

## Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath's *Lady Lazarus* is a confessional poem filled with intense emotions, dark imagery, and powerful symbolism. It explores themes of death, rebirth, female oppression, suffering, and personal power.

### 1. Death and Resurrection

The title refers to Lazarus, a biblical figure whom Jesus raised from the dead. In the poem, Plath compares herself to Lazarus, stating that she has "died" multiple times and returned each time.

The speaker claims she has attempted suicide three times but has been "resurrected" by external forces (doctors, society, etc.).

The idea of death as a performance is crucial; she describes her suffering as something the public watches, as if she is putting on a show.

## 2. Female Oppression and Resistance

The poem critiques patriarchal control over women's bodies and lives.

The speaker compares herself to a Holocaust victim, suggesting that she is being controlled, experimented on, and objectified by men (whom she calls "Herr Doktor" and "Herr Enemy," possibly referring to Nazi officers or oppressive male figures).

She is forced to conform to societal expectations but fights back by reclaiming her power.

## 3. Suicide and Mental Illness

Plath uses personal experiences with depression and suicidal thoughts to build the poem's emotional intensity.

The speaker sees her suicide attempts as moments of both despair and defiance, refusing to be fully controlled by those who save her.

#### 4. Performance and Spectacle

The speaker describes her suffering as a circus act, where the audience eagerly watches her destruction and revival.

She sarcastically refers to herself as “The Lady Lazarus” and claims she performs death every decade, making it seem like an art form.

This reflects how society often sensationalizes women’s pain and suffering.

#### 5. Revenge and Power

In the final lines, the speaker transforms into a Phoenix-like figure, rising from her ashes.

She warns her enemies that she will return even stronger, consuming them in flames.

This shift from victim to avenger highlights female rage and empowerment.

The poem opens with the speaker declaring that she has died once every decade:

“I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it—”

She refers to herself as “a sort of walking miracle”, suggesting both sarcasm and self-awareness. Her survival feels unnatural, almost forced, as if she is being kept alive against her will.

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Lines 10–29: Death as a Performance

The speaker compares herself to a Holocaust victim, using disturbing imagery:

“My skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My right foot  
A paperweight,”

This shocking comparison suggests extreme suffering, objectification, and dehumanization. She feels like a relic of past pain, similar to how Jewish victims of Nazi concentration camps were reduced to mere objects.

She also describes her body as something the public is eager to see, turning her suffering into a spectacle:

“The peanut-crunching crowd  
Shoves in to see  
Them unwrap me hand and foot—  
The big strip tease.”

Here, she compares her resurrection to a circus act, criticizing how people consume tragedy as entertainment.

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### Lines 30–50: Male Oppression and Control

She introduces an ominous male figure, possibly representing society, doctors, or oppressive men in general:

“Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands

My knees.

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.”

Despite being reduced to nothing, she still retains her identity. The “gentlemen” could represent men who try to control women’s bodies and choices.

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Lines 51–64: Suicide and the Fascination with Death

She describes how her past suicides were seen as performances rather than cries for help. Her survival becomes a curse rather than a relief, as she must endure the pain again and again.

“Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.”

This famous line shows her dark humor and deep pain. She sarcastically presents her own suffering as something she has mastered, further reinforcing the

idea of suicide as a public act rather than a personal struggle.

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Lines 65–79: Financial and Emotional Exploitation

The speaker mocks those who try to profit from her suffering:

“There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge

For the hearing of my heart—

It really goes.”

She implies that society exploits suffering for entertainment and financial gain, much like a museum exhibit.

She also introduces more male figures:



“So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.”

These figures could represent doctors, psychiatrists, or male authority figures who control her life but fail to understand her suffering.

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Lines 80–84: The Final Transformation

The poem shifts dramatically in tone as she warns of her impending resurrection:

“Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air.”

This ending presents the speaker as a Phoenix-like figure, rising from the ashes of her past destruction. She is no longer a victim but an avenger, ready to consume those who tried to control her.