

Part One

Still laughter scampers around . . .
And rolls back onto the mattress, legs in the air

But it's only human

And finally it's had enough—enough!
And slowly sits up, exhausted,
And slowly starts to fasten buttons,
With long pauses,

Like somebody the police have come for.

—*Ted Hughes*

Martinis, filets and cigarettes, tea sandwiches
with butter and matted snarls of watercress,
coffee white with cream and caffeine black,
the egg's cornea looking up
from a frizzled mat of hash.
The food looks guilty. And why not?
It's cooked by men in wraparound aprons.
There seems to be no motive to it.
On the plate the T-bone bleeds to death.
The ceiling's bare bulb is clear and perfect as a hard-boiled egg,
The block of Stilton's gangrenous and veined.
A cobbler's dark clottedness looks like a hemorrhage in a bowl.
It's a hard and dirty world. Noir,
Hello.

The living teetered at the edge of a cliff.
Below the living lies the lake, that slick, black
plate of water, and just behind them purred

a car as dark and hollow as a hearse.
I dipped my pen into that inky place.
I sat behind the windshield of my face.

The cloudy brow of night
was furrowed in concern,
because the living did not seem to know
that they were being stalked by me.

Night after night I tried to nudge them
into the water, the path of a train,
or my oncoming speed.

But they were always busy:
The woman in red waxed
and waned, smoldered like a mine fire

just beneath the surface of the page.
And the woman in white was always
asleep inside the simple moonbeam of herself.

The car was ready, and the cliff;
the moon was a drop of mercury
that rolled back and forth across

the night, and beside the black
vat of reservoir I had planted witnesses
like flowers in the rubber pots of their galoshes.

I sat and smoked and lingered.
Inside me a murder sulked and ached
like a lake behind a dam.

I was waiting until the world was on my side
and would turn itself murderous for my sake.

The Revolution

Remember it was early—we were still in the dark
slots of the narrow beds, the room twitching and burning
from all night TV—then voices—almost *lively*

for this place, I think, unsheathing myself from the damp
bedding to the cool and cluttered eight-story commotion—a burn
of sound, those voices, a braille of noise.

I can't remember what broke the wash of listening,
what turned it (like a boat steered hard into its own wake) into sight:
one or two floors below us, an answer to your question—

(you are up and beside me now)—*what is that?* was dragged by—
window, wall, window, wall—locked in the arms of two men
and trying to bite her way out of their official embrace.

Did I mention—leaning out to put ourselves into the courtyard
where a spill of images lengthened the view—we stared
at a woman in her nightgown

screaming like something metal opening against its will.
We saw her, then she was disappeared by wall, we saw her
naked feet on the stone. Wind blew this way and that

in the immense eight-storied square. And these two facts:
Her gown was torn from her. And we stood staring. What could be done?
There had been trouble, we knew. Betrayals.

Who was to say she was innocent?

Into the clearing of . . .
she climbed and stood

up from the black boots of her blackouts
into her body.

The coat wept upon her shoulder,
it hung upon her, a carcass heavy on a hook,

and in the sockets of the buttonholes
the buttons lolled and looked.

As she climbed into that clearing
it shook as it took her.

A fever wrote the sentence
and screwed it tight with ache

and the long hair of the grass grew silvery and weak,
lay greasily against the skull of dirt.

My mother was a figure armed with . . .
and came toward me

flew to me as though I were a sentence
that must be mended, that must be broken,

then ended, ended, ended.

Personal experiences are chains and balls
fatally drawn to the magnetic personality.
And I have always been a poet
who poured herself into the shrouds
of experience's tight dresses so that a reader could try to get a feel
for the real me, metaphorically speaking, of course,
using only the mind, of course, and a dictionary
that the mind wears like a surgical glove.

I bore experience's leashes and tourniquets.
I stuffed myself deep into the nooses of its collars.
I was equipped. I was like a ship plated with the armor of experience,
nosing the seas which are its seas.

But now I have other things to do. I will not write about dying
my hair blonde-on-black for my post-post-feminist project. The wicked
must be punished.
The innocent exalted, butchers called forth for the slaughter of the lambs,
and doctors
called from their face-lifts to perform amputations.