# The Weary Blues

by Langston Hughes

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# THE WEARY BLUES

by

LANGSTON HUGHES

WITH AN INTRODUCTON BY CARL VAN VECHTEN

Running dog

NEW YORK ALFRED · A · KNOPF 1926

# THE WEARY BLUES

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TO MY MOTHER

I wish to thank the editors of The Crisis, Opportunity, Survey Graphic, Vanity Fair, The World Tomorrow and The Amsterdam News for having first published some of the poems in this book.

# INTRODUCING LANGSTON HUGHES TO THE READER

## I

At the moment I cannot recall the name of any other person whatever who, at the age of twenty-three, has enjoyed so picturesque and rambling an existence as

Langston Hughes. Indeed, a complete account of his disorderly and delightfully fantastic career would make a fascinating picaresque romance which I hope this young Negro will write before so much more befalls him that he may find it difficult to capture all the salient episodes within the limits of a single volume.

Born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri, he had lived, before his twelfth year, in the City of Mexico, Topeka, Kansas, Colorado Springs, Charlestown, Indiana, Kansas City, and Buffalo. He attended Central High School, from which he graduated, at Cleveland, Ohio, while in the summer, there and in Chicago, he worked as delivery- and dummy-boy in hat-stores. In his senior year he was elected class poet and editor of the Year Book.

After four years in Cleveland, he once more joined his father in Mexico, only to migrate to New York where he entered Columbia University. There, finding the environment distasteful, or worse, he remained till spring, when he quit, broke with his father and, with thirteen dollars in cash, went on his own. First, he worked for a truck-farmer on Staten Island; next, he delivered flowers for Thorley; at length he partially satisfied an insatiable craving to go to sea by signing up with an old ship anchored in the Hudson for the winter. His first real cruise as a sailor carried him to the Canary Islands, the Azores, and the West Coast of Africa, of which voyage he has written: “Oh, the sun in Dakar! Oh, the little black girls of Burutu! Oh, the blue, blue bay of Loanda! Calabar, the city lost in a forest; the long, shining days at sea, the masts rocking against the stars at night; the black Kru-boy sailors, taken at Freetown, bathing on deck morning and evening; Tom Pey and Haneo, whose dangerous job it was to dive under the seven-ton mahogany logs floating and bobbing at the ship’s side and fasten them to the chains of the crane; the vile houses of rotting women at Lagos; the desolation of the Congo; Johnny Walker, and the millions of whisky bottles buried in the sea along the West Coast; the daily fights on board, officers, sailors, everybody drunk; the timorous, frightened missionaries we carried as passengers; and George, the Kentucky colored boy, dancing and singing

the Blues on the after-deck under the stars."

Returning to New York with plenty of money and a monkey, he presently shipped again—this time for Holland. Again he came back to New York and again he sailed—on his twenty-second birthday: February 1, 1924. Three weeks later he found himself in Paris with less than seven dollars. However, he was soon provided for: a woman of his own race engaged him as doorman at her boîte de nuit. Later he was employed, first as second cook, then as waiter, at the Grand Duc, where the Negro entertainer, Florence, sang at this epoch. Here he made friends with an Italian family who carried him off to their villa at Desenzano on Lago di Garda where he passed a happy month, followed by a night in Verona and a week in Venice. On his way back across Italy his passport was stolen and he became a beach-comber in Genoa. He has described his life there to me: "Wine and figs and pasta. And sunlight! And amusing companions, dozens of other beach-combers roving the dockyards and water-front streets, getting their heads whacked by the Fascisti, and breaking one loaf of bread into so many pieces that nobody got more than a crumb. I lived in the public gardens along the water-front and slept in the Albergo Populare for two lire a night amidst the snores of hundreds of other derelicts.... I painted my way home as a sailor. It seems that I must have painted the whole ship myself. We made a regular 'grand tour': Livorno, Napoli (we passed so close to Capri I could have cried). Then all around Sicily—Catania, Messina, Palermo—the Lipari Islands, miserable little peaks of pumice stone out in the sea; then across to Spain, divine Spain! My buddy and I went on a spree in Valencia for a night and a day.... Oh, the sweet wine of Valencia!"

He arrived in New York on November 10, 1924. That evening I attended a dance given in Harlem by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Some time during the course of the night, Walter White asked me to meet two young Negro poets. He introduced me to Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes. Before that moment I had never heard of either of them.

## II

I have merely sketched a primitive outline of a career as rich in adventures as a fruit-cake is full of raisins. I have already stated that I hope Langston Hughes may be persuaded to set it down on paper in the minutest detail, for the bull-fights in Mexico, the drunken gaiety of the Grand Duc, the delicately exquisite grace of the little black girls at Burutu, the exotic languor of the Spanish women at Valencia, the barbaric jazz dances of the cabarets in New York's own Harlem, the companionship of sailors of many races and nationalities, all have stamped an indelible impression on the highly sensitized, poetic imagination of this young Negro, an impression which has found its initial expression in the poems assembled in this book.

And also herein may be discerned that nostalgia for color and warmth and beauty which explains this boy's nomadic instincts.

"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,"

he sings. Again, he tells his 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.”

More of this wistful longing may be discovered in the poems entitled The South and As I Grew Older. His verses, however, are by no means limited to an exclusive mood; he writes caressingly of little black prostitutes in Harlem; his cabaret songs throb with the true jazz rhythm; his sea-pieces ache with a calm, melancholy lyricism; he cries bitterly from the heart of his race in Cross and The Jester; he sighs, in one of the most successful of his fragile poems, over the loss of a loved friend. Always, however, his stanzas are subjective, personal. They are the (I had almost said informal, for they have a highly deceptive air of spontaneous improvisation) expression of an essentially sensitive and subtly illusive nature, seeking always to break through the veil that obscures for him, at least in some degree, the ultimate needs of that nature.

To the Negro race in America, since the day when Phillis Wheatley indited lines to General George Washington and other aristocratic figures (for Phillis Wheatley never sang “My way’s cloudy,” or “By an by, I’m goin to lay down dis heavy load”) there have been born many poets. Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Countée Cullen, are a few of the more memorable names. Not the least of these names, I think, is that of Langston Hughes, and perhaps his adventures and personality offer the promise of as rich a fulfillment as has been the lot of any of the others.

Carl Van Vechten.

New York.

August 3, 1925.

# CONTENTS

# PROEM

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.

# THE WEARY BLUES

## 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.

## 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.

## NEGRO DANCERS

“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!”

## 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!

!

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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!

## 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?

## YOUNG PROSTITUTE

Her dark brown face

Is like a withered flower

On a broken stem.

Those kind come cheap in Harlem

So they say.

## 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?

## 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’.

## 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.

## DREAM VARIATIONS

**DREAM VARIATIONS**

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.

## 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!

## 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.

## 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 whir thin and slow,

But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun

To go with me

to the darkness

where I go.

## 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?

### 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!

## THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

### 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.

## 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?

## 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?

**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.

## 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!

## 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.

### POEM

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.

## BLACK PIERROT

### 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.

## 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.

## 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.

**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.

**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.

## 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!

## 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

### 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.

## 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.

## SEASCAPE

Off the coast of Ireland
As our ship passed by

We saw a line of fishing ships

Etched against the sky.

Off the coast of England

As we rode the foam

We saw an Indian merchantman

Coming home.

## 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.

## 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.

### 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.

## SHADOWS IN THE SUN

### 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!

## 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.

## SUICIDE’S NOTE

The calm,

Cool face of the river

Asked me for a kiss.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## YOUNG BRIDE

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 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.

### 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.

## OUR LAND

### 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!

## 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## 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.

## 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?

## 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-cimbin’ 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 set 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.

**POEM**

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.

**EPILOGUE**

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.

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