

A cold wind blows to
burden the city



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ostensibly, the Ann Petry's novel *The Street* describes the work's windy urban setting and introduces the protagonist Lutie Johnson and her desire to find an apartment that suits her needs. On a deeper level, this novel portrays the ever-present and all-encompassing challenges of life in the city as well as the perseverance necessary to overcome this struggle. Through sensory language and diction, the image of a personified wind exemplifies the harshness of city life, indirectly characterizing Lutie Johnson as a determined and patient individual.

The speaker's strong diction personifies the wind as the city's mischievous and aggressive antagonist. There is not a single moment of comfort with this "cold November wind" (1). From the very beginning, it is mercilessly "blowing through 116th street" (1-2) and "[driving] most of the people off the street in the block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues" (5-7). It raucously "[rattles] the tops of garbage cans, [sucks] window shades out through the top of opened windows, and [sets] them flapping" (2-4), the violent verbs implying the wind's power and the city's inhospitable nature. As a result, "hurried pedestrians have to "[bend] double in an effort to offer the least possible exposed surface" (8-9) to the "barrages of paper" (17) that "swirled into [their] faces" (17). It even attacked "chicken bones and pork-chop bones" (19-20), which connote death. The wind's affectionless acts substantiate the city's cruel and uncomfortable atmosphere.

In the same way, the detailed imagery of the wind's indiscriminate attacks make it a symbol of the universality of the hardships of city life. Although the excerpt focuses on Lutie Johnson's response to the wind's torture, she is not the only one with conflict with the wind; rather, this is a struggle shared

among all, for no person or thing is safe from its “ violent assault” (9). The wind finds “ every scrap of paper along the street” (10) no matter how big or how small. It attacks “ theater throwaways, announcements of dances and lodge meetings...heavy waxed paper...thinner waxed paper...old envelopes, newspapers” (11-15), the asyndeton of these objects representing the wind’s rapidity and randomness. The “ dirt and dust and grime on the sidewalk” that the wind lifts up make breathing, seeing, and walking difficult for innocent pedestrians, the polysyndeton of these obstructions reflecting the victims’ consequently slower pace. Furthermore, the wind toys with and bullies the cityfolk, wrapping “ newspaper around their feet entangling them until the people cursed...stamped...kicked” (28-29) and “ were forced to stoop and dislodge the paper” (30) just so that the wind could grab “ their hats, [pry] their scarves from around their necks, [stick] fingers inside their coat collars, [blow] their coats away from their bodies” (31-34). Just as there is no privacy or break from the harshness of city-life, the wind does not relent as it invades people’s clothes and makes it difficult to walk through the streets.

Ironically, the wind’s determination to inconvenience the city’s inhabitants emphasizes Lutie Johnson’s own tenacity and adaptability in the face of adversity. Just like the wind “ took time to rush into doorways and areaways” (18-19), Lutie patiently waited until the wind “ held [the sign] still for an instant” (56-57), so that she could discover if the advertised apartment met her needs. Although at times she “ felt suddenly naked and bald” (36-37) when the wind would lift her “ hair away from the back of her neck” (35-36), touch “ the back of her neck and [explore] the sides of her head” (39-40),

she endured the wind's abuse, so she could accomplish her mission.

Moreover, despite being a woman of mettle, she remained undaunted by the sign whose “ metal had slowly rusted, making a dark red stain like blood” (54-55), this pun possibly foreshadowing an unpleasant future if she remains in the city. While the wind “ did everything it could to discourage the people walking along the street” (21-22), Lutie did everything she could to find a suitable apartment, so her persistence is rewarded with a “ reasonable” (61) apartment with “ three rooms, steam heat, parquet floors, respectable tenants” (60-61). The opposition between the wind's impish acts and Lutie Johnson's persistence display how one can build character through hardship.

Through diction, imagery, personification, and indirect characterization, this excerpt provides a pessimistic and discouraging yet realistic view of life in the city. Constantly overwhelmed by people and the stress of daily activity, the city provides very little privacy or solace. However, as shown by the city people's, and particularly, Lutie Johnson's constant battles with the wind, this struggle is an integral part of an urban lifestyle that may require great determination but can yield worthwhile rewards.