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# A Poem for Women in Rage

Audre Lorde

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A Poem for Women in Rage ·  
*Audre Lorde*

A killing summer heat wraps up the city  
emptied of all who are not bound to stay  
a black woman waits for a white woman  
leans against the railing in the Upper West Side street  
at intermission  
the distant sounds of Broadway dim to lulling  
until I can hear the voice of sparrows  
like a promise I await  
the woman I love  
our slice of time  
a place beyond the city's pain.

In the corner phone booth a woman  
glassed in by reflections of the street between us  
her white face dangles  
a tapestry of disasters seen  
through a veneer of order  
mouth drawn like an ill-used road map  
to eyes without core, a bottled heart  
impeccable credentials of old pain.  
The veneer cracks open  
she lurches through the glaze into my afternoon  
our eyes touch like hot wire  
and the street snaps into nightmare  
a woman with white eyes is clutching  
a bottle of Fleischman's gin  
is fumbling at her waistband  
is pulling a butcher knife from her ragged pants  
her hand arcs backward "You Black Bitch!"  
the heavy blade spins out toward me  
slow motion  
years of fury surge upward like a wall  
and I do not hear it  
clatter to the pavement at my feet.

Gears of ancient nightmare churn  
swift in familiar dread and silence  
but this time I am awake, released  
I smile. Now. This time is  
my turn.

I bend to the knife my ears blood-drumming  
across the street my lover's voice  
the only moving sound within white heat  
"Don't touch it!"

I straighten, weaken, then start down again  
hungry for resolution  
simple as anger and so close at hand  
my fingers reach for the familiar blade  
the known grip of wood against my palm  
for I have held it to the whetstone  
a thousand nights for this  
escorting fury through my sleep  
like a cherished friend  
to wake in the stink of rage  
beside the sleep-white face of love.

The keen steel of a dreamt knife  
sparks honed from the whetted edge with a tortured shriek  
between my lover's voice and the grey spinning  
a choice of pain or fury  
slashing across judgment like a crimson scar  
I could open her up to my anger  
with a point sharpened upon love.

In the deathland my lover's voice  
fades  
like the roar of a train derailed  
on the other side of a river  
every white woman's face I love  
and distrust is upon it  
eating green grapes from a paper bag  
marking yellow exam-books tucked into a manila folder  
orderly as the last thought before death  
I throw the switch.

Through screams of crumpled steel  
I search the wreckage for a ticket of hatred  
my lover's voice  
calling  
a knife at her throat.

In this steaming aisle of the dead  
I am weeping  
to learn the names of those streets  
my feet have worn thin with running  
and why they will never serve me  
nor ever lead me home.  
"Don't touch it!" she cries  
I straighten myself  
in confusion  
a drunken woman is running away  
down the West Side street  
my lover's voice moves  
a shadowy clearing.

Corralled in fantasy  
the woman with white eyes has vanished  
to become her own nightmare  
and a french butcher blade hangs in my house  
love's token  
I remember this knife  
it carves its message into my sleeping  
she only read its warning  
written upon my face.