

# 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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