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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.