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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



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.