

A MANNER OF WOMAN

They called me in  
and charged me that I knew her.  
I said, "I know her not.  
What manner of woman  
is she?"

Three times they asked,  
and three times I denied.  
The cock crew thrice;  
the night grew into day.  
I hid my face;  
I crept my shame away.

She sent them after me.  
*Three times* they pursued me  
with assault.

The first time,  
I was set about with knives:  
long knives, and thin;  
little curved knives; serrated knives  
with points; the chef's knife,  
broad and keen.

Next, poisons.  
Locked poison cupboards,  
marked red cross on white,  
were turned to frightful liquor cabinets,  
whose rainbow-coloured fluids,  
pretty crystals,  
tempted a mouth gone  
little-girl-greedy.

They came at me then  
with chariots,  
screaming downhill to where  
I waited, at the stop,

sweating, shaking, afraid to look,  
clutching an iron hitch-post  
in my arms.

So when I had endured  
a weary while,  
she sent no more.

Grown curious, I sought them out  
and said, "Perhaps  
I knew her once. What manner  
of woman is she?"  
It was the time  
of her inquisition,  
her trial and suffering.

I saw her on her cross.

And now I wait for her  
to rise again,  
when the great stone between us  
will roll away.  
For there will come  
another time of summoning,  
and then the choice  
will not be mine to make.

When I hang  
upside-down upon my cross,  
I, who have looked so long  
on the black earth,  
may see white light,  
and her on her upright cross.

*Together* we might say:  
"*This*  
is the manner  
of woman."