## EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

### Because I could not stop for Death – (479)

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess – in the Ring –

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –

We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –

The Dews drew quivering and Chill –

For only Gossamer, my Gown –

My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity –

### “Hope” is the thing with feathers - (314)

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -

That perches in the soul -

And sings the tune without the words -

And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -

And sore must be the storm -

That could abash the little Bird

That kept so many warm –

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -

And on the strangest Sea -

Yet - never - in Extremity,

It asked a crumb - of me.

### “Faith” is fine invention (202)

“Faith” is a fine invention

For Gentlemen who see!

But Microscopes are prudent

In an Emergency!

### My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun (764)

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -

In Corners - till a Day

The Owner passed - identified -

And carried Me away -

And now We roam in Sovreign Woods -

And now We hunt the Doe -

And every time I speak for Him

The Mountains straight reply -

And do I smile, such cordial light

Opon the Valley glow -

It is as a Vesuvian face

Had let it’s pleasure through -

And when at Night - Our good Day done -

I guard My Master’s Head -

’Tis better than the Eider Duck’s

Deep Pillow - to have shared -

To foe of His - I’m deadly foe -

None stir the second time -

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye -

Or an emphatic Thumb -

Though I than He - may longer live

He longer must - than I -

For I have but the power to kill,

Without - the power to die –

### I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,

And Mourners to and fro

Kept treading - treading - till it seemed

That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,

A Service, like a Drum -

Kept beating - beating - till I thought

My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box

And creak across my Soul

With those same Boots of Lead, again,

Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,

And Being, but an Ear,

And I, and Silence, some strange Race,

Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And I dropped down, and down -

And hit a World, at every plunge,

And Finished knowing - then –

## ANNE SEXTON (1928-1974)

### The Double Image

1.

I am thirty this November.

You are still small, in your fourth year.

We stand watching the yellow leaves go queer,

flapping in the winter rain,

falling flat and washed. And I remember

mostly the three autumns you did not live here.

They said I’d never get you back again.

I tell you what you’ll never really know:

all the medical hypothesis

that explained my brain will never be as true as these

struck leaves letting go.

I, who chose two times

to kill myself, had said your nickname

the mewling months when you first came;

until a fever rattled

in your throat and I moved like a pantomime

above your head. Ugly angels spoke to me. The blame,

I heard them say, was mine. They tattled

like green witches in my head, letting doom

leak like a broken faucet;

as if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet,

an old debt I must assume.

Death was simpler than I’d thought.

The day life made you well and whole

I let the witches take away my guilty soul.

I pretended I was dead

until the white men pumped the poison out,

putting me armless and washed through the rigamarole

of talking boxes and the electric bed.

I laughed to see the private iron in that hotel.

Today the yellow leaves

go queer. You ask me where they go. I say today believed

in itself, or else it fell.

Today, my small child, Joyce,

love your self’s self where it lives.

There is no special God to refer to; or if there is,

why did I let you grow

in another place. You did not know my voice

when I came back to call. All the superlatives

of tomorrow’s white tree and mistletoe

will not help you know the holidays you had to miss.

The time I did not love

myself, I visited your shoveled walks; you held my glove.

There was new snow after this.

2.

They sent me letters with news

of you and I made moccasins that I would never use.

When I grew well enough to tolerate

myself, I lived with my mother. Too late,

too late, to live with your mother, the witches said.

But I didn’t leave. I had my portrait

done instead.

Part way back from Bedlam

I came to my mother’s house in Gloucester,

Massachusetts. And this is how I came

to catch at her; and this is how I lost her.

I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said.

And she never could. She had my portrait

done instead.

I lived like an angry guest,

like a partly mended thing, an outgrown child.

I remember my mother did her best.

She took me to Boston and had my hair restyled.

Your smile is like your mother’s, the artist said.

I didn’t seem to care. I had my portrait

done instead.

There was a church where I grew up

with its white cupboards where they locked us up,

row by row, like puritans or shipmates

singing together. My father passed the plate.

Too late to be forgiven now, the witches said.

I wasn’t exactly forgiven. They had my portrait

done instead.

3.

All that summer sprinklers arched

over the seaside grass.

We talked of drought

while the salt-parched

field grew sweet again. To help time pass

I tried to mow the lawn

and in the morning I had my portrait done,

holding my smile in place, till it grew formal.

Once I mailed you a picture of a rabbit

and a postcard of Motif number one,

as if it were normal

to be a mother and be gone.

They hung my portrait in the chill

north light, matching

me to keep me well.

Only my mother grew ill.

She turned from me, as if death were catching,

as if death transferred,

as if my dying had eaten inside of her.

That August you were two, but I timed my days with doubt.

On the first of September she looked at me

and said I gave her cancer.

They carved her sweet hills out

and still I couldn’t answer.

4.

That winter she came

part way back

from her sterile suite

of doctors, the seasick

cruise of the X-ray,

the cells’ arithmetic

gone wild. Surgery incomplete,

the fat arm, the prognosis poor, I heard

them say.

During the sea blizzards

she had here

own portrait painted.

A cave of mirror

placed on the south wall;

matching smile, matching contour.

And you resembled me; unacquainted

with my face, you wore it. But you were mine

after all.

I wintered in Boston,

childless bride,

nothing sweet to spare

with witches at my side.

I missed your babyhood,

tried a second suicide,

tried the sealed hotel a second year.

On April Fool you fooled me. We laughed and this

was good.

5.

I checked out for the last time

on the first of May;

graduate of the mental cases,

with my analyst’s okay,

my complete book of rhymes,

my typewriter and my suitcases.

All that summer I learned life

back into my own

seven rooms, visited the swan boats,

the market, answered the phone,

served cocktails as a wife

should, made love among my petticoats

and August tan. And you came each

weekend. But I lie.

You seldom came. I just pretended

you, small piglet, butterfly

girl with jelly bean cheeks,

disobedient three, my splendid

stranger. And I had to learn

why I would rather

die than love, how your innocence

would hurt and how I gather

guilt like a young intern

his symptoms, his certain evidence.

That October day we went

to Gloucester the red hills

reminded me of the dry red fur fox

coat I played in as a child; stock-still

like a bear or a tent,

like a great cave laughing or a red fur fox.

We drove past the hatchery,

the hut that sells bait,

past Pigeon Cove, past the Yacht Club, past Squall’s

Hill, to the house that waits

still, on the top of the sea,

and two portraits hung on the opposite walls.

6.

In north light, my smile is held in place,

the shadow marks my bone.

What could I have been dreaming as I sat there,

all of me waiting in the eyes, the zone

of the smile, the young face,

the foxes’ snare.

In south light, her smile is held in place,

her cheeks wilting like a dry

orchid; my mocking mirror, my overthrown

love, my first image. She eyes me from that face,

that stony head of death

I had outgrown.

The artist caught us at the turning;

we smiled in our canvas home

before we chose our foreknown separate ways.

The dry red fur fox coat was made for burning.

I rot on the wall, my own

Dorian Gray.

And this was the cave of the mirror,

that double woman who stares

at herself, as if she were petrified

in time — two ladies sitting in umber chairs.

You kissed your grandmother

and she cried.

7.

I could not get you back

except for weekends. You came

each time, clutching the picture of a rabbit

that I had sent you. For the last time I unpack

your things. We touch from habit.

The first visit you asked my name.

Now you stay for good. I will forget

how we bumped away from each other like marionettes

on strings. It wasn’t the same

as love, letting weekends contain

us. You scrape your knee. You learn my name,

wobbling up the sidewalk, calling and crying.

You call me mother and I remember my mother again,

somewhere in greater Boston, dying.

I remember we named you Joyce

so we could call you Joy.

You came like an awkward guest

that first time, all wrapped and moist

and strange at my heavy breast.

I needed you. I didn’t want a boy,

only a girl, a small milky mouse

of a girl, already loved, already loud in the house

of herself. We named you Joy.

I, who was never quite sure

about being a girl, needed another

life, another image to remind me.

And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure

nor soothe it. I made you to find me.

### 45 Mercy Street

In my dream,

drilling into the marrow

of my entire bone,

my real dream,

I'm walking up and down Beacon Hill

searching for a street sign -

namely MERCY STREET.

Not there.

I try the Back Bay.

Not there.

Not there.

And yet I know the number.

45 Mercy Street.

I know the stained-glass window

of the foyer,

the three flights of the house

with its parquet floors.

I know the furniture and

mother, grandmother, great-grandmother,

the servants.

I know the cupboard of Spode

the boat of ice, solid silver,

where the butter sits in neat squares

like strange giant's teeth

on the big mahogany table.

I know it well.

Not there.

Where did you go?

45 Mercy Street,

with great-grandmother

kneeling in her whale-bone corset

and praying gently but fiercely

to the wash basin,

at five A.M.

at noon

dozing in her wiggy rocker,

grandfather taking a nap in the pantry,

grandmother pushing the bell for the downstairs maid,

and Nana rocking Mother with an oversized flower

on her forehead to cover the curl

of when she was good and when she was...

And where she was begat

and in a generation

the third she will beget,

me,

with the stranger's seed blooming

into the flower called Horrid.

I walk in a yellow dress

and a white pocketbook stuffed with cigarettes,

enough pills, my wallet, my keys,

and being twenty-eight, or is it forty-five?

I walk. I walk.

I hold matches at street signs

for it is dark,

as dark as the leathery dead

and I have lost my green Ford,

my house in the suburbs,

two little kids

sucked up like pollen by the bee in me

and a husband

who has wiped off his eyes

in order not to see my inside out

and I am walking and looking

and this is no dream

just my oily life

where the people are alibis

and the street is unfindable for an

entire lifetime.

Pull the shades down -

I don't care!

Bolt the door, mercy,

erase the number,

rip down the street sign,

what can it matter,

what can it matter to this cheapskate

who wants to own the past

that went out on a dead ship

and left me only with paper?

Not there.

I open my pocketbook,

as women do,

and fish swim back and forth

between the dollars and the lipstick.

I pick them out,

one by one

and throw them at the street signs,

and shoot my pocketbook

into the Charles River.

Next I pull the dream off

and slam into the cement wall

of the clumsy calendar

I live in,

my life,

and its hauled up

notebooks.

### Her Kind

I have gone out, a possessed witch,

haunting the black air, braver at night;

dreaming evil, I have done my hitch

over the plain houses, light by light:

lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.

A woman like that is not a woman, quite.

I have been her kind.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,

filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,

closets, silks, innumerable goods;

fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:

whining, rearranging the disaligned.

A woman like that is misunderstood.

I have been her kind.

I have ridden in your cart, driver,

waved my nude arms at villages going by,

learning the last bright routes, survivor

where your flames still bite my thigh

and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.

A woman like that is not ashamed to die.

I have been her kind.

## SYLVIA PLATH (1932-1963)

### 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

O 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.

### 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 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.

### 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 darkness 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 enter 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).