

For Each Of You

Be who you are and will be
learn to cherish
that boisterous Black Angel that drives you
up one day and down another
protecting the place where your power rises
running like hot blood
from the same source
as you pain.

When you are hungry
learn to eat
whatever sustains you
until morning
but do not misled by details
simply because you live them.

Do not let your head deny
your hands
any memory of what passes through them
not your eyes
nor your heart
everything can be used
except what is wasteful
(you will need
to remember this when you are accused of destruction.)
Even when they are dangerous examine the heart of those machines you hate
before you discard them
and never mourn the lack of their power
lest you be condemned
to relieve them.
If you do not learn to hate
you will never be lonely
enough
to love easily
nor will you always be brave
although it does not grow any easier

Do not pretend to convenient beliefs
even when they are righteous

I have not ever seen my father's grave.

Audre Lorde

Coping

It has rained for five days
running
the world is
a round puddle
of sunless water
where small islands
are only beginning
to cope
a young boy
in my garden
is bailing out water
from his flower patch
when I ask him why
he tells me
young seeds that have not seen sun
forget
and drown easily.

Audre Lorde

Father Son And Holy Ghost

I have not ever seen my father's grave.

Not that his judgment eyes
have been forgotten
nor his great hands' print
on our evening doorknobs
 one half turn each night
 and he would come
 drabbled with the world's business
 massive and silent
 as the whole day's wish
 ready to redefine
 each of our shapes
but now the evening doorknobs
wait and do not recognize us
as we pass.

Each week a different woman
regular as his one quick glass
each evening
pulls up the grass his stillness grows
calling it weed.
Each week a different woman
has my mother's face
and he
who time has changeless
must be amazed
who knew and loved
but one.

My father died in silence
loving creation
and well-defined response
he lived still judgments
on familiar things
and died knowing
a January 15th that year me.

Lest I go into dust

over the hot coals
of four centuries of white male approval
until she let go
the first real power she ever had
and lined her own womb with cement
to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction
within me.
But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
and one day I will take my teenaged plug
and connect it to the nearest socket
raping an 85 year old white woman
who is somebody's mother
and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
a greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
"Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."

Audre Lorde

Power

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and
there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
this policeman said in his own defense
"I didn't notice the size nor nothing else
only the color". And
there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37 year old white man
with 13 years of police forcing
was set free
by eleven white men who said they were satisfied
justice had been done
and one Black Woman who said
"They convinced me" meaning
they had dragged her 4'10" black Woman's frame

and wherever I touch you
I lick cold from my fingers
taste rage
like salt from the lips of a woman
who has killed too often to forget
and carries each death in her eyes
your mouth a parting orchid
"Someday you will come to my country
and we will fight side by side?"

Keys jingle in the door ajar threatening
whatever is coming belongs here
I reach for your sweetness
but silence explodes like a pregnant belly
into my face
a vomit of nevers.

Mmanthatsi turns away from the cloth
her daughters-in-law are dyeing
the baby drools milk from her breast
she hands him half-asleep to his sister
dresses again for war
knowing the men will follow.
In the intricate Maseru twilights
quick sad vital
she maps the next day's battle
dreams of Durban sometimes
visions the deep wry song of beach pebbles
running after the sea.

Audre Lorde

The American Cancer Society Or There Is More Than One Way to Skin a Coon

Of all the ways in which this country
Prints its death upon me
Selling me cigarettes is one of the most certain.
Yet every day I watch my son digging
ConEdison GeneralMotors GarbageDisposal
Out of his nose as he watches a 3 second spot
On How To Stop Smoking
And it makes me sick to my stomach.
For it is not by cigarettes
That you intend to destroy my children.

Not even by the cold white light of moon-walks
While half the boys I knew
Are doomed to quicker trips by a different capsule;
No, the american cancer destroys
By seductive and reluctant admission
For instance
Black women no longer give birth through their ears
And therefore must have A Monthly Need For Iron:
For instance
Our Pearly teeth are not racially insured
And therefore must be Gleamed For Fewer Cavities:
For instance
Even though all astronauts are white
Perhaps Black People can develop
Some of those human attributes
Requiring
Dried dog food frozen coffee instant oatmeal
Depilatories deodorants detergents
And other assorted plastic.

And this is the surest sign I know
That the american cancer society is dying- -
It has started to dump its symbols onto Black People
Convincing proof that those symbols are now useless
And far more lethal than emphysema.

and never giving at all.

Audre Lorde

Making Love To Concrete

An upright abutment in the mouth
of the Willis Avenue bridge
a beige Honda leaps the divider
like a steel gazelle inescapable
sleek leather boots on the pavement
rat-a-tat-tat best intentions
going down for the third time
stuck in the particular

You cannot make love to concrete
if you care about being
non-essential wrong or worn thin
if you fear ever becoming
diamonds or lard
you cannot make love to concrete
if you cannot pretend
concrete needs your loving

To make love to concrete
you need an indelible feather
white dresses before you are ten
a confirmation lace veil milk-large bones
and air raid drills in your nightmares
no stars till you go to the country
and one summer when you are twelve
Con Edison pulls the plug
on the street-corner moons Walpurgisnacht
and there are sudden new lights in the sky
stone chips that forget you need
to become a light rope a hammer
a repeatable bridge
garden-fresh broccoli two dozen dropped eggs
and a hint of you
caught up between my fingers
the lesson of a wooden beam
propped up on barrels
across a mined terrain

between forgiving too easily

Stations

AUDRE LORDE

Some women love
to wait
for life for a ring
in the June light for a touch
of the sun to heal them for another
woman's voice to make them whole
to untie their hands
put words in their mouths
form to their passages sound
to their screams for some other sleeper
to remember their future their past.

Some women wait for their right
train in the wrong station
in the alleys of morning
for the noon to holler
the night come down.

Some women wait for love
to rise up
the child of their promise
to gather from earth
what they do not plant
to claim pain for labor
to become
the tip of an arrow to aim
at the heart of now
but it never stays.

Some women wait for visions
that do not return
where they were not welcome
naked

for invitations to places
they always wanted
to visit
to be repeated.

Some women wait for themselves
around the next corner
and call the empty spot peace
but the opposite of living
is only not living
and the stars do not care.

Some women wait for something
to change and nothing
does change
so they change
themselves.