

**Men**  
**by Maya Angelou**

When I was young, I used to  
Watch behind the curtains  
As men walked up and down the street. Wino men, old men.  
Young men sharp as mustard.  
See them. Men are always  
Going somewhere.  
They knew I was there. Fifteen  
Years old and starving for them.  
Under my window, they would pause,  
Their shoulders high like the  
Breasts of a young girl,  
Jacket tails slapping over  
Those behinds,  
Men.

One day they hold you in the  
Palms of their hands, gentle, as if you  
Were the last raw egg in the world. Then  
They tighten up. Just a little. The  
First squeeze is nice. A quick hug.  
Soft into your defenselessness. A little  
More. The hurt begins. Wrench out a  
Smile that slides around the fear. When the  
Air disappears,  
Your mind pops, exploding fiercely, briefly,  
Like the head of a kitchen match. Shattered.  
It is your juice  
That runs down their legs. Staining their shoes.  
When the earth rights itself again,  
And taste tries to return to the tongue,  
Your body has slammed shut. Forever.  
No keys exist.

Then the window draws full upon  
Your mind. There, just beyond  
The sway of curtains, men walk.  
Knowing something.  
Going someplace.  
But this time, I will simply  
Stand and watch.

Maybe.