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## Audre Lorde's signed draft "Women on Trains" poem to Angela Bowen and M. Jacqui Alexander

Audre Lorde

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WOMEN ON TRAINS

FOR Angela & Jacqui

Eleanor Roosevelt riding the rails  
behind her husband's casket  
forefinger tense along the propped cheek  
one knuckle caressing her lips  
young Nell's dreams laced between  
the sentinel stalks of mullein  
giving  
in the whip of the journey's wind  
my mother's mandatory hat  
in a no-nonsense tilt  
at the office windows in wartime  
scanning Lenox Avenue  
for the coal delivery truck.

Women on trains have a life that is  
exactly liveable  
the precision of days flashing past  
review overlook no intervention allowed  
the true shapes of each season  
relentless carved out across the land.

I have dreamed over mountains  
the earth crannied below  
deep a spread woman waiting  
but the pace of this laden sky heals me  
through the ugliness  
stacks of heat-treated lumber  
and beyond  
the bare arms of scrub maple and poplar  
already ablush a promise  
like the bodies of children sleeping.

Was it ever business as usual for these women  
as the snow-driven hopes and fears  
swirled past the tenement office window  
and nappy-topped stands of unreachabele trees  
flowed along in the southern dusk?  
The coal truck arrived after dark  
barely half-a-ton of dusty bituminous  
and she shoveled it down herself  
in the frigid Harlem night  
the tenants briefly appeased  
and coal dust on my mother's tired hat  
as the subway screamed us home.

Women on trains have a chance  
to unweave our tangles  
was it between Blythe and Patchoula  
Eleanor chose to live her own days?  
I have just counceled a woman  
badly  
to be who I am no longer willing to be  
for my living  
a stopgap hurled into the breech  
beyond any touch of support  
I search through these rushing sun-dark trees  
for your phone number  
to acknowledge both you and I  
are free to go.

