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## Published Poem: 1993 Audre Lorde, "Women on Trains"

Audre Lorde

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# Women on Trains

Lorde, Audre . In *The Collected Poems Of Audre Lorde* , Lorde, Audre, 448-449. New York: 1997.

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## FULL TEXT

*for Jacqui and Angela*

1 Leaving the known for another city  
2 the club-car smells of old velvet  
3 rails whisper relief mantras  
4 steel upon steel  
5 every fourth thud breaks the hum  
6 "stand and fight," I said  
7 leaving my words for ransom  
8 "your only way out."

9 This train is a doorway  
10 bent into the shape of a scale.

11 Eleanor Roosevelt riding the rails  
12 behind her husband's casket  
13 forefinger tense along a propped cheek  
14 one knuckle caressing her lips  
15 young Nell's dreams strung along  
16 sentinel stalks of mullein  
17 giving  
18 in the whip of the journey's wind  
19 my mother's mandatory hat  
20 at a no-nonsense tilt  
21 beside the tenement windows of wartime  
22 scanning Lenox Avenue  
23 for a coal-delivery truck.

24 Women on trains  
25 have a life  
26 that is exactly livable  
27 the precision of days flashing past

28 no intervention allowed  
29 and the shape of each season  
30 relentlessly carved in the land.

31 I have soared over crannied earth  
32 spread like a woman waiting  
33 but this angled sky anchors me  
34 inward through the ugliness  
35 shards of bright fireweed loosestrife  
36 and stacks of heat-treated lumber beyond  
37 the bare arms of scrub-maple and poplar  
38 already ablush.

39 Was it ever business as usual for these women  
40 as snow-driven hopes and fears swirled  
41 past tenement office windows  
42 and nappy-topped stands of unreachable trees  
43 flowed along in the southern dusk?

44 The coal truck arrived after dark dumping  
45 barely half-a-ton of bituminous  
46 my father gone to his second job  
47 she shoveled it down herself  
48 in the freezing Harlem night  
49 and coal dusted my mother's tired hat  
50 as the subway screamed us home.

51 Women on trains have a chance  
52 to unweave their tangles.  
53 Perhaps between Blythe and Patchoula  
54 Eleanor chose to live her own days.  
55 The subway tunnel walls  
56 closed in like thunder  
57 and my mother never had a chance  
58 to lay her magic down.

59 Between new lumber and the maples  
60 I rehear your question  
61 owning  
62 the woman who breaks the woman  
63 who is broken.

64 I counseled you unwisely my sister  
65 to be who I am no longer  
66 willing to be for my living  
67 stopgap hurled into the breach  
68 beyond support beyond change  
69 and I search these rushing sun-dark trees  
70 for your phone number  
71 to acknowledge  
72 both you and I  
73 are free to go.

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