RIOT

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

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It would be a terrible thing for Chicago if this black fountain of life should suddenly erupt. My friend assures me there’s no danger of that. I don’t feel so sure about it.

Maybe he’s right. Maybe the Negro will always be our friend, no matter what we do to him.

HENRY MILLER
from Sunday After the War.
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"Allah Shango," by Jeff Donaldson
This painting was the Purchase Award Winner at the exhibit "Black Expressions '69" at the Southside Community Art Center, Chicago.
NOTE
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For Dudley Randall,
a giant in our time.
A POEM IN THREE PARTS

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RIOT

John Cabot, out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe, all whitebluerose below his golden hair, wrapped richly in right linen and right wool, almost forgot his Jaguar and Lake Bluff; almost forgot Grandtully (which is The Best Thing That Ever Happened To Scotch); almost forgot the sculpture at the Richard Gray and Distelheim; the kidney pie at Maxim’s, the Grenadine de Boeuf at Maison Henri.

Because the Negroes were coming down the street.

Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty (not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka) and they were coming toward him in rough ranks. In seas. In windsweep. They were black and loud. And not detainable. And not discreet.


A riot is the language of the unheard. —MARTIN LUTHER KING
But, in a thrilling announcement, on It drove and breathed on him: and touched him. In that breath the fume of pig foot, chitterling and cheap chili, malign, mocked John. And, in terrific touch, old averted doubt jerked forward decently, cried "Cabot! John! You are a desperate man, and the desperate die expensively today."

John Cabot went down in the smoke and fire and broken glass and blood, and he cried "Lord! Forgive these nigguhs that know not what they do."

THE THIRD SERMON
ON THE WARPLAND

Phoenix

"In Egyptian mythology, a bird which lived for five hundred years and then consumed itself in fire, rising renewed from the ashes."

WEBSTER

The earth is a beautiful place. Watermirrors and things to be reflected. Goldenrod across the little lagoon.

The Black Philosopher says "Our chains are in the keep of the Keeper in a labeled cabinet on the second shelf by the cookies, sonatas, the arabesques . . . . There's a rattle, sometimes. You do not hear it who mind only cookies and crunch them. You do not hear the remarkable music—'A Death Song For You Before You Die.' If you could hear it you would make music too. The blackblues."
West Madison Street.
In “Jessie’s Kitchen”
Nobody’s eating Jessie’s Perfect Food.
Crazy flowers
cry up across the sky, spreading
and hissing This is it.

The young men run.

They will not steal Bing Crosby but will steal Melvin Van Peebles who made Lillie
a thing of Zampoughi a thing of red wiggles and trebles
(and I know there are twenty wire stalks sticking out of her head
as her underfed haunches jerk jazz.)
A clean riot is not one in which little rioters long-stomped, long-straddled, BEANLESS but knowing no Why go steal in hell a radio, sit to hear James Brown and Mingus, Young-Holt, Coleman, John, on V.O.N. and sun themselves in Sin.

However, what is going on is going on.

Fire.
That is their way of lighting candles in the darkness.
A White Philosopher said ‘It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.’

These candles curse—
inverting the deeps of the darkness.

GUARD HERE, GUNS LOADED.
The young men run.
The children in ritual chatter scatter upon their Own and old geography.

The Law comes sirening across the town.
A woman is dead.
Motherwoman.
She lies among the boxes
(that held the haughty hats, the Polish sausages)
in newish, thorough, firm virginity
as rich as fudge is if you've had five pieces.
Not again shall she
partake of steak
on Christmas mornings, nor of nighttime
chicken and wine at Val Gray Ward's
nor say
of Mr. Beetley, Exit Jones, Junk Smith
nor neat New-baby Williams (man-to-many)
"He treat me right."

That was a gut gal.

"We'll do an us!" yells Yancey, a twittering
twelve.
"Instead of your deathintheafternoon,
kill 'em, bull!
kill 'em, bull!"

The Black Philosopher blares
"I tell you, exhaustive black integrity
would assure a blackless America. . . ."

Nine die, Sun-Times will tell
and will tell too
in small black-bordered oblongs "Rumor? check it
at 744-4111."
A Poem to Peanut.
“Cooooool!” purrs Peanut. Peanut is Richard—a Ranger and a gentleman. A Signature. A Herald. And a Span. This Peanut will not let his men explode. And Rico will not. Neither will Sengali. Nor Bop nor Jeff, Geronimo nor Lover. These merely peer and purr, and pass the Passion over. The Disciples stir and thousandfold confer with ranging Rangermen; mutual in their “Yeah!—this AIN’T all upinheah!”

“But WHY do These People offend *themselves*?” say they who say also “It’s time. It’s time to help These People.”
AN ASPECT OF LOVE, ALIVE IN THE ICE AND FIRE

LaBohem Brown

It is the morning of our love.

In a package of minutes there is this We.
How beautiful.
Merry foreigners in our morning, we laugh, we touch each other, are responsible props and posts.

A physical light is in the room.

Because the world is at the window we cannot wonder very long.

You rise. Although genial, you are in yourself again. I observe your direct and respectable stride. You are direct and self-accepting as a lion in African velvet. You are level, lean, remote.

Lies are told and legends made.
Phoenix rises unafraid.
The Black Philosopher will remember: “There they came to life and exulted, the hurt mute. Then it was over.
The dust, as they say, settled.”
There is a moment in Camaraderie
when interruption is not to be understood.
I cannot bear an interruption.
This is the shining joy;
the time of not-to-end.

On the street we smile.
We go
in different directions
down the imperturbable street.
RIOT is a poem in three parts, only one part of which has appeared in print before. It arises from the disturbances in Chicago after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968.

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