

from *Landscapes*

The Lovely Sphinx

She knows already he will solve her riddle: she must dash
herself against the rocks, all her lovely parts,
the supple lion legs whose fur she combed and kept so bright,
her woman head, her crackling dragon wings,
princely gleaming teeth,
gently webbed fingers, delicate brown nails,
a puckered and mottled green torso,
naked and soft as an infant's, her sprightly odour
of raspberries and almonds.

The riddle, so perplexing
it kept the city free of men
whose minds were not fine.

Their bodies piled around her, she killed them
with a jet of blood from her heart,
poisonous to all who walk on two legs.

Now Oedipus stands before her,
squat, young, bald,

all the blather comes out of his mouth.

I will defeat you, give me your riddle,

I killed a man on my way here, don't mess with me.

She sees his fate in a snap.

In a moment of motherly compassion
is tempted to withhold the riddle.

But he leans in closer, he seethes into her teeth

Give. Me. The. Riddle!

Then in a breath he solves it.

The blood jet bubbles and sears in her chest.

She watches him run off, squawking with glee.

I solved the riddle! The city is mine! Where is the princess?