**Sylvia Plath**

**1932-1963**

**Cinderella 1952**

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 4  
  
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, 8  
  
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 12  
  
As amid the hectic music and cocktail talk  
She hears the caustic ticking of the clock. 14

# [**Bluebeard**](https://allpoetry.com/Bluebeard) **1952**

I am sending back the key  
that let me into bluebeard's study;  
because he would make love to me 3  
I am sending back the key;  
in his eye's darkroom I can see  
my X-rayed heart, dissected body : 6  
I am sending back the key  
that let me into bluebeard's study.

# [**The Princess And The Goblins**](https://allpoetry.com/The-Princess-And-The-Goblins) **1955**

(1)

From fabrication springs the spiral stair  
up which the wakeful princess climbs to find  
the source of blanching light that conjured her 3  
  
to leave her bed of fever and ascend  
a visionary ladder toward the moon  
whose holy blue anoints her injured hand. 6  
  
With finger bandaged where the waspish pin  
flew from the intricate embroidery  
and stung according to the witch's plan, 9  
  
she mounts through malice of the needle's eye,  
trailing her scrupulously simple gown  
along bright asterisks by milky way. 12  
  
Colonnades of angels nod her in  
where ancient, infinite, and beautiful,  
her legendary godmother leans down, 15  
  
spinning a single stubborn thread of wool  
which all the artful wizards cannot crimp  
to keep the young girl from her crowning goal. 18  
  
Initiated by the lunar lamp,  
kindling her within a steepled flame,  
the princess hears the thunder and the pomp 21  
  
of squadrons underground abducting him  
who is the destination of the cord  
now bound around her wrist till she redeem  
this miner's boy from goblin bodyguard. 25  
  
(2)  
  
Guided only by the tug and twitch  
of that mercurial strand, the girl goes down  
the darkening stair, undoes the palace latch 28  
  
and slips unseen past watchmen on the lawn  
dozing around their silvered sentry box.  
Across the frosted grass she marks the sheen 31  
  
of thread conducting her to the worn tracks  
made by miners up the mountainside  
among the jagged mazes of the rocks. 34

Laboring on the tilt of that steep grade  
behind which the declining moon has set,  
she recalls queer stories her nurse read 37  
  
about a goblin raid on miner's hut  
because new excavations came too near  
the chambers where their fiendish queen would sit. 40  
  
Hearing a weird cackle from afar,  
she clutches at the talismanic cord  
and confronts a cairn of iron ore. 43  
  
Suddenly a brazen song is heard  
from the pragmatic boy confined within,  
gaily cursing the whole goblin horde. 46  
  
Inviolate in the circle of that skein,  
looping like faith about her bleeding feet,  
the princess frees the miner, stone by stone,  
and leads him home to be her chosen knight. 50  
  
(3)  
  
The princess coaxes the incredulous boy  
through candid kitchens in the rising sun  
to seek the staircase by the glare of day. 53  
  
Hand in hand, they scale meridian,  
clambering up the creaking heights of heat  
until she hears the twittering machine 56  
  
which quaintly wove the fabric of her fate  
behind the zodiac on attic door  
with abracadabra from the alphabet. 59  
  
Pointing toward the spindle's cryptic whir,  
she tells the greenhorn miner to bow down  
and honor the great goddess of the air 62  
  
suspended aloft within her planet-shine.  
Laughing aloud, the dazzled boy demands  
why he should kneel before a silly scene 65  
  
where pigeons promenade the gable-ends  
and coo quadrilles about the blighted core  
in a batch of raveled apple rinds. 68  
  
At his words, the indignant godmother  
vanishes in a labyrinth of hay  
while sunlight winds its yarn upon the floor. 71  
  
O never again will the extravagant straw  
knit up a gilded fable for the child  
who weeps before the desolate tableau  
of clockwork that makes the royal blood run cold. 75

Two Sisters of Persephone 1956

Two girls there are : within the house  
One sits; the other, without.  
Daylong a duet of shade and light  
Plays between these.  4

In her dark wainscoted room  
The first works problems on  
A mathematical machine.  
Dry ticks mark time  8

As she calculates each sum.  
At this barren enterprise  
Rat-shrewd go her squint eyes,  
Root-pale her meager frame.  12

Bronzed as earth, the second lies,  
Hearing ticks blown gold  
Like pollen on bright air. Lulled  
Near a bed of poppies,  16

She sees how their red silk flare  
Of petaled blood  
Burns open to the sun’s blade.  
On that green alter  20

Freely become sun’s bride, the latter  
Grows quick with seed.  
Grass-couched in her labor’s pride,  
She bears a king. Turned bitter  24

And sallow as any lemon,  
The other, wry virgin to the last,  
Goes graveward with flesh laid waste,  
Worm-husbanded, yet no woman. 28

**THE DISQUIETING MUSES 1957**

Mother, mother, what ill-bred 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? 8

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. 16

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. 24

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. 32

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, 40

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. 48

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. 56

## The Beast,1959

|  |
| --- |
| He was the bullman earlierm  King of the dish, my lucky animal.  Breathing was easy in his airy holding.  The sun sat in his armpit.  Nothing went moldy. The little invisibles 5  Waited on him hand and foot.  The blue sisters sent me to another school.  Monkey lived under the dunce cap.  He kept blowing me kisses.  I hardly knew him. 10  He won't be got rid of:  Memblepaws, teary and sorry,  Fido Littlesoul, the bowel's unfamiliar.  A dustbin's enough for him.  The dark's his bone. 15  Call him any name, he'll come to it.  Mud-sump, happy sty face.  I've married a cupboard of rubbish.  I bed in a fish puddle.  Down here the sky is always falling. 20  Hogwallow's at the window.  The star bugs won't save me this mouth.  I housekeep in Time's gut-end  Among emmets and mollusks,  Duchess of Nothing, 25  Hairtusk's bride. |

## Lorelei, 1960

|  |
| --- |
| It is no night to drown in:  A full moon, river lapsing  Black beneath bland mirror-sheen, 3  The blue water-mists dropping  Scrim after scrim like fishnets  Though fishermen are sleeping, 6  The massive castle turrets  Doubling themselves in a glass  All stillness. Yet these shapes float 9  Up toward me, troubling the face  Of quiet. From the nadir  They rise, their limbs ponderous 12  With richness, hair heavier  Than sculptured marble. They sing  Of a world more full and clear 15  Than can be. Sisters, your song  Bears a burden too weighty  For the whorled ear's listening 18  Here, in a well-steered country,  Under a balanced ruler.  Deranging by harmony 21  Beyond the mundane order,  Your voices lay siege. You lodge  On the pitched reefs of nightmare, 24  Promising sure harborage;  By day, descant from borders  Of hebetude, from the ledge 27  Also of high windows. Worse  Even than your maddening  Song, your silence. At the source 30  Of your ice-hearted calling-  Drunkenness of the great depths.  O river, I see drifting 33  Deep in your flux of silver  Those great goddesses of peace.  Stone, stone, ferry me down there. 36 |
|  |

# The Colossus 1960

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. 5

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. 10

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. 15

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 20

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, 25

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. 30

## "Mirror" 1961

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.Whatever I see I swallow immediatelyJust as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.I am not cruel, only truthful, 4The 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 longI think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.Faces and darkness separate us over and over. 9Now 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. 13She 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 womanRises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish. 18

## The Babysitters 1961

|  |
| --- |
| It is ten years, now, since we rowed to Children's Island.  The sun flamed straight down that noon on the water off Marblehead.  That summer we wore black glasses to hide our eyes.  We were always crying, in our spare rooms, little put-upon sisters, 4  In the two, huge, white, handsome houses in Swampscott.  When the sweetheart from England appeared, with her cream skin and Yardley cosmetics,  I had to sleep in the same room with the baby on a too-short cot,  And the seven-year-old wouldn't go out unless his jersey stripes  Matched the stripes of his socks. 9  Or it was richness! --- eleven rooms and a yacht  With a polished mahogany stair to let into the water  And a cabin boy who could decorate cakes in six-colored frosting.  But I didn't know how to cook, and babies depressed me. 13  Nights, I wrote in my diary spitefully, my fingers red  With triangular scorch marks from ironing tiny ruchings and puffed sleeves.  When the sporty wife and her doctor husband went on one of their cruises  They left me a borrowed maid named Ellen, "for protection,"  And a small Dalmation. 18  In your house, the main house, you were better off.  You had a rose garden and a guest cottage and a model apothecary shop  And a cook and a maid, and knew about the key to the bourbon.  I remember you playing "Ja-Da" in a pink piqué dress 22  On the game-room piano, when the "big people" were out,  And the maid smoked and shot pool under a green shaded lamp.  The cook had one walleye and couldn't sleep, she was so nervous.  On trial, from Ireland, she burned batch after batch of cookies  Till she was fired. 27  O what has come over us, my sister!  On that day-off the two of us cried so hard to get  We lifted a sugared ham and a pineapple from the grownups' icebox  And rented an old green boat. I rowed. You read 31  Aloud, cross-legged on the stern seat, from the Generation of Vipers.  So we bobbed out to the island. It was deserted ---  A gallery of creaking porches and still interiors,  Stopped and awful as a photograph of somebody laughing  But ten years dead. 36  The bold gulls dove as if they owned it all.  We picked up sticks of driftwood and beat them off,  Then stepped down the steep beach shelf and into the water.  We kicked and talked. The thick salt kept us up. 40  I see us floating there yet, inseparable--two cork dolls.  What keyhole have we slipped through, what door has shut?  The shadows of the grasses inched round like hands of a clock,  And from our opposite continents we wave and call.  Everything has happened. 45 |
|  |
|  |

# *The Moon & The Yew Tree, 1961*

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  4  
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.  7  
  
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.  11  
Twice on Sunday, the bells startle the sky–   
Eight great tongues affirming the Resurrection   
At the end, they soberly bong out their names.  14  
  
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.  18  
How I would like to believe in tenderness -   
The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,   
Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.  21  
  
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,  25  
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.  28

# **Tulips, 1961**

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.    4

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 anesthetist and my body to surgeons. 7

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, 11

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. 14

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.    17

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. 21

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.    24

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. 28

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—— 31

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.    35

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.    38

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 color,

A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck. 42

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,    45

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. 49

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. 52

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. 56

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,    59

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. 63

### “Nick and the Candlestick” 1962

I am a miner. The light burns blue.  
Waxy stalactites  
Drip and thicken, tears 3  
  
The earthen womb  
Exudes from its dead boredom.  
Black bat airs 6  
  
Wrap me, raggy shawls,  
Cold homicides.  
They weld to me like plums. 9  
  
Old cave of calcium  
Icicles, old echoer.  
Even the newts are white, 12  
  
Those holy Joes.  
And the fish, the fish----  
Christ! They are panes of ice, 15  
  
A vice of knives,  
A piranha  
Religion, drinking 18  
  
Its first communion out of my live toes.  
The candle  
Gulps and recovers its small altitude, 21  
  
Its yellows hearten.  
O love, how did you get here?  
O embryo 24  
  
Remembering, even in sleep,  
Your crossed position.  
The blood blooms clean 27  
  
In you, ruby.  
The pain  
You wake to is not yours. 30  
  
Love, love,  
I have hung our cave with roses.  
With soft rugs---- 33  
  
The last of Victoriana.  
Let the stars  
Plummet to their dark address, 36

Let the mercuric  
Atoms that cripple drip  
Into the terrible well, 39  
  
You are the one  
Solid the spaces lean on, envious.  
You are the baby in the barn. 42

# Medusa, 1962

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, 5  
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 10  
departure,   
  
Dragging their Jesus hair.  
Did I escape, I wonder?  
My mind winds to you  
Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable, 15  
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 20  
To my water rod, dazzling and grateful,  
Touching and sucking.  
I didn't call you.  
I didn't call you at all.  
Nevertheless, nevertheless 25  
You steamed to me over the sea,  
Fat and red, a placenta  
  
Paralyzing the kicking lovers.  
Cobra light  
Squeezing the breath from the blood bells 30  
Of the fuchsia. I could draw no breath,  
Dead and moneyless,  
  
Overexposed, like an X-ray.  
Who do you think you are?  
A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary? 35  
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 40  
Hiss at my sins.  
Off, off, eely tentacle!  
There is nothing between us.

## The Beekeeper's Daughter, 1962

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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, 6  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 12  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 18  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. 22 | |
|  |
|  |

**Wintering, 1962**

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, 5

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. 10

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 15

Chinese yellow on appalling objects —-  
Black asininity. Decay.  
Possession.  
It is they who own me.  
Neither cruel nor indifferent, 20

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 25

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. 30

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, 35

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, 40

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. 45

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. 50

## Lady Lazarus 1962

I have done it again.   
One year in every ten   
I manage it—— 3  
  
A sort of walking miracle, my skin   
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,   
My right foot 6  
  
A paperweight,  
My face a featureless, fine   
Jew linen. 9  
  
Peel off the napkin   
O my enemy.   
Do I terrify?—— 12  
  
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 18  
  
And I a smiling woman.   
I am only thirty.  
And like the cat I have nine times to die. 21  
  
This is Number Three.   
What a trash  
To annihilate each decade. 24  
  
What a million filaments.   
The peanut-crunching crowd   
Shoves in to see 27  
  
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, 33  
  
Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.   
The first time it happened I was ten.   
It was an accident. 36  
  
The second time I meant  
To last it out and not come back at all.   
I rocked shut 39

As a seashell.  
They had to call and call  
And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls. 42  
  
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. 48  
  
It’s easy enough to do it in a cell.  
It’s easy enough to do it and stay put.   
It’s the theatrical 51  
  
Comeback in broad day  
To the same place, the same face, the same brute   
Amused shout: 54  
  
‘A miracle!’  
That knocks me out.   
There is a charge 57  
  
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 63  
  
Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.   
So, so, Herr Doktor.   
So, Herr Enemy. 66  
  
I am your opus,  
I am your valuable,   
The pure gold baby 69  
  
That melts to a shriek.   
I turn and burn.  
Do not think I underestimate your great concern. 72  
  
Ash, ash—  
You poke and stir.  
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there—— 75  
  
A cake of soap,   
A wedding ring,   
A gold filling. 78  
  
Herr God, Herr Lucifer   
Beware  
Beware. 81  
  
Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair   
And I eat men like air. 84

**Daddy 1962**

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. 5

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 10

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. 15

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 20

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. 25

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 30

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. 35

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. 40

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—— 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  
Any 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.  
And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you,  
A man in black with a Meinkampf 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,  
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. 80

# Fever 103° 1962

Pure? What does it mean?

The tongues of hell

Are dull, dull as the triple 3

Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus

Who wheezes at the gate. Incapable

Of licking clean 6

The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin.

The tinder cries.

The indelible smell 9

Of a snuffed candle!

Love, love, the low smokes roll

From me like Isadora’s scarves, I’m in a fright 12

One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel,

Such yellow sullen smokes

Make their own element. They will not rise, 15

But trundle round the globe

Choking the aged and the meek,

The weak 18

Hothouse baby in its crib,

The ghastly orchid

Hanging its hanging garden in the air, 21

Devilish leopard!

Radiation turned it white

And killed it in an hour. 24

Greasing the bodies of adulterers

Like Hiroshima ash and eating in.

The sin. The sin. 27

Darling, all night

I have been flickering, off, on, off, on.

The sheets grow heavy as a lecher’s kiss. 30

Three days. Three nights.

Lemon water, chicken

Water, water make me retch. 33

I am too pure for you or anyone.

Your body

Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern—— 36

My head a moon

Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin

Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive. 39

Does not my heat astound you! And my light!

All by myself I am a huge camellia

Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush. 42

I think I am going up,

I think I may rise——

The beads of hot metal fly, and I love, I 45

Am a pure acetylene

Virgin

Attended by roses, 48

By kisses, by cherubim,

By whatever these pink things mean!

Not you, nor him 51

Nor him, nor him

(My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats)——

To Paradise. 54

# [**Witch Burning**](https://allpoetry.com/Witch-Burning)**, 1962**

In the marketplace they are piling the dry sticks.  
A thicket of shadows is a poor coat. I inhabit  
The wax image of myself, a doll's body.   
Sickness begins here: I am the dartboard for witches.  
Only the devil can eat the devil out.  
In the month of red leaves I climb to a bed of fire. 6  
  
It is easy to blame the dark: the mouth of a door,  
The cellar's belly. They've blown my sparkler out.  
A black-sharded lady keeps me in parrot cage.  
What large eyes the dead have!  
I am intimate with a hairy spirit.  
Smoke wheels from the beak of this empty jar. 12  
  
If I am a little one, I can do no harm.  
If I don't move about, I'll knock nothing over. So I said,  
Sitting under a potlid, tiny and inert as a rice grain.  
They are turning the burners up, ring after ring.  
We are full of starch, my small white fellows. We grow.  
It hurts at first. The red tongues will teach the truth. 18  
  
Mother of beetles, only unclench your hand:  
I'll fly through the candle's mouth like a singeless moth.  
Give me back my shape. I am ready to construe the days  
I coupled with dust in the shadow of a stone.  
My ankles brighten. Brightness ascends my thighs.  
I am lost, I am lost, in the robes of all this light. 24

# Ariel 1962

Stasis in darkness.

Then the substanceless blue

Pour of tor and distances. 3

God’s lioness,

How one we grow,

Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow 6

Splits and passes, sister to

The brown arc

Of the neck I cannot catch, 9

Nigger-eye

Berries cast dark

Hooks— 12

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,

Shadows.

Something else 15

Hauls me through air—

Thighs, hair;

Flakes from my heels. 18

White

Godiva, I unpeel—

Dead hands, dead stringencies. 21

And now I

Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.

The child’s cry 24

Melts in the wall.

And I

Am the arrow, 27

The dew that flies

Suicidal, at one with the drive

Into the red 30

Eye, the cauldron of morning. 31

Kindness 1963

[Kindness glides about my house](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10787803).  
[Dame Kindness, she is so nice](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10787829)!  
[The blue and red jewels of her rings smoke  
In the windows, the mirrors  
Are filling with smiles.](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-4654555) 5  
  
[What is so real as the cry of a child?  
A rabbit's cry may be wilder  
But it has no](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10790615) soul.  
[Sugar can cure everything, so Kindness says.  
Sugar is a necessary fluid,](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-4655260) 10  
  
[Its crystals a little poultice.  
O kindness, kindness  
Sweetly picking up pieces!](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10790786)  
[My Japanese silks, desperate butterflies,](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-4655274)  
May be [pinned any minute, anesthetized](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10790935). 15  
  
[And here you come, with a cup of tea  
Wreathed in steam](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10791248).  
[The blood jet is poetry,  
There is no stopping](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10791277) it.  
[You hand me two children, two roses](https://genius.com/Sylvia-plath-kindness-annotated#note-10791306). 20

# Edge 1963

The woman is perfected.

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,

The illusion of a Greek necessity 4

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,

Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:

We have come so far, it is over. 8

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,

One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.

She has folded 12

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. 16

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. 20