keep him in,  
An old pole for the lightning,  
The acid baths, the skyfuls off of you.  
He lumps it down the plastic cobbled hill,  
Flogged trolley. The sparks are blue.  
The blue sparks spill,  
Splitting like quartz into a million bits.  
  
O jewel! O valuable!  
That night the moon  
Dragged its blood bag, sick  
Animal  
Up over the harbor lights.  
And then grew normal,  
Hard and apart and white.  
The scale-sheen on the sand scared me to death.  
We kept picking up handfuls, loving it,  
Working it like dough, a mulatto body,  
The silk grits.  
A dog picked up your doggy husband. He went on.  
  
Now I am silent, hate  
Up to my neck,  
Thick, thick.  
I do not speak.  
I am packing the hard potatoes like good clothes,  
I am packing the babies,  
I am packing the sick cats.  
O vase of acid,  
It is love you are full of. You know who you hate.  
He is hugging his ball and chain down by the gate  
That opens to the sea  
Where it drives in, white and black,  
Then spews it back.  
Every day you fill him with soul-stuff, like a pitcher.  
You are so exhausted.  
Your voice my ear-ring,  
Flapping and sucking, blood-loving bat.  
That is that. That is that.  
You peer from the door,  
Sad hag. 'Every woman’s a whore.  
I can’t communicate.'  
  
I see your cute décor  
Close on you like the fist of a baby  
Or an anemone, that sea  
Sweetheart, that kleptomaniac.  
I am still raw.  
I say I may be back.  
You know what lies are for.  
  
Even in your Zen heaven we shan’t meet.

**Cut**

What a thrill --  
My thumb instead of an onion.  
The top quite gone  
Except for a sort of hinge

Of skin,  
A flap like a hat,  
Dead white.  
Then that red plush.

Little pilgrim,  
The Indian's axed your scalp.  
Your turkey wattle  
Carpet rolls

Straight from the heart.  
I step on it,  
Clutching my bottle  
Of pink fizz.

A celebration, this is.  
Out of a gap  
A million soldiers run,  
Redcoats, every one.

Whose side are they on?  
O my  
Homunculus, I am ill.  
I have taken a pill to kill

The thin  
Papery feeling.  
Saboteur,  
Kamikaze man --

The stain on your  
Gauze Ku Klux Klan  
Babushka  
Darkens and tarnishes and when

The balled  
Pulp of your heart  
Confronts its small  
Mill of silence

How you jump --  
Trepanned veteran,  
Dirty girl,  
Thumb stump.

**Ariel**

Stasis in darkness.  
Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.  
  
God's lioness,  
How one we grow,  
Pivot of heels and knees! ---The furrow  
  
Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,  
  
Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks ---  
  
Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else  
  
Hauls me through air ---  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.  
  
White  
Godiva, I unpeel ---  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.  
  
And now I  
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.  
The child's cry  
  
Melts in the wall.  
And I  
Am the arrow,  
  
The dew that flies,  
Suicidal, at one with the drive  
Into the red  
  
Eye, the cauldron of morning.

**Poppies in October**

Even the sun-clouds this morning cannot manage such skirts.

Nor the woman in the ambulance

Whose red heart blooms through her coat so astoundingly ----

A gift, a love gift

Utterly unasked for

By a sky

Palely and flamily

Igniting its carbon monoxides, by eyes

Dulled to a halt under bowlers.

O my God, what am I

That these late mouths should cry open

In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers.

**Nick and the Candlestick**

I am a miner. The light burns blue.

Waxy stalactites

Drip and thicken, tears

The earthen womb

Exudes from its dead boredom.

Black bat airs

Wrap me, raggy shawls,

Cold homicides.

They weld to me like plums.

Old cave of calcium

Icicles, old echoer.

Even the newts are white,

Those holy Joes.

And the fish, the fish----

Christ! They are panes of ice,

A vice of knives,

A piranha

Religion, drinking

Its first communion out of my live toes.

The candle

Gulps and recovers its small altitude,

Its yellows hearten.

O love, how did you get here?

O embryo

Remembering, even in sleep,

Your crossed position.

The blood blooms clean

In you, ruby.

The pain

You wake to is not yours.

Love, love,

I have hung our cave with roses.

With soft rugs----

The last of Victoriana.

Let the stars

Plummet to their dark address,

Let the mercuric

Atoms that cripple drip

Into the terrible well,

You are the one

Solid the spaces lean on, envious.

You are the baby in the barn.

**Lady Lazarus**  
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,

My right foot

A paperweight,

My face a featureless, fine

Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin

0 my enemy.

Do I terrify?----

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be

At home on me

And I a smiling woman.

I am only thirty.

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.

The peanut-crunching crowd

Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot

The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies

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.

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.

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.

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.

It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day

To the same place, the same face, the same brute

Amused shout:

'A miracle!'

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.

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, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash ---

You poke and stir.

Flesh, bone, there is nothing there----

A cake of soap,

A wedding ring,

A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air.

**Stopped Dead**

A squeal of brakes.  
Or is it a birth cry?  
And here we are, hung out over the dead drop  
Uncle, pants factory Fatso, millionaire.  
And you out cold beside me in your chair.  
  
The wheels, two rubber grubs, bite their sweet tails.  
Is that Spain down there?  
Red and yellow, two passionate hot metals  
Writhing and sighing, what sort of a scenery is it?  
It isn't England, it isn't France, it isn't Ireland.  
  
It's violent. We're here on a visit,  
With a goddam baby screaming off somewhere.  
There's always a bloody baby in the air.  
I'd call it a sunset, but  
Whoever heard a sunset yowl like that?  
  
You are sunk in your seven chins, still as a ham.  
Who do you think I am,  
Uncle, uncle?  
Sad Hamlet, with a knife?  
Where do you stash your life?  
  
Is it a penny, a pearl –

Your soul, your soul?  
I'll carry it off like a rich pretty girl,  
Simply open the door and step out of the car  
And live in Gibraltar on air, on air.

**The Munich Mannequins**

Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.

Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,

The tree of life and the tree of life

Unloosing their moons, month after month, to no purpose.

The blood flood is the flood of love,

The absolute sacrifice.

It means: no more idols but me,

Me and you.

So, in their sulfur loveliness, in their smiles

These mannequins lean tonight

In Munich, morgue between Paris and Rome,

Naked and bald in their furs,

Orange lollies on silver sticks,

Intolerable, without mind.

The snow drops its pieces of darkness,

Nobody's about. In the hotels

Hands will be opening doors and setting

Down shoes for a polish of carbon

Into which broad toes will go tomorrow.

O the domesticity of these windows,

The baby lace, the green-leaved confectionery,

The thick Germans slumbering in their bottomless Stolz.

And the black phones on hooks

Glittering

Glittering and digesting

Voicelessness. The snow has no voice.

**Child**

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.  
I want to fill it with color and ducks,  
The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate ---  
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,  
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,  
Pool in which images  
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous  
Wringing of hands, this dark  
Ceiling without a star.

**Edge**

The woman is perfected.  
Her dead  
  
Body wears the smile of accomplishment,  
The illusion of a Greek necessity  
  
Flows in the scrolls of her toga,  
Her bare  
  
Feet seem to be saying:  
We have come so far, it is over.  
  
Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,  
One at each little  
  
Pitcher of milk, now empty  
She has folded  
  
Them back into her body as petals  
Of a rose close when the garden  
  
Stiffens and odors bleed  
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.  
  
The moon has nothing to be sad about,  
Staring from her hood of bone.  
  
She is used to this sort of thing.  
Her blacks crackle and drag.