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Poems

Lorna Goodison

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Poems

Abstract
THE WOMAN SPEAKS TO THE MAN WHO HAS EMPLOYED HER SON, RECOMMENDATION FOR AMBER

This journal article is available in Kunapipi: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol16/iss1/70
Lorna Goodison was born in Kingston Jamaica. She is a major Jamaican poet. Her first book of poems *Tamarind Season* (Institute of Jamaica, 1980) was greeted with critical acclaim as was her first public appearance in London in 1985 for the International Poetry Festival in memory of Michael Smith and for the Fourth International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books. Her second book of poetry *I Am Becoming My Mother* (New Beacon Books, 1986) confirmed her growing reputation and won the Americas Section of the British Airways Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1986.

*Heartease* (New Beacon Books) is Lorna Goodison’s third book of poetry. It continues and deepens her striving towards an organic perception, an intensity of vision drawing on a fountain of striking poetic imagery. The poems enact an essential engagement with the authentic, the boundary life of woman.
Lorna Goodison

THE WOMAN SPEAKS
TO THE MAN WHO HAS EMPLOYED HER SON

Her son was first made known to her as a sense of unease, a need to cry for little reasons and a metallic tide rising in her mouth each morning. Such signs made her know that she was not alone in her body. She carried him full term tight up under her heart.

She carried him like the poor carry hope, hope you get a break or a visa, hope one child go through and remember you. He had no father. The man she made him with had more like him, he was fair-minded he treated all his children with equal and absolute indifference.

She raised him twice, once as mother then as father, set no ceiling on what he could be doctor earth healer, pilot take wings. But now he tells her he is working for you, that you value him so much you give him one whole submachine gun for him alone.

He says you are like a father to him she is wondering what kind of father would give a son, hot and exploding death when he asks him for bread. She went downtown and bought three and one third yards of black cloth And a deep crowned and veiled hat for the day he draw his bloody salary.
She has no power over you and this 
at the level of earth, what she has 
are prayers and a mother's tears 
and at knee city she uses them. 
She says psalms for him 
she reads psalms for you 
she weeps for his soul 
her eyewater covers you.

She is throwing a partner 
with Judas Iscariot's mother 
the thief on the left hand side 
of the cross, his mother 
is the banker, her draw though 
is first and last for she still 
throwing two hands as mother and father 
she is prepared, she is done. Absalom.

RECOMMENDATION FOR AMBER

With her, you would have a guide 
to the small nubians in the garden. 
They live only under bushes 
that have never known knives.

They come out at night 
riding on seasonal cicadas 
whose noise is a radar guide, 
they have given her minute boxes 
of see-in-space eye ointment. 
A very little rubbed on the eyes 
makes you see good duppies. 
With her Mondays could be Sunday.

She would go to church on Monday 
then stay indoors all afternoon 
sleeping, because there is no 
difference in days with Amber.

No matter how she tries she loses 
things (she is not orderly) 
But she will summon them back again 
by invoking their names over and over.
So if you pass outside her window and hear her repeating insistently ‘keys’ or ‘comb’, just know that this is her strange ceremony the finding of lost objects. Invariably she finds what’s missing or if it’s taken, in its place will come something amazingly much better.

She is blessed with a remarkable nose she can identify the ingredients in perfumes just so, like she can isolate the trail of the gentle tuberose from beneath the more sensual oil slick smell of the cat glands secreting civet. She also knows the secret properties of gemstones. Take amber itself her name.

Though neither rare, costly nor a gem but the golden night sweat of a tree compassionate and resilient, it’s special because it is self healing.

Despite her tendency to wearing her hair wild and her slow egyptian eyes which are fixed always above her employer’s head she has a good hand at plain cooking.