

On the Subway by Sharon Olds

The boy and I face each other.
His feet are huge, in black sneakers
laced with white in a complex pattern like a
a set of intentional scars. We are stuck on
opposite sides of the car, a couple of
molecules stuck in a rod of light
rapidly moving through darkness. He has the
casual cold look of a mugger,
alert under hooded lids. He is wearing
red, like the inside of the body
exposed. I am wearing dark fur, the
whole skin of an animal taken and
used. I look at his raw face,
he looks at my fur coat, and I didn't
know if I am in his power-
he could take my coat so easily, my
briefcase, my life-
of if he is in my power, the way I am
living off his life, eating the steak
he does not eat, as if I am taking
the food from his mouth. And he is black
and I am white, and without meaning or
trying to I must profit from his darkness,
the way he absorbs the murderous beams of the
nation's heart, as black cotton
absorbs the heat of the sun and holds it. There is
no way to know how easy this
white skin makes my life, this
life he could take so easily and
break across his knee like a stick the way
his own back is being broken, the
rob of his soul that at birth was dark and
fluid and rich as the heart of a seedling
ready to thrust up into any available light.

<http://www.mrbauld.com/oldspoems.html>