

POETRY OUT LOUD



Emily Dickinson at the Poetry Slam

by Dan Vera

I will tell you why she rarely ventured from her house.
It happened like this:

One day she took the train to Boston,
made her way to the darkened room,
put her name down in cursive script
and waited her turn.

When they read her name aloud
she made her way to the stage
straightened the papers in her hands —
pages and envelopes, the backs of grocery bills,
she closed her eyes for a minute,
took a breath,
and began.

From her mouth perfect words exploded,
intact formulas of light and darkness.
She dared to rhyme with words like cochineal
and described the skies like diadem.
Obscurely worded incantations filled the room
with an alchemy that made the very molecules quake.

The solitary words she handled
in her upstairs room with keen precision
came rumbling out to make the electric lights flicker.

40 members of the audience
were treated for hypertension.
20 year old dark haired beauties found their heads
had turned a Moses White.

Her second poem erased the memory of every cellphone
in the nightclub,
and by the fourth line of the sixth verse
the grandmother in the upstairs apartment
had been cured of her rheumatism.

The papers reported the power outages.
The area hospitals taxed their emergency generators
and sirens were heard to wail through the night.

Quietly she made her way to the exit,
walked to the terminal and rode back to Amherst.

She never left her room again
and never read such syllables aloud.

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