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.
Dan Vera, "Emily Dickinson at the Poetry Slam" from The Space Between Our Danger and Delight. Copyright © 2009 by Dan Vera. Reprinted by permission of Beothuk Books.

Source: The Space Between Our Danger and Delight (Beothuk Books, 2009)