

## 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 5  
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 10  
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 15

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

1961

1966

## Lady Lazarus<sup>1</sup>

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,<sup>2</sup> 5  
My right foot

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

Peel off the napkin 10  
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, Herr<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

Herr God, Herr Lucifer  
 Beware 80  
 Beware.

Out of the ash<sup>5</sup>  
 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.