

PURSUIT

Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit.

RACINE

There is a panther stalks me down:
One day I'll have my death of him;
His greed has set the woods aflame,
He prowls more lordly than the sun.
Most soft, most suavely glides that step,
Advancing always at my back;
From gaunt hemlock, rooks croak havoc:
The hunt is on, and sprung the trap.
Flayed by thorns I trek the rocks,
Haggard through the hot white noon.
Along red network of his veins
What fires run, what craving wakes?

Insatiate, he ransacks the land
Condemned by our ancestral fault,
Crying: blood, let blood be spilt;
Meat must glut his mouth's raw wound.
Keen the rending teeth and sweet
The singeing fury of his fur;
His kisses parch, each paw's a briar,
Doom consummates that appetite.
In the wake of this fierce cat,
Kindled like torches for his joy,
Charred and ravened women lie,
Become his starving body's bait.

Now hills hatch menace, spawning shade;
Midnight cloaks the sultry grove;
The black marauder, hauled by love
On fluent haunches, keeps my speed.
Behind snarled thickets of my eyes
Lurks the lithe one; in dreams' ambush
Bright those claws that mar the flesh
And hungry, hungry, those taut thighs.
His ardor snares me, lights the trees,
And I run flaring in my skin;
What lull, what cool can lap me in
When burns and brands that yellow gaze?

I hurl my heart to halt his pace,
To quench his thirst I squander blood;
He eats, and still his need seeks food,
Compels a total sacrifice.
His voice waylays me, spells a trance,
The gutted forest falls to ash;
Appalled by secret want, I rush
From such assault of radiance.
Entering the tower of my fears,
I shut my doors on that dark guilt,
I bolt the door, each door I bolt.
Blood quickens, gonging in my ears:

The panther's tread is on the stairs,
Coming up and up the stairs.

Comment [CK1]: Highlight Legend:

Red – Power and Violence
Green – Nature
Cyan – Sexuality and Intrigue
Pink – Specific mention of colors
Blue – Repetition

Comment [CK2]: Racine, a French playwright, is author to the first line of the poem. Literally translated, the line is "In the heart of the forest, his image follows me." Possibly an encapsulating quotation that Plath used as inspiration for this piece.

Comment [CK3]: The persona is being tracked and hunted by a metaphorical 'panther'. With Plath being well-known as a confessional poet, we can attribute the persona to be herself. Though at first glance, it may literally seem a chase, the entire poem is metaphorical and delves into the idea of sexuality coupled with its ties with power and violence.

Comment [CK4]: The specific image of woods being set aflame contrasts the idea of nature and preservation versus fire and its association with destruction. Plath does this to accentuate the idea of how the 'panther', who we can attribute to likely be her would-be husband, Ted Hughes, is a force to be reckon with. The repetition of paired phrases that reflect a contrast between nature and destruction might even suggest how although Plath has established that the 'panther' is something destructive and powerful, she is inexplicably drawn to him- or might be drawn to him because of his power.

Comment [CK5]: The idea of the panther advancing behind her back suggests sinister alternatives.

Comment [CK6]: The use of warm colors (white, red, color) and its association of boldness and warmth might have been used by Plath to give her readers a more abstract description of the emotions she may be experiencing.

Comment [CK7]: The repetition of asking 'what' and the use of question marks further exemplifies Plath's intrigue with the enigmatic 'panther'.

Comment [CK8]: Repetition of blood has both destructive and sexual imagery. Furthermore, there is the description of 'squandering blood' and the image evoked of a 'blood pact'.

Comment [CK9]: The image of a tower and stairs suggests the futile struggle of civilization against the forces of nature/the panther