



POETRY

LANGSTON HUGHES

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FAIRIES

Out of the dust of dreams,
Fairies weave their garments;
Out of the purple and rose of old memories,
They make rainbow wings.
No wonder we find them such marvellous things!

WINTER SWEETNESS

The little house is sugar,
 Its roof with snow is piled,
And from its tiny window,
 Peeps a maple-sugar child.

SIGNS OF SPRING

Bright, jolly sunshine and clear blue skies,
Green trees and gardens and gay butterflies,
Soft little winds that balmy blow,
A golden moon with a love light glow,
And the music of bird songs, blithe and clear,
Are the things which tell us that Spring is here.

AN APRIL RAIN SONG

Let the rain kiss you.
Let the rain beat upon your head
With silver liquid drops.
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
With its pitty-pat.
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in the gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep tune
On our roof at night,
And I love the rain.

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

(To W. E. B. DuBois)

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of
human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to
New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the
sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

AUNT SUE'S STORIES

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
And tells him stories.

Black slaves
Working in the hot sun,
And black slaves
Walking in the dewy night,
And black slaves
Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
Mingle themselves softly
In the flow of old Aunt Sue's voice,
Mingle themselves softly
In the dark shadows that cross and recross
Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue
Never got her stories out of any book at all,
But that they came
Right out of her own life.

And the dark-faced child is quiet
Of a summer night

Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.

THE LAMENT OF A VANQUISHED BEAU

Willy is a silly boy,
Willy is a cad.
Willy is a foolish kid,
Sense he never had.
Yet all the girls like Willy—
Why I cannot see—
He even took my best girl
Right away from me.

I asked him did he want to fight,
But all he did was grin
And answer, "Don't be guilty
Of such a brutal sin."
Oh, Willy's sure a silly boy,
He really is a cad,
Because he took the only girl
That I 'most ever had.

Her hair's so long and pretty
And her eyes are very gay;
I guess that she likes Willy
'Cause he's handsome, too, they say.
But for me, he's not good looking;
And he sure has made me mad,
'Cause he went and took the only girl
That I 'most ever had.

MISTER SANDMAN

The Sandman walks abroad tonight,
With his canvas sack o' dreams filled tight.

Over the roofs of the little town,
The golden face of the moon looks down.

Each Mary and Willy and Cora and Ned
Is sound asleep in some cozy bed,

When the Sandman opens his magic sack
To select the dreams from his wonder pack.

"Ah," says the Sandman, "To this little girl
I'll send a dream like a precious pearl."

So to Mary Jane, who's been good all day,
A fairy comes in her sleep to play;

But for Corinne Ann, who teased the cat,
There's a horrid dream of a horrid rat,

And the greedy boy, with his stomach too full,
Has a bad, bad dream of a raging bull;

While for tiny babes, a few days old,
Come misty dreams, all rose and gold.

And for every girl and every boy

The Sandman has dreams that can please or annoy.

When at pink-white dawn, with his night's work done,
He takes the road toward the rising sun,

He goes straight on without a pause
To his house in the land of Santa Claus.

But at purple night-fall he's back again
To distribute his dreams, be it moon light or rain;

And good little children get lovely sleep toys;
But woe to the bad little girls and boys!

For those who'd have dreams that are charming and sweet,
Must be good in the day and not stuff when they eat,

'Cause old Mister Sandman, abroad each night,
Has a dream in his sack to fit each child just right.

AUTUMN THOUGHT

Flowers are happy in summer;
In autumn they die and are blown away.

 Dry and withered,
Their petals dance on the wind,
Like little brown butterflies.

THANKSGIVING TIME

When the night winds whistle through the trees and blow the crisp
brown leaves a-crackling down,
When the autumn moon is big and yellow-orange and round,
When old Jack Frost is sparkling on the ground,
It's Thanksgiving time!

When the pantry jars are full of mince-meat and the shelves are
laden with sweet spices for a cake,
When the butcher man sends up a turkey nice and fat to bake,
When the stores are crammed with everything ingenious cooks can
make,
It's Thanksgiving time!

When the gales of coming winter outside your window howl,
When the air is sharp and cheery so it drives away your scowl,
When one's appetite craves turkey and will have no other fowl,
It's Thanksgiving time!

THE NEGRO

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:

The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me now in Texas.

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

QUESTION

When the old junk man Death
Comes to gather up our bodies
And toss them into the sack of oblivion,
I wonder if he will find
The corpse of a white multi-millionaire
Worth more pennies of eternity,
Than the black torso of
A Negro cotton-picker?

MEXICAN MARKET WOMAN

This ancient hag
Who sits upon the ground
Selling her scanty wares
Day in, day round,
Has known high wind-swept mountains,
And the sun has made
Her skin so brown.

THE NEW MOON

There's a new, young moon riding the hills tonight;

There's a sprightly, young moon exploring the clouds;

There's a half-shy, young moon veiling her face like a virgin,
Waiting for her lover.

TO A DEAD FRIEND

The moon still sends its mellow light
Through the purple blackness of the night;
The morning star is palely bright
 Before the dawn.

The sun still shines just as before;
The rose still grows beside my door,
 But you have gone.

The sky is blue and the robin sings;
The butterflies dance on rainbow wings
 Though I am sad.

In all the earth no joy can be;
Happiness comes no more to me,
 For you are dead.

MY LOVES

I love to see the big white moon,
A-shining in the sky;
I love to see the little stars,
When the shadow clouds go by.

I love the rain drops falling
On my roof-top in the night;
I love the soft wind's sighing,
Before the dawn's gray light.

I love the deepness of the blue,
In my Lord's heaven above;
But better than all these things I think,
I love my lady love.

THE SOUTH

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
 Beast-strong,
 Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
 Cotton and the moon,
 Warmth, earth, warmth,
 The sky, the sun, the stars,
 The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
 Passionate, cruel,
 Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
 That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
 So now I seek the North—
 The cold-faced North,
 For she, they say,
 Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children

May escape the spell of the South.

LAUGHERS

Dream singers,
Story tellers,
Dancers,
Loud laughs in the hands of Fate—

My people.

Dish-washers,
Elevator-boys,
Ladies' maids,
Crap-shooters,
Cooks,
Waiters,
Jazzers,
Nurses of babies,
Loaders of ships,
Rounders,
Number writers,
Comedians in vaudeville
And band-men in circuses—
Dream-singers all—

My people.

Story-tellers all—

My people.

Dancers—

God! What dancers!

Singers—

God! What singers!

Singers and dancers,

Dancers and laughs.

Laughs?

Yes, laughs... laughs... laughs—

Loud-mouthed laughs in the hands

Of Fate.

DANSE AFRICAINE

The low beating of the tom-toms,
The slow beating of the tom-toms,
 Low ... slow
 Slow ... low—
 Stirs your blood.
 Dance!
A night-veiled girl
 Whirls softly into a
 Circle of light.
 Whirls softly ... slowly,
Like a wisp of smoke around the fire—
 And the tom-toms beat,
 And the tom-toms beat,
And the low beating of the tom-toms
 Stirs your blood.

AFTER MANY SPRINGS

Now,
In June,
When the night is a vast softness
Filled with blue stars,
And broken shafts of moon-glimmer
Fall upon the earth,
Am I too old to see the fairies dance?
I cannot find them any more.

BEGGAR BOY

What is there within this beggar lad
That I can neither hear nor feel nor see,
That I can neither know nor understand
And still it calls to me?

Is not he but a shadow in the sun—
A bit of clay, brown, ugly, given life?
And yet he plays upon his flute a wild free tune
As if Fate had not bled him with her knife!

SONG FOR A BANJO DANCE

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake your brown feet, chile,
Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake 'em swift and wil'—

Get way back, honey,
Do that low-down step.

Walk on over, darling,

Now! Come out

With your left.

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake 'em, honey chile.

Sun's going down this evening—
Might never rise no mo'.
The sun's going down this very night—
Might never rise no mo'—
So dance with swift feet, honey,
(The banjo's sobbing low)
Dance with swift feet, honey—
Might never dance no mo'.

Shake your brown feet, Liza,
Shake 'em, Liza, chile,
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The music's soft and wil')
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The banjo's sobbing low)

The sun's going down this very night—
Might never rise no mo'.

MOTHER TO SON

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare;
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark,
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back;
Don't you sit down on the steps,
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard;
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

WHEN SUE WEARS RED

When Susanna Jones wears red
Her face is like an ancient cameo
Turned brown by the ages.

Come with a blast of trumpets,
Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.

Blow trumpets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like pain.

Sweet silver trumpets,
Jesus!

A BLACK PIERROT

I am a black Pierrot:

She did not love me,
So I crept away into the night
And the night was black, too.

I am a black Pierrot:

She did not love me,
So I wept until the red dawn
Dripped blood over the eastern hills
And my heart was bleeding, too.

I am a black Pierrot:

She did not love me,
So with my once gay-colored soul
Shrunken like a balloon without air,
I went forth in the morning
To seek a new brown love.

JUSTICE

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise.
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once, perhaps, were eyes.

MONOTONY

Today like yesterday
Tomorrow like today;
The drip, drip, drip,
 Of monotony
Is wearing my life away;
Today like yesterday,
Tomorrow like today.

DREAMS

Hold fast to dreams, my son,
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams, O boy,
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

POEM

FOR THE PORTRAIT OF AN AFRICAN BOY AFTER THE MANNER OF GAUGUIN

All the tom-toms of the jungles beat in my blood,
And all the wild hot moons of the jungles shine in my soul.
I am afraid of this civilization—
 So hard,
 So strong,
 So cold.

OUR LAND

POEM FOR A DECORATIVE PANEL

We should have a land of sun,
Of gorgeous sun,
And a land of fragrant water
Where the twilight
Is a soft bandanna handkerchief
Of rose and gold,
And not this land where life is cold.

We should have a land of trees,
Of tall thick trees
Bowed down with chattering parrots
Brilliant as the day,
And not this land where birds are grey.

Ah, we should have a land of joy,
Of love and joy and wine and song,
And not this land where joy is wrong.

Oh, sweet, away!
Ah, my beloved one, away!

THE LAST FEAST OF BELSHAZZAR

The jeweled entrails of pomegranates bled on the marble floor.
The jewel-heart of a virgin broke at the golden door.
The laughter of a drunken lord hid the sob of a silken whore.

Mene,
Wrote a strange hand,
Mene Tekel Upharsin—
And Death stood at the door.

YOUNG PROSTITUTE

Her dark brown face
Is like a withered flower
On a broken stem.
Those kind come cheap in Harlem
So they say.

JAZZONIA

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

SHADOWS

We run,
We run,
We cannot stand these shadows!
Give us the sun.

We were not made
For shade,
For heavy shade,
And narrow space of stifling air
That these white things have made.
We run,
Oh, God,
We run!
We must break through these shadows,
We must find the sun.

CABARET

Does a jazz-band ever sob?
They say a jazz-band's gay.
Yet as the vulgar dancers whirled
And the wan night wore away,
One said she heard the jazz-band sob
When the little dawn was grey.

WINTER MOON

How thin and sharp is the moon tonight!
How thin and sharp and ghostly white
Is the slim curved crook of the moon tonight!

YOUNG SINGER

One who sings "*chansons vulgaires*"
In a Harlem cellar
Where the jazz-band plays
From dark to dawn
Would not understand
Should you tell her
That she is like a nymph
For some wild faun.

PRAYER MEETING

Glory! Halleluiah!
De dawn's a-comin'!
Glory! Halleluiah!
De dawn's a-comin'!
A black old woman croons
In the amen-corner of the
Ebecanezer Baptist Church.
A black old woman croons—
De dawn's a-comin'!

POEM

THE NIGHT IS BEAUTIFUL

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

THE LITTLE FRIGHTENED CHILD

A little southern colored child comes to a northern school and is afraid to play with the white children.

At first they are nice to him, but finally they taunt him and call him "nigger."

The colored children hate him after a while, too.

He is a little dark boy with a round black face and a white embroidered collar.

One might make a story out of this tiny frightened child.

MY BELOVED

Shall I make a record of your beauty?

Shall I write words about you?

Shall I make a poem that will live a thousand years and paint you in
the poem?

THE WHITE ONES

I do not hate you,
For your faces are beautiful, too.
I do not hate you,
Your faces are whirling lights of loveliness and splendor, too.
Yet why do you torture me,
O, white strong ones,
Why do you torture me?

GRANT PARK

The haunting face of poverty,
The hands of pain,
The rough, gargantuan feet of fate,
The nails of conscience in a soul
That didn't want to do wrong—
You can see what they've done
To brothers of mine
In one back-yard of Fifth Avenue.
You can see what they've done
To brothers of mine—
Sleepers on iron benches
Behind the Library in Grant Park.

GODS

The ivory gods,
And the ebony gods,
And the gods of diamond and jade,
Sit silently on their temple shelves
While the people
Are afraid.
Yet the ivory gods,
And the ebony gods,
And the gods of diamond-jade,
Are only silly puppet gods
That the people themselves
Have made.

FIRE-CAUGHT

The gold moth did not love him
So, gorgeous, she flew away.
But the gray moth circled the flame
 Until the break of day.
And then, with wings like a dead desire,
She fell, fire-caught, into the fire.

SONG FOR A SUICIDE

Oh, the sea is deep
And a knife is sharp
And a poison acid burns;
But they all bring rest
In a deep, long sleep
For which the tired soul yearns—
They all bring rest in a nothingness
From where no road returns.

PRAYER FOR A WINTER NIGHT

O, Great God of Cold and Winter,
Wrap the earth in an icy blanket
And freeze the poor in their beds.
All those who haven't enough cover
To keep them warm,
Nor food enough to keep them strong—
Freeze, dear God.
Let their limbs grow stiff
And their hearts cease to beat,
Then tomorrow
They'll wake up in some rich kingdom of nowhere
Where nothingness is everything and
Everything is nothingness.

LAMENT FOR DARK PEOPLES

I was a red man one time,
But the white men came.
I was a black man, too,
But the white men came.

They drove me out of the forest.
They took me away from the jungles.
I lost my trees.
I lost my silver moons.

Now they've caged me
In the circus of civilization.
Now I herd with the many—
Caged in the circus of civilization.

FASCINATION

Her teeth are as white as the meat of an apple,
Her lips are like dark ripe plums.

I love her.

Her hair is a midnight mass, a dusky aurora.

I love her.

And because her skin is the brown of an oak leaf in autumn, but a
softer color,

I want to kiss her.

POEM

WE HAVE TOMORROW

We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame.

Yesterday, a night-gone thing,
A sun-down name.

And dawn-today
Broad arch above the road we came.

We march.

MAMMY

I'm waiting for ma mammy—
She is Death.

Say it very softly.
Say it very slowly if you choose.

I'm waiting for ma mammy—
Death.

DREAM VARIATION

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me—
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! whirl! whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening....
A tall, slim tree....
Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.

AFRAID

We cry among the skyscrapers
As our ancestors
Cried among the palms in Africa
Because we are alone,
It is night,
And we're afraid.

SUBWAY FACE

That I have been looking
For you all my life
Does not matter to you.
You do not know.

You never knew.
Nor did I.
Now you take the Harlem train uptown;
I take a local down.

A SONG TO A NEGRO WASH-WOMAN

Oh, wash-woman,
Arms elbow-deep in white suds,
Soul washed clean,
Clothes washed clean—
I have many songs to sing you
Could I but find the words.

Was it four o'clock or six o'clock on a winter afternoon, I saw you
wringing out the last shirt in Miss White Lady's kitchen? Was it four
o'clock or six o'clock? I don't remember.

But I know, at seven one spring morning you were on Vermont Street
with a bundle in your arms going to wash clothes.
And I know I've seen you in a New York subway train in the late
afternoon coming home from washing clothes.

Yes, I know you, wash-woman.
I know how you send your children to school, and high-school, and
even college.
I know how you work and help your man when times are hard.
I know how you build your house up from the wash-tub and call it
home.
And how you raise your churches from white suds for the service of
the Holy God.

And I've seen you singing, wash-woman. Out in the backyard garden
under the apple trees, singing, hanging white clothes on long lines

in the sunshine.

And I've seen you in church a Sunday morning singing, praising your Jesus, because some day you're going to sit on the right hand of the Son of God and forget you ever were a wash-woman. And the aching back and the bundles of clothes will be unremembered then.

Yes, I've seen you singing.

And for you,

O singing wash-woman,

For you, singing little brown woman,

Singing strong black woman,

Singing tall yellow woman,

Arms deep in white suds,

Soul clean,

Clothes clean—

For you I have many songs to make

Could I but find the words.

THE POPPY FLOWER

A wild poppy-flower
 Withered and died.
The day-people laughed
But the night-people cried.
A wild poppy-flower
 Withered and died.

TROUBLED WOMAN

She stands
In the quiet darkness,
This troubled woman,
Bowed by
Weariness and pain,
Like an
Autumn flower
In the frozen rain.
Like a
Wind-blown autumn flower
That never lifts its head
Again.

JOHANNESBURG MINES

In the Johannesburg Mines
There are 240,000
Native Africans working.
What kind of poem
Would you
Make out of that?
240,000 natives
Working in the
Johannesburg mines.

TO CERTAIN INTELLECTUALS

You are no friend of mine
For I am poor,
Black,
Ignorant and slow—
Not your kind,
You yourself
Have told me so—
No friend of mine.

STEEL MILLS

The mills
That grind and grind,
That grind out new steel
And grind away the lives
Of men—
In the sunset
Their stacks
Are great black silhouettes
Against the sky.
In the dawn
They belch red fire.
The mills—
Grinding out new steel,
Old men.

NEGRO DANCER

“Me an’ ma baby’s
Got two mo’ ways,
Two mo’ ways to do de buck!
 Da, da,
 Da, da, da!
Two mo’ ways to do de buck!”

Soft light on the tables,
Music gay,
Brown-skin steppers
In a cabaret.

White folks, laugh!
White folks, pray!

“Me an’ ma baby’s
Got two mo’ ways,
Two mo’ ways to do de buck!”

LIARS

It is we who are liars:
The Pretenders-to-be who are not
And the Pretenders-not-to-be who are.
It is we who use words
As screens for thoughts
And weave dark garments
To cover the naked body
Of the too white Truth.
It is we with the civilized souls
Who are liars.

SEA CHARM

Sea charm
The sea's own children
Do not understand.
They know
But that the sea is strong
Like God's hand.
They know
But that sea wind is sweet
Like God's breath,
And that the sea holds
A wide, deep death.

THE DREAM KEEPER

Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamers.
Bring me all of your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too rough fingers
Of the world.

SONG

LOVELY, DARK, AND LONELY ONE

Lovely, dark, and lonely one,
Bare your bosom to the sun,
Do not be afraid of light
You who are a child of night.

Open wide your arms to life,
Whirl in the wind of pain and strife,
Face the wall with the dark closed gate,
Beat with bare, brown fists
And wait.

POEM

BEING WALKERS WITH THE DAWN AND MORNING

Being walkers with the dawn and morning
Walkers with the sun and morning,
We are not afraid of night,
Nor days of gloom,
Nor darkness,
Being walkers with the sun and morning.

AN EARTH SONG

It's an earth song—
And I've been waiting long for an earth song.
It's a spring song—
And I've been waiting long for a spring song.
 Strong as the shoots of a new plant
 Strong as the bursting of new buds
 Strong as the coming of the first child from its mother's womb.
It's an earth song,
A body song,
A spring song—
I have been waiting long for this spring song.

I Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

DRAMA FOR WINTER NIGHT

(Fifth Avenue)

You can't sleep here,
My good man,
You can't sleep here.
This is the house of God.

The usher opens the church door and he goes out.

You can't sleep in this car, old top,
Not here.
If Jones found you
He'd give you to the cops.
Get-the-hell out now,
This ain't home.
You can't stay here.

The chauffeur opens the door and he gets out.

Lord! You can't let a man lie in the streets like this.
Find an officer quick.
Send for an ambulance.
Maybe he is sick but
He can't die on this corner,
Not here!
He can't die here.

Death opens a door.

Oh, God,

Lemme git by St. Peter.

Lemme sit down on the steps of your throne.

Lemme rest somewhere.

What did yuh say, God?

What did yuh say?

You can't sleep here....

Bums can't stay....

The man's raving.

Get him to the hospital quick.

He's attracting a crowd.

He can't die on this corner.

No, no, not here.

GOD TO HUNGRY CHILD

Hungry child,
I didn't make this world for you.
You didn't buy any stock in my railroad.
You didn't invest in my corporation.
Where are your shares in standard oil?
I made the world for the rich
And the will-be-rich
And the have-always-been-rich.
Not for you,
Hungry child.

POEM TO A DEAD SOLDIER

“Death is a whore who consorts with all men.”

Ice-cold passion
And a bitter breath
Adorned the bed
Of Youth and Death—
Youth, the young soldier
Who went to the wars
And embraced white Death,
The vilest of whores.

Now we spread roses
Over your tomb—
We who sent you
To your doom.
Now we make soft speeches
And sob soft cries
And throw soft flowers
And utter soft lies.

We mould you in metal
And carve you in stone,
Not daring make statue
Of your dead flesh and bone,
Not daring to mention

The bitter breath
Nor the ice-cold passion
Of your love-night with Death.

We make soft speeches.
We sob soft cries
We throw soft flowers,
And utter soft lies.
And you who were young
When you went to the wars
Have lost your youth now
With the vilest of whores.

PARK BENCHING

I've sat on the park benches in Paris
Hungry.
I've sat on the park benches in New York
Hungry.
And I've said:
I want a job.
I want work.
And I've been told:
There are no jobs.
There is no work.
So I've sat on the park benches
Hungry.
Mid-winter,
Hungry days,
No jobs,
No work.

RISING WATERS

To you
Who are the
Foam on the sea
And not the sea—
What of the jagged rocks,
And the waves themselves,
And the force of the mounting waters?
You are
But foam on the sea,
You rich ones—
Not the sea.

THE WEARY BLUES

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
 He did a lazy sway....
 He did a lazy sway....
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.
 O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
 Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.
 O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
 “Ain't got nobody in all this world,
 Ain't got nobody but ma self.
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
 And put ma troubles on the shelf.”
Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more—
 “I got the Weary Blues
 And I can't be satisfied.
 Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied—

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

PRAYER

I ask you this:
Which way to go?
I ask you this:
Which sin to bear?
Which crown to put
Upon my hair?
I do not know,
Lord God,
I do not know.

POEM

To F. S.

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began—
I loved my friend.

AMERICA

Little dark baby,
Little Jew baby,
Little outcast,
America is seeking the stars,
America is seeking tomorrow.
You are America.
I am America
America—the dream,
America—the vision.
America—the star-seeking I.
Out of yesterday
The chains of slavery;
Out of yesterday,
The ghettos of Europe;
Out of yesterday,
The poverty and pain of the old, old world,
The building and struggle of this new one,
We come
You and I,
Seeking the stars.
You and I,
You of the blue eyes
And the blond hair,
I of the dark eyes
And the crinkly hair.
You and I
Offering hands

Being brothers,
Being one,
Being America.
You and I.
And I?
Who am I?
You know me:
I am Crispus Attucks at the Boston Tea Party;
Jimmy Jones in the ranks of the last black troops marching for
democracy.
I am Sojourner Truth preaching and praying for the goodness of this
wide, wide land;
Today's black mother bearing tomorrow's America.
Who am I?
You know me,
Dream of my dreams,
I am America.
I am America seeking the stars.
America—
Hoping, praying
Fighting, dreaming.
Knowing
There are stains
On the beauty of my democracy,
I want to be clean.
I want to grovel
No longer in the mire.
I want to reach always
After stars.
Who am I?
I am the ghetto child,
I am the dark baby,
I am you
And the blond tomorrow
And yet
I am my one sole self,
America seeking the stars.

TO CERTAIN “BROTHERS”

You sicken me with lies,
With truthful lies.
And with your pious faces,
And your wide, out-stretched, mock-welcome, Christian hands.
While underneath
Is dirt and ugliness,
And rotting hearts,
And wild hyenas howling
In your soul's waste lands.

SUICIDE'S NOTE

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.

FANTASY IN PURPLE

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.
And let the choir sing a stormy song
To drown the rattle of my dying breath.

Beat the drums of tragedy for me,
And let the white violins whirl thin and slow,
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun
To go with me
 to the darkness
 where I go.

TO MIDNIGHT NAN AT LEROY'S

Strut and wiggle,
Shameless gal.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your pal.

Hear dat music. ...
Jungle night.
Hear dat music. ...
And the moon was white.

Sing your Blues song,
Pretty baby.
You want lovin'
And you don't mean maybe.

Jungle lover. ...
Night black boy. ...
Two against the moon
And the moon was joy.

Strut and wiggle,
Shameless Nan.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your man.

YOUNG BRIDGE

They say she died—
Although I do not know,
They say she died of grief
And in the earth-dark arms of Death
Sought calm relief,
And rest from pain of love
In loveless sleep.

THE JESTER

In one hand
I hold tragedy
And in the other
Comedy—
Masks for the soul.
Laugh with me.
You would laugh!
Weep with me.
You would weep!
Tears are my laughter.
Laughter is my pain.
Cry at my grinning mouth,
If you will.
Laugh at my sorrow's reign.
I am the Black Jester,
The dumb clown of the world,
The booted, booted fool of silly men.
Once I was wise.
Shall I be wise again?

SOLEDAD

A CUBAN PORTRAIT

The shadows
Of too many nights of love
Have fallen beneath your eyes.
Your eyes,
So full of pain and passion,
So full of lies.
So full of pain and passion,
Soledad,
So deeply scarred,
So still with silent cries.

POEM

TO THE BLACK BELOVED

Ah,
My black one,
Thou art not beautiful
Yet thou hast
A loveliness
Surpassing beauty.

Oh,
My black one,
Thou art not good
Yet thou hast
A purity
Surpassing goodness.

Ah,
My black one,
Thou art not luminous
Yet an altar of jewels,
An altar of shimmering jewels,
Would pale in the light
Of thy darkness,
Pale in the light
Of thy nightness.

CROSS

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

SUMMER NIGHT

The sounds
Of the Harlem night
Drop one by one into stillness.
The last player-piano is closed.
The last victrola ceases with the
“Jazz Boy Blues.”

The last crying baby sleeps
And the night becomes
Still as a whispering heartbeat.

I toss
Without rest in the darkness,
Weary as the tired night,
My soul
Empty as the silence,
Empty with a vague,
Aching emptiness,
Desiring,
Needing someone,
Something.

I toss without rest
In the darkness
Until the new dawn,
Wan and pale,
Descends like a white mist
Into the court-yard.

DISILLUSION

I would be simple again,
Simple and clean
Like the earth,
Like the rain,
Nor ever know,
Dark Harlem,
The wild laughter
Of your mirth
Nor the salt tears
Of your pain.
Be kind to me,
Oh, great dark city.
Let me forget.
I will not come
To you again.

JAZZ BAND IN A PARISIAN CABARET

Play that thing,
Jazz band!
Play it for the lords and ladies,
For the dukes and counts,
For the whores and gigolos,
For the American millionaires,
And the school teachers
Out for a spree.
Play it,
Jazz band!
You know that tune
That laughs and cries at the same time.
You know it.
 May I?
 Mais oui.
 Mein Gott!
 Parece una rumba.
Play it, jazz band!
You've got seven languages to speak in
And then some,
Even if you do come from Georgia.
 Can I go home wid yuh, sweetie?
 Sure.

MINSTREL MAN

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long.

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry,
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die.

NUDE YOUNG DANCER

What jungle tree have you slept under,
Midnight dancer of the jazzy hour?
What great forest has hung its perfume
Like a sweet veil about your bower?

What jungle tree have you slept under,
Night-dark girl of the swaying hips?
What star-white moon has been your mother?
To what clean boy have you offered your lips?

SONGS TO THE DARK VIRGIN

I

Would
That I were a jewel,
A shattered jewel,
That all my shining brilliants
Might fall at thy feet,
Thou dark one.

II

Would
That I were a garment,
A shimmering, silken garment,
That all my folds
Might wrap about thy body,
Absorb thy body,
Hold and hide thy body,
Thou dark one.

III

Would
That I were a flame,
But one sharp, leaping flame
To annihilate thy body,
Thou dark one.

YOUNG SAILOR

He carries
His own strength
And his own laughter,
His own today
And his own hereafter—
This strong young sailor
Of the wide seas.

What is money for?
To spend, he says.
And wine?
To drink.
And women?
To love.
And today?
For joy.
And tomorrow?
For joy.
And the green sea
For strength,
And the brown land
For laughter.
And nothing hereafter.

Joy

I went to look for Joy,
Slim, dancing Joy,
Gay, laughing Joy,
Bright-eyed Joy—
And I found her
Driving the butcher's cart
In the arms of the butcher boy!
Such company, such company,
As keeps this young nymph, Joy!

STRANGE HURT SHE KNEW

In times of stormy weather
She felt queer pain
That said,
“You’ll find rain better
Than shelter from the rain.”

Days filled with fiery sunshine
Strange hurt she knew
That made
Her seek the burning sunlight
Rather than the shade.

In months of snowy winter
When cozy houses hold,
She’d break
Down doors to wander
Naked through the cold.

STAR SEEKER

I have been a seeker
Seeking a flaming star,
And the flame-white star
Has burned my hands
Even from afar.

Walking in a dream-dead world
Circled by iron bars
I sought a singing star's
Wild beauty.—
Now behold my scars.

LULLABY

My little dark baby,
My little earth-thing,
My little love-one,
What shall I sing
For your lullaby?
 Stars,
 Stars,
 A necklace of stars
 Winding the night.

My little black baby,
My dark body's baby,
What shall I sing
For your lullaby?
 Moon,
 Moon,
 Great diamond moon,
 Kissing the night.

Oh, little dark baby,
Night black baby,
 Stars, stars,
 Moon,
 Night stars,
 Moon,
For your sleep-song lullaby.

SALOME

There
Is no sweetness
In the kiss
Of a mouth
Unwarm and dead,
And even passion's
Flaming bliss
Turns ashen
In a charnel bed.
Salome
Of the wine-red lips,
What would you with death's head?

THE RING

Love is the master of the ring
And life a circus tent.
What is this silly song you sing?
Love is the master of the ring.

I am afraid!
Afraid of Love
And of Love's bitter whip!
Afraid,
Afraid of Love
And Love's sharp, stinging whip.

What is this silly song you sing?
Love is the master of the ring.

MIDWINTER BLUES

In de middle of de winter,
Snow all over de ground.
In de middle of de winter,
Snow all over de ground—
'Twas de night befo' Christmas
Ma good man turned me down.

Don' know's I'd mind his goin'
But he left me when de coal was low.
Don' know's I'd mind his goin'
But he left when de coal was low.
Now, if a man loves a woman
That ain't no time to go.

He told me that he loved me
But he must a been tellin' a lie.
He told me that he loved me.
He must a been tellin' a lie.
But he's the only man I'll
Love till de day I die.

I'm gonna buy me a rose bud
An' plant it at ma back door.
Gonna buy me a rose bud
And plant it at ma back door,
So when I'm dead they
Won't need no flowers from de store.

GYPSY MAN

Ma man's a gypsy
Cause he never does come home.
Ma man's a gypsy—
He never does come home.
I'm gonna be a gypsy woman
Fer I can't stay here alone.

Once I was in Memphis,
I mean Tennessee.
Once I was in Memphis,
Said Tennessee.
But I had to leave cause
Nobody there was good to me.

I met a yellow papa,
He took ma last thin dime.
Met a yellow papa,
He took ma last thin dime.
I give it to him cause I loved him
But I'll have mo' sense next time.

Love, Oh, love is
Such a strange disease.
Love, Oh, love is
Such a strange disease.
When it hurts yo' heart you
Sho can't find no ease.

MA MAN

When ma man looks at me
He knocks me off ma feet.
When ma man looks at me
He knocks me off ma feet.
He's got those 'lectric-shockin' eyes an'
De way he shocks me sho is sweet.

He kin play a banjo.
Lordy, he kin plunk, plunk, plunk.
He kin play a banjo.
I mean plunk, plunk... plunk, plunk.
He plays good when he's sober
An' better, better, better when he's drunk.

Eagle-rockin',
Daddy, eagle-rock with me.
Eagle rockin',
Come an' eagle-rock with me.
Honey baby,
Eagle-rockish as I kin be!

LOVE SONG FOR LUCINDA

Love
Is a ripe plum
Growing on a purple tree.
Taste it once
And the spell of its enchantment
Will never let you be.

Love
Is a bright star
Glowing in far Southern skies.
Look too hard
And its burning flame
Will always hurt your eyes.

Love
Is a high mountain
Stark in a windy sky.
If you
Would never lose your breath
Do not climb too high.

TEACHER

Ideals are like the stars,
Always above our reach.
Humbly I tried to learn,
More humbly did I teach.

On all honest virtues
I sought to keep firm hold.
I wanted to be a good man
Though I pinched my soul.

But now I lie beneath cool loam
Forgetting every dream;
And in this narrow bed of earth
No lights gleam.

In this narrow bed of earth
Star-dust never scatters,
And I tremble lest the darkness teach
Me that nothing matters.

MINNIE SINGS HER BLUES

Cabaret, cabaret!
That's where ma man an' me go.
Cabaret, cabaret!
That's where we go—
Leaves de snow outside
An' our troubles at de door.

Jazz band, jazz band!
Ma man an' me dance.
When I cuddles up to him
No other gal's got a chance.

Baby, O, Baby,
I'm midnight mad.
If ma daddy didn't love me
It sho would be sad.
If he didn't love me
I'd go away
An' dig me a grave this very day.

Blues... blues!
Blue, blue, blues!
I'd sho have them blues.

LISTEN HERE BLUES

Sweet girls, sweet girls,
Listen here to me.
All you sweet girls,
Listen here to me:
Gin an' whiskey
Kin make you lose yo' 'ginity.

I used to be a good chile,
Lawd, in Sunday School.
Used to be a good chile—
Always in Sunday School,
Till these licker-headed rounders
Made me everbody's fool.

Good girls, good girls,
Listen here to me.
Oh, you good girls,
Better listen to me:
Don't you fool wid no men cause
They'll bring you misery.

FORTUNE TELLER BLUES

I went to de gypsy,
De gypsy took hold o' my hand.
Went to de gypsy,
Gypsy took hold o' my hand.
She looked at me and tole me
Chile, you gonna lose yo' man.

These fortune tellers
Never tell me nothin' kind.
I say fortune tellers
Never tell me nothin' kind.
I'd give a hundred dollars
To de one that would ease my mind.

Cause I'll holler an' scream an'
Fall down on de flo'.
Say I'll holler an' scream an'
Fall down on de flo'.
If my man leaves me
I won't live no mo'.

JUDGMENT DAY

They put ma body in de ground,
Ma soul went flyin' o' de town.

Lord Jesus!

Went flyin' to de stars an' moon
A shoutin' God, I's comin' soon.

O Jesus!

Lord in heaben,
Crown on His head,
Says don't be 'fraid
Cause you ain't dead.

Kind Jesus!

An' now I'm settin' clean an' bright
In de sweet o' ma Lord's sight—
Clean an' bright,
Clean an' bright.

WIDE RIVER

Ma baby lives across de river
An' I ain't got no boat.
She lives across de river,
I ain't got no boat.
I ain't a good swimmer
An' I don't know how to float.

Wide, wide river
'Tween ma love an' me.
Wide, wide river
'Tween ma love an' me.
I never knowed how
Wide a river can be.

Got to cross that river
An' git to ma baby somehow.
Cross that river,
Git to ma baby somehow,
Cause if I don't see ma baby
I'll lay down an' die right now.

HOMESICK BLUES

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Ever time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to de station.
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
Went down to de station.
Heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to de South.

Homesick blues, Lawd,
'S a terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens ma mouth an' laughs.

RUBY BROWN

She was young and beautiful
And golden like the sunshine
That warmed her body.
And because she was colored
Mayville had no place to offer her,
Nor fuel for the clean flame of joy
That tried to burn within her soul.

One day,
Sitting on old Mrs. Latham's back porch
Polishing the silver,
She asked herself two questions
And they ran something like this:
What can a colored girl do
On the money from a white woman's kitchen?
And ain't there any joy in this town?

Now the streets down by the river
Know more about this pretty Ruby Brown,
And the sinister shuttered houses of the bottoms
Hold a yellow girl
Seeking an answer to her questions.
The good church folk do not mention
Her name any more.

But the white men,
Habitués of the high shuttered houses,

Pay more money to her now
Than they ever did before,
When she worked in their kitchens.

FORMULA

Poetry should treat
Of lofty things
Soaring thoughts
And birds with wings.

The Muse of Poetry
Should not know
That roses
In manure grow.

The Muse of Poetry
Should not care
That earthly pain
Is everywhere.

Poetry!
Treats of lofty things:
Soaring thoughts
And birds with wings.

AUTUMN NOTE

The little flowers of yesterday
Have all forgotten May.
The last gold leaf
Has turned to brown.
The last bright day is grey.
The cold of winter comes apace
And you have gone away.

FOR DEAD MIMES

Oh, white-faced mimes,
May rose leaves
Cover you like snow.
And may Pierrette,
The faithful,
Rest forever with Pierrot.

NEW YEAR

The years
Fall like dry leaves
From the top-less tree
Of eternity.
Does it matter
That another leaf has fallen?

EPITAPH

Within this grave I lie,
Yes, I.
Why laugh, good people,
Or why cry?
Within this grave
Lies nothing more
Than I.

To BEAUTY

To worship
At the altar of Beauty,
To feel her loveliness and pain,
To thrill
At the wonder of her gorgeous moon
Or the sharp, swift, silver swords
Of falling rain.

To walk in a golden garden
When an autumn sun
Has almost set,
When near-night's purple splendor
Shimmers to a star-shine net.

To worship
At the altar of Beauty
Is a pleasure divine,
Not given to the many many
But to fools
Who drink Beauty's wine.
Not given to the many many
But to fools
Who seek no other goddess
Nor grapes
Plucked from another's
Vine.

BOUND NO'TH BLUES

Goin' down de road, Lawd,
Goin' down de road.
Down de road, Lawd,
Way, way down de road.
Got to find somebody
To help me carry dis load.

Road's in front o' me,
Nothin' to do but walk.
Road's in front o' me,
Walk... and walk... and walk.
I'd like to meet a good friend
To come along an' talk.

Hates to be lonely,
Lawd, I hates to be sad.
Says I hates to be lonely,
Hates to be lonely an' sad,
But ever friend you finds seems
Like they try to do you bad.

Road, road, road, O!
Road, road... road... road, road!
Road, road, road, O!
On de No'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

LONESOME PLACE

I got to leave this town.
It's a lonesome place.
Got to leave this town cause
It's a lonesome place.
A po', po' boy can't
Find a friendly face.

Goin' down to de river
Flowin' deep an' slow.
Goin' down to de river
Deep an' slow.—
Cause there ain't no worries
Where de waters go.

I'm weary, weary,
Weary, as I can be.
Weary, weary,
Weary as can be.
This life's so weary,
'S 'bout to overcome me.

MISERY

Play de blues for me.
Play de blues for me.
No other music
'Ll ease ma misery.

Sing a soothin' song.
Said a soothin' song,
Cause de man I love's done
Done me wrong.

Can't you understand,
O, understand
A good woman's cryin'
For a no-good man?

Black gal like me,
Black gal like me
'S got to hear a blues
For her misery.

BAD LUCK CARD

Cause you don't love me
Is awful, awful hard.
Gypsy done showed me
Ma bad luck card.

There ain't no good left
In this world for me.
Gypsy done tole me—
Unlucky as can be.

I don't know what
Po' weary me can do.
Gypsy says I'd kill ma self
If I was you.

FEET O' JESUS

At de feet o' Jesus,
Sorrow like a sea.
Lordy, let yo' mercy
Come driftin' down on me.

At de feet o' Jesus,
At yo' feet I stand.
O, ma little Jesus,
Please reach out yo' hand.

DOWN AN' OUT

If you loves me
Help me when I'm down an' out.
If you loves me
Help me when I'm down an' out.
Cause I'm a po' gal that
Nobody gives a damn about.

'Stalment man's done took ma clothes
An' rent time's most nigh here.
'Stalment man's done took ma clothes,
Rent time's most nigh here.
I'd like to buy a straightenin' comb
An' I needs a dime for beer.

Talk about yo' friendly friends
Bein' kind to you.
Talk about yo' friendly friends
Bein' kind to you:
Just let yo'self git down an' out
An' then see what they'll do.

Fog

Singing black boatmen
An August morning
In the thick white fog at Sekondi
Coming out to take cargo
From anchored alien ships,
You do not know the fog
We strange so-civilized ones
Sail in always.

PICTURES TO THE WALL

Shall I tell you of my old, old dreams
Lost at the earth's strange turnings,
Some in the sea when the waves foamed high,
Some in a garret candle's burnings?

Shall I tell you of bitter, forgotten dreams—
You who are still so young, so young?
You with your wide brown singing eyes
And laughter at the tip of your tongue.

Shall I tell you of weary, weary dreams—
You who have lost no dreams at all,
Or shall I keep quiet and let turn
My ugly pictures to the wall?

WALLS

Four walls can hold
Oh, so much pain:
Four walls that shield
From the wind and rain.

Four walls can keep
Oh, so much sorrow
Garnered from yesterday
And held for tomorrow.

BEALE STREET LOVE

Love
Is a brown man's fist
With hard knuckles
Crushing the lips,
Blackening the eyes—
Hit me again,
Says Clorinda.

DRESSED UP

I had ma clothes cleaned
Just like new.
I put 'em on but
I still feels biue.

I bought a new hat,
Sho is fine,
But I wish I had back that
Old gal o' mine.

I got new shoes—
They don't hurt ma feet,
But I ain't got nobody
For to call me sweet.

A HOUSE IN TAOS

RAIN

Thunder of the Rain God:
And we three
Smitten by beauty.

Thunder of the Rain God:
And we three
Weary, weary.

Thunder of the Rain God:
And you, she, and I
Waiting for nothingness.

Do you understand the stillness
Of this house in Taos
Under the thunder of the Rain God?

SUN

That there should be a barren garden
About this house in Taos
Is not so strange,
But that there should be three barren hearts
In this one house in Taos—
Who carries ugly things to show the sun?

MOON

Did you ask for the beaten brass of the moon?
We can buy lovely things with money,
You, she and I,
Yet you seek
As though you could keep,
This unbought loveliness of moon.

WIND

Touch our bodies, wind.
Our bodies are separate individual things.
Touch our bodies, wind,
But blow quickly
Through the red, white, yellow skins
Of our bodies
To the terrible snarl,
Not mine,
Not yours,
Not hers,
But all one snarl of souls.
Blow quickly, wind,
Before we run back into the windlessness—
With our bodies—
Into the windlessness
Of our house in Taos.

SUICIDE

Ma sweet good man has
Packed his trunk and left.
Ma sweet good man has
Packed his trunk and left.
Nobody to love me:
I'm gonna kill ma self.

I'm gonna buy me a knife with
A blade ten inches long.
Gonna buy a knife with
A blade ten inches long.
Shall I carve ma self or
That man that done me wrong?

'Lieve I'll jump in de river
Eighty-nine feet deep.
'Lieve I'll jump in de river
Eighty-nine feet deep.
Cause de river's quiet
An' a po', po' gal can sleep.

HARD LUCK

When hard luck overtakes you
Nothin' for you to do.
When hard luck overtakes you
Nothin' for you to do.
Gather up yo' fine clothes
An' sell 'em to de Jew.

Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Go to de bootleg's,
Git some gin to make you laugh.

If I was a mule I'd
Git me a wagon to haul.
If I was a mule I'd
Git a wagon to haul.
I'm so low-down I
Ain't even got a stall.

Po' Boy BLUES

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold.

I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
Fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
She made me lose ma money
An' almost lose ma mind.

Weary, weary,
Weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary,
Early, early in de morn.
I's so weary
I wish I'd never been born.

RED ROSES

I'm waitin' for de springtime
When de tulips grow—
Sweet, sweet springtime
When de tulips grow;
Cause if I'd die in de winter
They'd bury me under snow.

Un'neath de snow, Lawd,
Oh, what would I do?
Un'neath de snow,
I say what would I do?
It's bad enough to die but
I don't want freezin' too.

I'm waitin' for de springtime
An' de roses red,
Waitin' for de springtime
When de roses red
'LI make a nice coverin'
Fer a gal that's dead.

RAILROAD ADVENTURE

Dusk dark
On Railroad Avenue.
Lights in the fish joints,
Lights in the pool rooms.
A box-car some train
Has forgotten
In the middle of the
Block.
A player piano,
A victrola.
 942
 Was the number.
A boy
Lounging on a corner.
A passing girl
With purple powdered skin.
 Laughter
 Suddenly
 Like a taut drum.
 Laughter
 Suddenly
 Neither truth nor lie.
 Laughter
Hardening the dusk dark evening.
 Laughter
Shaking the lights in the fish joints,
Rolling white balls in the pool rooms,

And leaving untouched the box-car
Some train has forgotten.

ELEVATOR BOY

I got a job now
Runnin' an elevator
In the Dennison Hotel in Jersey.
Job ain't no good though.
No money around.
Jobs are just chances
Like everthing else.
Maybe a little luck now,
Maybe not.
Maybe a good job sometimes:
Step out o' the barrel, boy.
Two new suits an'
A woman to sleep with.
Maybe no luck for a long time.
Only the elevators
Goin' up an' down,
Up an' down,
Or somebody elses' shoes
To shine,
Or greasy pots in a dirty kitchen.
I been runnin' this
Elevator too long.
Guess I'll quit now.

STARS

O, sweep of stars over Harlem streets,
O, little breath of oblivion that is night;
 A city building
 To a mother's song.
 A city building
 To a lullabye.
 Dark boy,
Reach up your hand and take a star
Out of the little breath of oblivion
 That is night,
 Take just one star.

BRASS SPITOONS

Clean the spittoons, boy.

Detroit,
Chicago,
Atlantic City,
Palm Beach.

Clean the spittoons.

The steam in hotel kitchens,
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
And the slime in hotel spittoons:
Part of my life.

Hey, boy!

A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,

Two dollars a day.

Hey, boy!

A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,

Two dollars

Buys shoes for the baby.

House rent to pay.

Gin on Saturday,

Church on Sunday.

My God!

Babies and girl and church
and women and Sunday

all mixed up with dimes and
dollars and clean spittoons
and house rent to pay.

Hey, boy!

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
Of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.

Hey, boy!

A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished—
At least I can offer that.

Com' mere, boy!

THE NEW CABARET GIRL

That little yaller gal
Wid blue-green eyes:
If her daddy ain't white
Would be a surprise.

She don't drink gin
An' she don't like corn.
I asked her one night
Where she was born.

An' she say, Honey,
I don't know
Where I come from
Or where I go.

That crazy little yaller gal
Wid blue-green eyes:
If her daddy ain't 'fay
Would be a surprise.

An' there she sets a cryin'
In de cabaret
A lookin' all sad
When she ought to play.

My God, I says,
You can't live that way!

Babe, you can't
Live that way!

ARGUMENT

Now lookahere, gal,
Don't you talk 'bout me.
I got mo' hair 'n you evah did see,
An' if I ain't high yaller
I ain't coal black,
So what you said 'bout me
You bettah take it back.

Now, listen, Corrine,
I don't talk 'bout you.
I's got much mo'
Important things to do.

All right, gal,
But I'm speakin' ma mind:
You bettah keep yo' freight train
Off ma line.

SATURDAY NIGHT

Play it once.
O, play some more.
Charlie is a gambler
An' Sadie is a whore.
 A glass o' whiskey
 An' a glass o' gin:
 Strut, Mr. Charlie,
 Till de dawn comes in.
Pawn yo' gold watch
An' diamond ring.
Git a quart o' licker,
Let's shake dat thing!
 Skee-de-dad! De-dad!
 Doo-doo-doo!
 Won't be nothin' left
 When de worms git through
 An' you's a long time
 Dead
 When you is
 Dead, too.
So beat dat drum, boy!
Shout dat song:
Shake 'em up an' shake 'em up
All night long.
 Hey! Hey!
 Ho... Hum!
 Do, it, Mr. Charlie,

Till de red dawn come.

THE CAT AND THE SAXOPHONE

(2 A.M.)

EVERYBODY

Half-pint—

Gin?

No, make it

LOVES MY BABY

corn. You like

liquor,

don't you, honey?

BUT MY BABY

Sure. Kiss me,

DON'T LOVE NOBODY

daddy.

BUT ME.

Say!

EVERYBODY

Yes?

WANTS MY BABY

I'm your

BUT MY BABY

sweetie, ain't I?

DON'T WANT NOBODY

Sure.

BUT

Then let's

ME,

do it!

SWEET ME.

Charleston,

mamma!

!

TO A LITTLE LOVER-LASS, DEAD

She
Who searched for lovers
In the night
Has gone the quiet way
Into the still,
Dark land of death
Beyond the rim of day.

Now like a little lonely waif
She walks
An endless street
And gives her kiss to nothingness.
Would God his lips were sweet!

HARLEM NIGHT CLUB

Sleek black boys in a cabaret.
Jazz-band, jazz-band—
Play, plAY, PLAY!
Tomorrow... who knows?
Dance today!

White girls' eyes
Call gay black boys.
Black boys' lips
Grin jungle joys.

Dark brown girls
In blond men's arms.
Jazz-band, jazz-band—
Sing Eve's charms!

White ones, brown ones,
What do you know
About tomorrow
Where all paths go?

Jazz-boys, jazz-boys,—
Play, plAY, PLAY!
Tomorrow... is darkness.
Joy today!

TO A BLACK DANCER IN “THE LITTLE SAVOY”

Wine-maiden
Of the jazz-tuned night,
Lips
Sweet as purple dew,
Breasts
Like the pillows of all sweet dreams,
Who crushed
The grapes of joy
And dripped their juice
On you?

BLUES FANTASY

Hey! Hey!
That's what the
Blues singers say.
Singing minor melodies
They laugh,
Hey! Hey!

My man's done left me,
Chile, he's gone away.
My good man's left me,
Babe, he's gone away.
Now the cryin' blues
Haunts me night and day.

Hey!... Hey!

Weary,
Weary,
Trouble, pain.
Sun's gonna shine
Somewhere
Again.

I got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.

Sing 'em, sister!

Got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.
And when I get on the train
I'll cast my blues aside.

Laughing,
Hey!... Hey!
Laugh a loud,
Hey! Hey!

LENOX AVENUE: MIDNIGHT

The rhythm of life
Is a jazz rhythm,
Honey.
The gods are laughing at us.

The broken heart of love,
The weary, weary heart of pain—
 Overtones,
 Undertones,
To the rumble of street cars,
To the swish of rain.

Lenox Avenue,
Honey.
Midnight,
And the gods are laughing at us.

POÈME D'AUTOMNE

The autumn leaves
Are too heavy with color.
The slender trees
On the Vulcan Road
Are dressed in scarlet and gold
Like young courtesans
Waiting for their lovers.
But soon
The winter winds
Will strip their bodies bare
And then
The sharp, sleet-stung
Caresses of the cold
Will be their only
Love.

MARCH MOON

The moon is naked.
The wind has undressed the moon.
The wind has blown all the cloud-garments
Off the body of the moon
And now she's naked,
Stark naked.

But why don't you blush,
O shameless moon?
Don't you know
It isn't nice to be naked?

AS I GREW OLDER

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun—
My dream.

And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose slowly, slowly,
Dimming,
Hiding,
The light of my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky—
The wall.

Shadow.
I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.

My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!

Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

HARLEM NIGHT SONG

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

I love you.

Across
The Harlem roof-tops
Moon is shining.
Night sky is blue.
Stars are great drops
Of golden dew.
In the cabaret
The jazz-band's playing.

I love you.

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

ARDELLA

I would liken you
To a night without stars
Were it not for your eyes.
I would liken you
To a sleep without dreams
Were it not for your songs.

PIERROT

I work all day,
Said Simple John,
Myself a house to buy.
I work all day,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot wondered why.

For Pierrot loved the long white road,
And Pierrot loved the moon,
And Pierrot loved a star-filled sky,
And the breath of a rose in June.

I have one wife,
Said Simple John,
And, faith, I love her yet.
I have one wife,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot left Pierrette.

For Pierrot saw a world of girls,
And Pierrot loved each one,
And Pierrot thought all maidens fair
As flowers in the sun.

Oh, I am good,
Said Simple John,
The Lord will take me in.

Yes, I am good,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot's steeped in sin.

For Pierrot played on a slim guitar,
And Pierrot loved the moon,
And Pierrot ran down the long white road
With the burgher's wife one June.

WATER-FRONT STREETS

The spring is not so beautiful there—
But dream ships sail away
To where the spring is wondrous rare
And life is gay.

The spring is not so beautiful there—
But lads put out to sea
Who carry beauties in their hearts
And dreams, like me.

A FAREWELL

With gypsies and sailors,
Wanderers of the hills and seas,
I go to seek my fortune.
With pious folk and fair
I must have a parting.
But you will not miss me—
You who live between the hills
And have never seen the seas.

LONG TRIP

The sea is a wilderness of waves,
A desert of water.
We dip and dive,
Rise and roll,
Hide and are hidden
On the sea.
 Day, night,
 Night, day,
The sea is a desert of waves,
A wilderness of water.

PORT TOWN

Hello, sailor boy,
In from the sea!
Hello, sailor,
Come with me!

Come on drink cognac.
Rather have wine?
Come here, I love you.
Come and be mine.

Lights, sailor boy,
Warm, white lights.
Solid land, kid.
Wild, white nights.

Come on, sailor,
Out o' the sea.
Let's go, sweetie!
Come with me.

SEA CALM

How still,
How strangely still
The water is today.
It is not good
For water
To be so still that way.

CARIBBEAN SUNSET

God having a hemorrhage,
Blood coughed across the sky,
Staining the dark sea red,
That is sunset in the Caribbean.

NATCHA

Natcha, offering love.
For ten shillings offering love.
Offering: A night with me, honey.
A long, sweet night with me.
 Come, drink palm wine.
 Come, drink kisses.
A long, dream night with me.

DEATH OF AN OLD SEAMAN

We buried him high on a windy hill,
But his soul went out to sea.
I know, for I heard, when all was still,
His sea-soul say to me:

Put no tombstone at my head,
For here I do not make my bed.
Strew no flowers on my grave,
I've gone back to the wind and wave.
Do not, do not weep for me,
For I am happy with my sea.

Sick Room

How quiet
It is in this sick room
Where on the bed
A silent woman lies between two lovers—
Life and Death,
And all three covered with a sheet of pain.

TO THE DARK MERCEDES OF “EL PALACIO DE AMOR”

Mercedes is a jungle-lily in a death house.

Mercedes is a doomed star.

Mercedes is a charnel rose.

Go where gold

Will fall at the feet of your beauty,

Mercedes.

Go where they will pay you well

For your loveliness.

MULATTO

I am your son, white man!

Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.

*You are my son!
Like hell!*

The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
Full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
 Juicy bodies
 Of nigger wenches
 Blue black
 Against black fences.
 O, you little bastard boy,
 What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.
 What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere.
 What's the body of your mother?
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
 A nigger night,
 A nigger joy,
 A little yellow

Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.

Niggers ain't my brother.

Not ever.

Niggers ain't my brother.

The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.

O, sweet as earth,

Dusk dark bodies

Give sweet birth

To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night,

You ain't white.

The bright stars scatter everywhere.

Pine wood scent in the evening air.

A nigger night,

A nigger joy.

I am your son, white man!

A little yellow

Bastard boy.

A LETTER TO ANNE

Since I left you, Anne,
I have seen nothing but you.
Every day
Has been your face,
And every night your hand,
And every road
Your voice calling me.
And every rock and every flower and tree
Has been a touch of you.
Nowhere
Have I seen anything else but you,
Anne.

IN THE MIST OF THE MOON

In the mist of the moon I saw you,
O, Nanette,
And you were lovelier than the moon.
 You were darkness,
 And the body of darkness.
 And light,
 And the body of light.
In the mist of the moon I saw you,
Dark Nanette.

SONG

ROCKS AND THE FIRM ROOTS OF TREES

Rocks and the firm roots of trees.
The rising shafts of mountains.
Something strong to put my hands on.

Sing, O Lord Jesus!
Song is a strong thing.
I heard my mother singing when you hurt her:

Gonna ride in ma chariot some day.

The branches rise from the firm roots of trees.
The mountains rise from the solid lap of earth.
The waves rise from the dead weight of sea.

Sing, O black mother!
Song is a strong thing.

FOR AN INDIAN SCREEN

Clutching at trees and clawing rocks
And panting and climbing
Until he reached the top
A tiger in India
Surmounted a cliff one day
When the hunters were behind him
And his lair was far away.
A black and golden tiger
Climbed a red cliff's side
And men in black and golden gowns
Sought the tiger's hide.

O, splendid, supple animal:
Against the cliff's red face:
A picture for an Indian screen
Woven in silks of subtle sheen
And brodered in yellow lace,
A picture for an Indian screen
As a prince's gift to some ebony queen
In a far-off land like a fairy scene.

DAY

Where most surely comes a day
When all the sweets you've gorged
Will turn your stomach sick
And all the friends you've loved
Will go away
And every gold swift hour
Will be an hour of pain
And every sun-filled cloud
A cloud of rain
And even the withered flowers
Will lose their long-held faint perfume
And you alone will be with you
In that last room—
Only your single selves together
Facing a single doom.

PASSING LOVE

Because you are to me a song
I must not sing you overlong.

Because you are to me a prayer
I cannot say you everywhere.

Because you are to me a rose
You will not stay when summer goes.

LINCOLN MONUMENT

(Washington)

Let's go see old Abe
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,
Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.
Quiet for a million, million centuries.
Quiet—and yet a voice forever
Against the timeless walls of time,
Old Abe.

SONG FOR A DARK GIRL

Way Down South in Dixie
(Break the heart of me)
They hung my black young lover
To a cross roads tree.

Way Down South in Dixie
(Bruised body high in air)
I asked the white Lord Jesus
What was the use of prayer.

Way Down South in Dixie
(Break the heart of me)
Love is a naked shadow
On a gnarled and naked tree.

GAL'S CRY FOR A DYING LOVER

Heard de owl a hootin',
Knowed somebody's 'bout to die.
Heard de owl a hootin',
Knowed somebody's 'bout to die.
Put ma head un'neath de kiver,
Started in to moan an' cry.

Hound dawg's barkin'
Means he's gonna leave this world.
Hound dawg's barkin'
Means he's gonna leave this world.
O, Lawd have mercy
On a po' black girl.

Black an' ugly
But he sho do treat me kind.
I'm black an' ugly
But he sho do treat me kind.
High-in-heaben Jesus,
Please don't take this man o' mine.

DESIRE

Desire to us
Was like a double death.
Swift dying
Of our mingled breath,
Evaporation
Of an unknown strange perfume
Between us quickly
In a naked room.

BULWARK

You were the last bulwark of my dreams,
And now you, too, have tumbled down into the dust.
You, too, are no more than a broken lie.

Something
came between us
green and slimy
like sickly laughter
and a bowl was broken
from which
we could not drink thereafter
and we turned around
and threw
the shattered bits
upon the ground
and went our separate ways
into the town
and a clock
somewhere in a tower
boomed out slowly
hour after hour
a great cracked
broken sound.

You were the last bulwark of my dreams,
And now you, too, have tumbled down.

WISE MEN

Let me become dead eyed
Like a fish—
I'm sure then I'd be wise
For all the wise men I've seen
Have had dead eyes.

Let me learn to fit all things
Into law and rule:
I'd be the proper person then
To teach a school.

POEM FOR YOUTH

Raindrops
On the crumbling walls
Of tradition,
Sunlight
Across mouldy pits
Of yesterday.

Oh,
Wise old men,
What do you say
About the fiddles
And the jazz
And the loud Hey! Hey!
About the dancing girls,
And the laughing boys,
And the brilliant lights,
And the blaring joys,
The firecracker days
And the nights—
Love-toys?

Staid old men,
What do you say
About sun-filled rain
Drowning yesterday?

THE NAUGHTY CHILD

The naughty child
Who ventured to go cut flowers,
Fell into the mill-pond
And was drowned.
But the good children all
Are living yet,
Nice folks now
In a very nice town.

MONA

She lived in sinful happiness
And died in pain,
But she danced in sunshine
And laughed in rain.

She went one summer morning
When flowers spread the plain
But she told my mother
She was coming back again.

The old folks made a coffin
And hid her deep in earth.
Seems like she said: My body
Brings new birth.

For sure there grew flowers
And tall young trees
And sturdy weeds and grasses
To sway in the breeze.

And sure she lived in growing things
With no pain
And laughed in sunshine
And danced in rain.

MA LORD

Ma Lord ain't no stuck up man.
Ma Lord, he ain't proud.
When he goes a walkin'
He gives me his hand.
You ma friend, he 'lowed.

Ma Lord knows what it is to work.
He knows how to pray.
Ma Lord's life was trouble, too,
Trouble ever day.

Ma Lord ain't no stuck up man.
He's a friend o' mine.
When he went to heaben,
His soul like fire,
He tole me I was gwine.
He said, Sho you'll come wid me
An' be ma friend through eternity.

TAPESTRY

Men who ride strange wild horses
Down dangerous glens and glades,
Men who draw keen sharp swords,
Toledo or Damascus blades,
Men who swear and laugh and love
And live and sing like troubadours—
Wrinkled old beldams somewhere
Are dreaming of old amours.

NOCTURNE FOR THE DRUMS

Gay little devils
That hide in gin
And tickle black boys
Under the chin
And make them laugh,
Gay little devils
That lurk in kisses,
And shine in the eyes
Of ebony misses,
Shine in their eyes:
Whee-e-e!!
O-o-o-o... Boom!
Jazz band in a cabaret!
The quick red hour
Before the day.

SUCCESS

Here I sit with my belly full
And he who might have been my brother
Walks hungry in the rain.

Here I sit with my belly full
And she I might have loved
Seeks someone in the shadows
To whom she may sell her body.

Here I sit with my belly full,
No longer the rain,
No longer the shadows for the
Woman I love,
No longer hunger.

Success is a great big beefsteak
With onions on it,
And I eat.

BEING OLD

It's because you are so young—
You do not understand.
 But we are old
 As the jungle trees
 That bloomed forever,
 Old as the forgotten rivers
 That flowed into the earth.
Surely we know what you do not know:
 Joy of living,
 Uselessness of things.
You are too young to understand yet.
 Build another skyscraper
 Touching the stars.
We sit with our backs against a tree
And watch skyscrapers tumble
And stars forget.
 Solomon built a temple
 And it must have fallen down.
 It isn't here now.
We know some things, being old,
You do not understand.

MONTMARTRE BEGGAR WOMAN

Once you were beautiful—
Now,
Hunched in the cold,
Nobody cares
That you are old.

Once you were lovely—
Now,
In the street,
No one remembers
Your lips were sweet.

Oh, withered old woman
Of rue Fontaine,
Nobody but death
Will kiss you again.

I THOUGHT IT WAS TANGIERS I WANTED

I know now
That Notre Dame is in Paris.
And the Seine is more to me now
Than a wriggling line on a map
Or a name in travel stories.

I know now
There is a Crystal Palace in Antwerp
Where a hundred women sell their naked bodies,
And the night-lovers of sailors
Wait for men on docks in Genoa.

I know now
That a great golden moon
Like a picture-book moon
Really rises behind palm groves
In Africa,
And tom-toms do beat
In village squares under the mango trees.

I know now
That Venice is a church dome
And a net-work of canals,
Tangiers a whiteness under sun.
I thought
It was Tangiers I wanted,
Or the gargoyles of Notre Dame,

Or the Crystal Palace in Antwerp,
Or the golden palm-grove moon in Africa,
Or a church dome and a net-work of canals.

Happiness lies nowhere,
Some old fool said,
If not within oneself.

It's a sure thing
Notre Dame is in Paris—
But I thought it was Tangiers I wanted.

DREAMER

I take my dreams
And make of them a bronze vase,
And a wide round fountain
With a beautiful statue in its center,
And a song with a broken heart,
And I ask you:
Do you understand my dreams?
Sometimes you say you do
And sometimes you say you don't.
Either way
It doesn't matter.
I continue to dream.

HEY!

Sun's a settin',
This is what I'm gonna sing.
Sun's a settin',
This is what I'm gonna sing:
I feels de blues a comin',
Wonder what de blues'll bring?

HEY! HEY!

Sun's a risin',
This is gonna be ma song.
Sun's a risin',
This is gonna be ma song.
I could be blue but
I been blue all night long.

BAD MAN

I'm a bad, bad man
Cause everybody tells me so.
I'm a bad, bad man.
Everybody tells me so.
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everywhere I go.

I beats ma wife an'
I beats ma side gal too.
Beats ma wife an'
Beats ma side gal too.
Don't know why I do it but
It keeps me from feelin' blue.

I'm so bad I
Don't even want to be good.
So bad, bad, bad I
Don't even want to be good.
I'm goin' to de devil an'
I wouldn't go to heaben if I could.

CLOSING TIME

Starter!

Her face is pale
In the doorway light.
Her lips blood red
And her skin blue white.

Taxi!

I'm tired.

Deep... River....

O, God, please!

The river and the moon hold memories.

Cornets play.
Dancers whirl.
Death, be kind

What was the cover charge, kid?

To a little drowned girl.

PRIZE FIGHTER

Only dumb guys fight.
If I wasn't dumb
I wouldn't be fightin'.
I could make six dollars a day
On the docks
And I'd save more than I do now.
Only dumb guys fight.

CRAP GAME

Lemme roll 'em, boy.
I got ma tail curled!
If a seven don't come
'Leven ain't far away.
An' if I craps,
Dark baby,
Trouble
Don't last all de time.
Hit 'em, bones!

BALLAD OF GIN MARY

Carried me to de court,
Judge was settin' there.
Looked all around me,
Didn't have a friend nowhere.

Judge Pierce he says, Mary.
Old Judge says, Mary Jane,
Ever time I mounts this bench
I sees yo' face again.

O, Lawd! O, Lawd!
O, Lawd... Lawdee!
Seems like bad licker,
Judge, won't let me be.

Old Judge says you's a drunkard.
Fact is you worries me.
Gwine give you eighteen months
So licker'll let you be.

Eighteen months in jail!
O, eighteen months locked in!
Won't be so bad in jail.
But I'll miss ma gin.

O, please sir, Judge, have mercy!
Have mercy, please, on me!

Old hard-faced Judge says eighteen months
Till lickin' let you be.

DEATH OF DO DIRTY

A ROUNDER'S SONG

O, you can't find a buddy
Any old time
'Ll help you out
When you ain't got a dime.

He was a friend o' mine.

They called him Do Dirty
Cause he was black
An' had cut his gal
An' shot a man in de back.

Ma friend o' mine.

But when I was hungry,
Had nothin' to eat,
He bought me corn bread
An' a stew o' meat.

Good friend o' mine.

An' when de cops got me
An' put me in jail
If Dirty had de money,
He'd go ma bail.

O, friend o' mine.

That night he got kilt
I was standin' in de street.

Somebody comes by
An' says yo' boy is gettin' beat.

Ma friend o' mine.

But when I got there
An' seen de ambulance
A guy was sayin'
He ain't got a chance.

Best friend o' mine.

An' de ones that kilt him—
Damn their souls—
I'm gonna fill 'em up full o'
Bullet holes.

Ma friend o' mine.

PORTER

I must say
Yes, sir,
To you all the time.
Yes, sir!
Yes, sir!
All my days
Climbing up a great big mountain
Of yes, sirs!

Rich old white man
Owns the world.
Gimme yo' shoes
To shine.

Yes, sir!

SPORT

Life
For him
Must be
The shivering of
A great drum
Beaten with swift sticks
Then at the closing hour
The lights go out
And there is no music at all
And death becomes
An empty cabaret
And eternity an unblown saxophone
And yesterday
A glass of gin
Drunk long
Ago.

SHOUT

Listen to yo' prophets,
Little Jesus!
Listen to yo' saints!

FIRE

Fire,
Fire, Lord!
Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I ain't been good,
I ain't been clean—
I been stinkin', low-down, mean.

Fire,
Fire, Lord!
Fire gonna burn ma soul!

Tell me, brother,
Do you believe
If you wanta go to heaben
Got to moan an' grieve?

Fire,
Fire, Lord!
Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I been stealin',
Been tellin' lies,
Had more women
Than Pharaoh had wives.

Fire,

Fire, Lord!
Fire gonna burn ma soul!
I means Fire, Lord!
Fire gonna burn ma soul!

MOAN

I'm deep in trouble,
Nobody to understand,
Lord, Lord!

Deep in trouble,
Nobody to understand,
O, Lord!

Gonna pray to ma Jesus,
Ask him to gimme His hand.
Ma Lord!

I'm moanin', moanin',
Nobody cares just why.
No, Lord!

Moanin', moanin',
Feels like I could die.
O, Lord!

Sho, there must be peace,
Ma Jesus,
Somewhere in yo' sky.
Yes, Lord!

ANGELS WINGS

De angels wings is white as snow,
O, white as snow,
White
as
snow.

De angels wings is white as snow,
But I drug ma wings
In de dirty mire.
O, I drug ma wings
All through de fire.
But de angels wings is white as snow,
White
as
snow.

SINNER

Have mercy, Lord!

Po' an' black
An' humble an' lonesome
An' a sinner in yo' sight.

Have mercy, Lord!

CORA

I broke ma heart this mornin'.
Ain't got no heart no mo'.
Next time a man comes near me
Gonna shut an' lock ma door
Cause they treats me mean—
The ones I loves.
They always treats me mean.

WORKIN' MAN

I works all day
Wid a pick an' a shovel.
Comes home at night—
It ain't nothin' but a hovel.

I calls for ma woman
When I opens de door.
She's out in de street—
Ain't nothin' but a 'hore,

I does her good
An' I treats her fine,
But she don't gimme lovin'
Cause she ain't de right kind.

I'm a hard workin' man
An' I sho pays double
Cause I tries to be good
An' gits nothin' but trouble.

BABY

Albert!
Hey, Albert!
Don't you play in dat road.
 You see dem trucks
 A goin' by.
 One run ovah you
 An' you die.
Albert, don't you play in dat road.

EVIL WOMAN

I ain't gonna mistreat ma
Good gal any more.
I'm just gonna kill her
Next time she makes me sore.

I treats her kind but
She don't do me right.
She fights an' quarrels most
Ever night.

I can't have no woman's
Got such low-down ways,
Cause a blue-gummed woman
Ain't de style now days.

I brought her from de South
An' she's goin' on back
Else I'll use her head
For a carpet tack.

A RUINED GAL

Standin' by de lonesome riverside
After de boat's done gone,
 Po' weary me
 Won't be nobody's bride
 Cause I is long gone wrong.

Standin' by de weary riverside
When de boat comes in,
 Po' lonesome me
 Won't meet nobody
 Cause I ain't got no friend.

By de edge o' de weary riverside
Night-time's comin' down.
 Ain't nothin' for a ruined gal
 But jump overboard an' drown.

O, de lonesome riverside,
O, de wicked water.
 Damn ma black old mammy's soul
 For ever havin' a daughter.

SUN SONG

Sun and softness,
Sun and the beaten hardness of the earth,
Sun and the song of all the sun-stars
Gathered together—
Dark ones of Africa,
I bring you my songs
To sing on the Georgia roads.

MAGNOLIA FLOWERS

The quiet fading out of life
In a corner full of ugliness.

I went lookin' for magnolia flowers
But I didn't find 'em.
I went lookin' for magnolia flowers in the dusk
And there was only this corner
Full of ugliness.

'Scuse me,
I didn't mean to stump ma toe on you, lady,

There ought to be magaoalias
Somewhere in this dusk.

'Scuse me,
I didn't mean to stump ma toe on you.

RED SILK STOCKINGS

Put on yo' red silk stockings,
Black gal.
Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.

Ain't nothin' to do for you, nohow,
Round this town—
You's too pretty.
Put on yo' red silk stockings, gal,
An' tomorrow's chile'll
Be a high yaller.

Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.

YOUNG GAL'S BLUES

I'm gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma friend Miss Cora Lee.
Gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma dear friend Cora Lee
Cause when I'm dead some
Body'll have to walk behind me.

I'm goin' to de po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
Goin' to de po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
When I'm old an' ugly
I'll want to see somebody, too.

De po' house is lonely
An' de grave is cold.
O, de po' house is lonely,
De graveyard grave is cold.
But I'd rather be dead than
To be ugly an' old.

When love is gone what
Can a young gal do?
When love is gone, O,
What can a young gal do?
Keep on a-lovin' me, daddy,
Cause I don't want to be blue.

HARD DADDY

I went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Ma daddy says Honey
Can't you bring no better news?

I cried on his shoulder but
He turned his back on me.
Cried on his shoulder but
He turned his back on me.
He said a woman's cryin's
Never gonna bother me.

I wish I had wings to
Fly like de eagle flies.
Wish I had wings to
Fly like de eagle flies.
I'd fly on ma man an'
I'd scratch out both his eyes.

SUNSET—CONEY ISLAND

The sun,
Like the red yolk of a rotten egg,
Falls behind the roller-coaster
And the horizon sticks
With a putrid odor of colors.
Down on the beach
A little Jewish tailor from the Bronx,
With a bad stomach,
Throws up the hot-dog sandwiches
He ate in the afternoon
While life
To him
Is like a sick tomato
In a garbage can.

NONETTE

You wound my soul with a thousand spears,
You bathe my wounds in a flood of tears,
Nonette.

You give me a rose whose breath is sweet,
Whose petals are poison and death to eat,
Nonette.

And when I am dead you do not cry,
But your heart breaks, too, and you, too, die.

LOVER'S RETURN

(Song for a Deserted Woman)

Ma old time daddy
Came back home last night.
His face was pale an'
His eyes didn't look just right.

He says to me I'm
Comin' home to you
So sick an' lonsome
I don't know what to do.

O, men treats women
Just like a pair o' shoes.
I say treats women
Like a pair o' shoes—,
They kicks 'em round an'
Does 'em like they choose.

I looked at ma daddy—
Lawd! an' I wanted to cry.
He looked so thin.—
Lawd! that I wanted to cry.
But de devil told me
Damn a lover

Comes home to die!

MAZIE DIES ALONE IN THE CITY HOSPITAL

I hate to die this way with the quiet
Over everything like a shroud.
I'd rather die where the band's a playin'
Noisy and loud.

I'd rather die the way I lived—
Drunk and rowdy and gay;
God! Why did you ever curse me
Makin' me die this way?



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