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Power

BY AUDRE LORDE

The difference between poetry and rhetoric is being ready to kill yourself instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds and a dead child dragging his shattered black face off the edge of my sleep blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders is the only liquid for miles and my stomach churns at the imagined taste while my mouth splits into dry lips without loyalty or reason thirsting for the wetness of his blood as it sinks into the whiteness of the desert where I am lost without imagery or magic trying to make power out of hatred and destruction trying to heal my dying son with kisses only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and there are tapes to prove it. At his trial this policeman said in his own defense "I didn't notice the size nor nothing else only the color". And there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37 year old white man with 13 years of police forcing was set free by eleven white men who said they were satisfied justice had been done and one Black Woman who said "They convinced me" meaning they had dragged her 4'10" black Woman's frame over the hot coals of four centuries of white male approval until she let go the first real power she ever had and lined her own womb with cement to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction within me.

But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
and one day I will take my teenaged plug
and connect it to the nearest socket
raping an 85 year old white woman
who is somebody's mother
and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
a greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
"Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."

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Source: The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1997)

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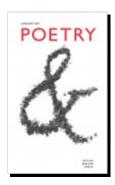
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