The Mother

Abortion will not let you forget.
You remember the children you got that you did not get,
The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair;
The singers and workers that never handled the air.
You will never neglect or forget
Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.
I have contracted. I have eased
My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
Your luck
And your lives from your unfinished reach,
If I stole your births and your names,
Your straight baby tears and your games,
Your stilled or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches, and your deaths,
If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
Though why should I whine,
Whine that the crime was other than mine?—
Since anyhow you are dead.
Or rather, or instead,
You were never made.
But that too, I am afraid,
Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
You were born, you had body, you died.
It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.
Believe me, I loved you all.
Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you all.

Sadie and Maud

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
The Blackstone Rangers

We Real Cool

The Pool Players,
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We
Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
Jazz June. We
Die soon.

The Blackstone Rangers²

1. AS SEEN BY DISCIPLINES³

There they are.
Thirty at the corner.
Black, raw, ready.
Sores in the city
that do not want to heal.

II

THE LEADERS

Jeff, Gene, Geronimo, And Bop.
They cancel, cure and curry.
Hardly the dupes of the downtown thing
the cold bonbon,
the rhinestone thing. And hardly
in a hurry,
Hardly Belafonte, King,
Black Jesus, Stokely, Malcolm X or Rap.⁴
Bungled trophies.
Their country is a Nation on no map.

Jeff, Gene, Geronimo and Bop
in the passionate noon,
in bewitching night

1. A form of Chinese silk.
2. A Chicago street gang that took its name from Blackstone Street, the eastern edge of the black ghetto in Chicago.
3. Refers to law enforcement.
4. The names refer to heroic figures in African American culture and politics, including singer Harry Belafonte, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and H. Rap Brown.
are the detailed men, the copious men.
They curry, cure,
they cancel, cancelled images whose Concerts
are not divine, vivacious; the different tins
are intense last entries; pagan argument;
translations of the night.

The Blackstone bitter bureaus
(bureaucracy is footloose) edit, fuse
unfashionable damnations and descent;
and exulting, monstrous hand on monstrous hand,
construct, strangely, a monstrous pearl or grace.

III
GANG GIRLS

A Rangerette

Gang Girls are sweet exotics.
Mary Ann
uses the nutrients of her orient,
buts sometimes sighs for Cities of blue and jewel
beyond her Ranger rim of Cottages Grove.5
(Bowery Boys, Disciples, Whip-Birds will
dissolve no margins, stop no savory sanctities.)

Mary is
a rose in a whiskey glass.

Mary's
February shudder and are gone. Aprils
fret frankly, lilac hurries on.
Summer is a hard irregular ridge.
October looks away.
And that's the Year!

Save for her bugle-love.
Save for the beat of not-obese devotion.
Save for Somebody Terribly Dying, under
the philanthropy of robins. Save for her Ranger
bringing
an amount of rainbow in a string-drawn bag.
"Where did you get the diamond?" Do not ask:
but swallow, straight, the spirals of his flask
and assist him at your zipper; pet his lips
and help him clutch you.

Love's another departure.
Will there be any arrivals, confirmations?
Will there be gleaning?

Mary, the Shakedancer's child
from the rooming-flat, pants carefully, peers at
her laboring lover. . . .

Mary! Mary Ann!
Settle for sandwiches! settle for stocking caps!
for sudden blood, aborted carnival,
the props and niceties of non-loneliness—
the rhymes of Leaning.

The Coora Flower

Today I learned the coora flower
grows high in the mountains of Itty-go-luba Bésa.
Province Meechee.
Pop. 39.

Now I am coming home.
This, at least, is Real, and what I know.
It was restful, learning nothing necessary.
School is tiny vacation. At least you can sleep.
At least you can think of love or feeling your boy friend against you
(which is not free from grief).

But now it's Real Business.
I am Coming Home.

My mother will be screaming in an almost dirty dress.
The crack6 is gone. So a Man will be in the house.

I must watch myself.
I must not dare to sleep.

ROBERT LOWELL
(1917-1977)

In Notebook 1967-68, Robert Lowell wrote a verse account of a conversation
with T. S. Eliot:

Caught between two streams of traffic, in the gloom
of Memorial Hall and Harvard's war-dead . . . And he:
"Don't you loathe to be compared with your relatives?
I do. I've just found two of mine reviewed by Poe.
He wiped the floor with them . . . and I was delighted."

The quotation is telling—not only about Eliot, but also about the man who recorded
it in a verse rather than a prose memoir. Robert Lowell could never forget—or let

5. A main thoroughfare on Chicago's South Side.

6. Cocaine.