**Skunk Hour**

BY [ROBERT LOWELL](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-lowell)

*(For Elizabeth Bishop)*

Nautilus Island’s hermit

heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;

her sheep still graze above the sea.

Her son’s a bishop. Her farmer

is first selectman in our village;

she’s in her dotage.

Thirsting for

the hierarchic privacy

of Queen Victoria’s century,

she buys up all

the eyesores facing her shore,

and lets them fall.

The season’s ill—

we’ve lost our summer millionaire,

who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean

catalogue. His nine-knot yawl

was auctioned off to lobstermen.

A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy

decorator brightens his shop for fall;

his fishnet’s filled with orange cork,

orange, his cobbler’s bench and awl;

there is no money in his work,

he’d rather marry.

One dark night,

my Tudor Ford climbed the hill’s skull;

I watched for love-cars . Lights turned down,

they lay together, hull to hull,

where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .

My mind’s not right.

A car radio bleats,

“Love, O careless Love. . . .” I hear

my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,

as if my hand were at its throat. . . .

I myself am hell;

nobody’s here—

only skunks, that search

in the moonlight for a bite to eat.

They march on their soles up Main Street:

white stripes, moonstruck eyes’ red fire

under the chalk-dry and spar spire

of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top

of our back steps and breathe the rich air—

a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail

She jabs her wedge-head in a cup

of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,

and will not scare.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSlcc2b02yc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C_0PjBr4Tg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em8fUK5Q3fg>

*"To Speak of Woe That Is in Marriage"*

[Robert Lowell](https://poets.org/poet/robert-lowell) - 1917-1977

*It is the future generation that presses into being by means of  
these exuberant feelings and supersensible soap bubbles of ours."*

—Schopenhauer

"The hot night makes us keep our bedroom windows open.

Our magnolia blossoms. Life begins to happen.

My hopped up husband drops his home disputes,

and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,

free-lancing out along the razor's edge.

This screwball might kill his wife, then take the pledge.

Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust. . .

It's the injustice . . . he is so unjust—

whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.

My only thought is how to keep alive.

What makes him tick? Each night now I tie

ten dollars and his car key to my thigh. . . .

Gored by the climacteric of his want,

he stalls above me like an elephant."

From *Selected Poems* by Robert Lowell, published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.



Robert Lowell's poetry collection *Life Studies* is considered by many to have changed the landscape of modern poetry.

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVwxPRfbyoQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDq0trKqyj8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lJPFA2JXnk>

[Mirror](https://allpoetry.com/poem/8498499-Mirror-by-Sylvia-Plath)

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I 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 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.

**Daddy** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hz1ar58BIM>

BY [SYLVIA PLATH](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath)

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 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 gipsy 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.

Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” from *Collected Poems.* Copyright © 1960, 1965, 1971, 1981 by the Estate of Sylvia Plath. Editorial matter copyright © 1981 by Ted Hughes. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Source: *Collected Poems* (HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 1992)

**All My Pretty Ones** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3tUtgKqsqs>

BY [ANNE SEXTON](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-sexton)

Father, this year’s jinx rides us apart

where you followed our mother to her cold slumber;

a second shock boiling its stone to your heart,

leaving me here to shuffle and disencumber

you from the residence you could not afford:

a gold key, your half of a woolen mill,

twenty suits from Dunne’s, an English Ford,

the love and legal verbiage of another will,

boxes of pictures of people I do not know.

I touch their cardboard faces. They must go.

But the eyes, as thick as wood in this album,

hold me. I stop here, where a small boy

waits in a ruffled dress for someone to come ...

for this soldier who holds his bugle like a toy

or for this velvet lady who cannot smile.

Is this your father’s father, this commodore

in a mailman suit? My father, time meanwhile

has made it unimportant who you are looking for.

I’ll never know what these faces are all about.

I lock them into their book and throw them out.

This is the yellow scrapbook that you began

the year I was born; as crackling now and wrinkly

as tobacco leaves: clippings where Hoover outran

the Democrats, wiggling his dry finger at me

and Prohibition; news where the *Hindenburg* went

down and recent years where you went flush

on war. This year, solvent but sick, you meant

to marry that pretty widow in a one-month rush.

But before you had that second chance, I cried

on your fat shoulder. Three days later you died.

These are the snapshots of marriage, stopped in places.

Side by side at the rail toward Nassau now;

here, with the winner’s cup at the speedboat races,

here, in tails at the Cotillion, you take a bow,

here, by our kennel of dogs with their pink eyes,

running like show-bred pigs in their chain-link pen;

here, at the horseshow where my sister wins a prize;

and here, standing like a duke among groups of men.

Now I fold you down, my drunkard, my navigator,

my first lost keeper, to love or look at later.

I hold a five-year diary that my mother kept

for three years, telling all she does not say

of your alcoholic tendency. You overslept,

she writes. My God, father, each Christmas Day

with your blood, will I drink down your glass

of wine? The diary of your hurly-burly years

goes to my shelf to wait for my age to pass.

Only in this hoarded span will love persevere.

Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,

bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you.

Anne Sexton, “All My Pretty Ones” from *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

. Conversational

. The self confessing

. Radical break with Modernism

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