

Black Woman Moose Lodge #719

(Ludie Mae Green edits the great Zora Neale Hurston with one stroke of her orange hoe)

On this wooden bench I have learned to pray for myself first.
Here, no, here, just below her glorious wings, I never know what
I will find. Just last week I came upon a book pulling me over to it
as soon as I walked in. I picked it up with both hands and squeezed
it tight. It was the great story of Eyes and God by the great Negress
authoress. In my day, I was the reading champ, so I and sat with it
like I had found an old friend. And soon there it was – still breast-high,
page 44, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so far as Ah can see.”
Just to see those words again, rising off the page like field smoke, words
I used to whisper every night after working in their kitchens all day. Well,
the memory of all that made me throw that sweet book, cover and all,
the whole way back down to that bench’s other end. I guess you could
say the great Negress authoress had hooked me once again. I picked it
back up and finished reading it for the five hundredth time. Reading
and reading, circling back to read some more, just to have the word-lights
of the great Negress authoress going off like lee-little lighthouses from one
end of me to the other. Inside the rich red soil of her words I feel pulled away
from their hot stove and dressed and ready for what I’m most famous for:
the okra and green beans of my garden. Even now as I sit here with my magic
wand: my life’s orange hoe, curled and waiting quiet in my hand, I do so believe
that a writer of her knack needs to know the effect she is still having on the
living who are still trying to live. Therefore:

Dear Miss Zora Neale Hurston,
Even though you may be dead you are not gone. I write to thank you for fleshing me out on page
44. And if I may, I would like to offer one small edit of your great and perfect words. I, Miss Ludie
Mae Green, would like to add to the official record of me, first reported in 1937, when you
announced that the “De nigger woman is the mule uh de world...”. May I also say, she is the
headless faceless moose of the world. We are gawked at and rode around on our backsides and
worked to our death but our smart minds and pretty dark faces are also cut out of the final picture.
What they can use is kept for sale and decoration, while our odd and precious other parts are hung

up on the wall just like a trophy. In closing, I would like to say, American history is indivisible, and invisible too, and made from the pure wild wonderful wilderness of a Black woman's life – so far as I can see.

Yours, Most Truly and Most Sincerely,

Ludie Mae Green
Reading Champ of 1945, Ninety-Six, South Carolina

Nikky Finney