

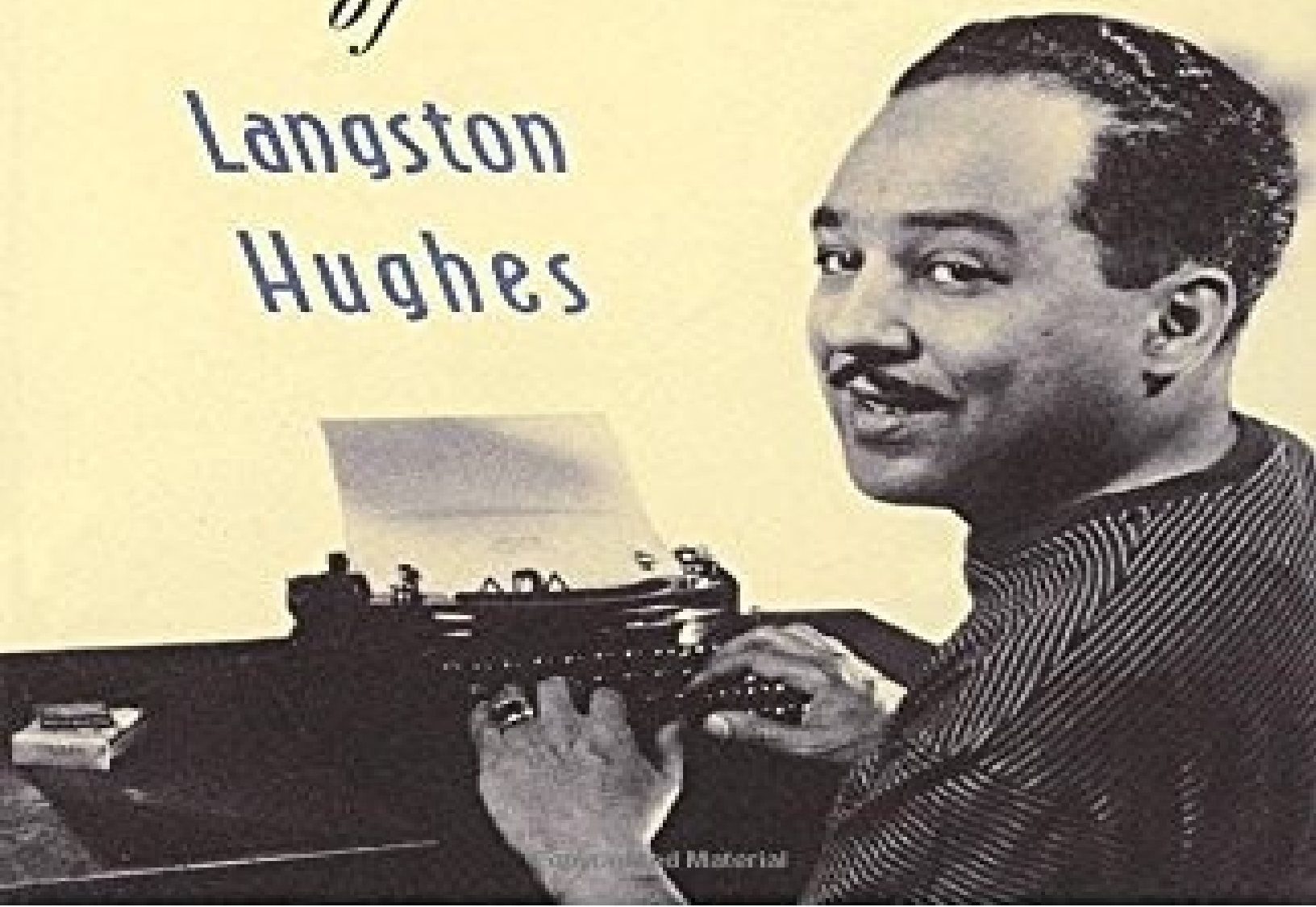
A

classic collection of  
poems by a master  
of American verse

# Selected Poems

*of*

Langston  
Hughes



SELECTED  
POEMS *of*  
LANGSTON  
HUGHES

V

VINTAGE CLASSICS · VINTAGE BOOKS

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**To my cousin, Flora**

This book contains a selection of the poems of Langston Hughes  
chosen by himself from his earlier volumes: THE WEARY BLUES

FINE CLOTHES TO THE JEW

SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM

FIELDS OF WONDER

ONE-WAY TICKET

MONTAGE OF A DREAM DEFERRED

*and from the privately printed limited edition*

## **DEAR LOVELY DEATH**

together with a number of new poems published here for the  
first time in book form, some never before anywhere.

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# AFRO- AMERICAN FRAGMENTS

## Afro-American Fragment

So long,  
So far away  
Africa.

Not even memories alive Save those that history books create, Save those  
that songs  
beat back into the blood— Beat out of blood with words sad-sung In  
strange un-Negro tongue— So long,  
So far away  
Africa.

Abandoned and time-lost  
The drums—and yet  
Through some vast mist of race There comes this song  
I do not understand,  
This song of atavistic land, Of bitter yearnings lost Without a place— So  
long,  
So far away  
Africa's  
Dark face.

## **The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

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.

## Sun Song

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

## Aunt Sue's Stories

unt Sue has a head full of stories.

unt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.

ummer nights on the front porch Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to  
her bosom And tells him stories.

ack slaves

orking in the hot sun, And black slaves

alking in the dewy night, And black slaves

nging 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.

nd the dark-faced child, listening, Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real  
stories.

e knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories Out of any book at all, But  
that they came  
ght out of her own life.

ie dark-faced child is quiet Of a summer night  
stening to Aunt Sue's stories.



## Danse Africaine

ie low beating of the tom-toms, The slow beating of the tom-toms,  
Low ... slow Slow ... low— Stirs your blood.

Dance!

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.

## Negro

I'm 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 still in Mississippi.

I'm a Negro:

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

## **American Heartbreak**

in the American heartbreak— Rock on which Freedom  
kicks its toe—  
the great mistake  
made at Jamestown  
made long ago.

## October 16

perhaps  
you will remember  
John Brown.

John Brown  
who took his gun,  
took twenty-one companions White and black,  
went to shoot your way to freedom Where two rivers meet  
in the hills of the  
North  
in the hills of the  
South  
looked slow at one another— And died  
for your sake.

Now that you are  
many years free,  
in the echo of the Civil War Has passed away,  
John Brown himself  
has long been tried at law, Hanged by the neck,  
and buried in the ground— Since Harpers Ferry  
alive with ghosts today, Immortal raiders  
come again to town—

perhaps  
you will recall  
John Brown.

## As I Grew Older

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,  
Humming,  
Ding,  
The light of my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky— The wall.

Shadow.  
In black.

He lay 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!  
And my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness, To smash this night,

Break this shadow Into a thousand lights of sun, Into a thousand  
whirling dreams Of sun!

## **My People**

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

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

autiful, also, is the sun.

autiful, also, are the souls of my people.

## Dream Variations

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

› fling my arms wide  
the face of the sun, Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
ll the quick day is done.  
st at pale evening ...  
tall, slim tree ...  
ght coming tenderly  
Black like me.

**FEET  
OF  
JESUS**

**Feet o' Jesus**

the feet o' Jesus, Sorrow like a sea.  
rdy, let yo' mercy Come driftin' down on me.

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



## Prayer

ask you this:  
hich way to go?  
ask you this:  
hich sin to bear?  
hich crown to put  
on my hair?  
lo not know,  
rd God,  
lo not know.

## **Shout**

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

## Fire

re,  
re, Lord!  
re gonna burn ma soul!

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

re,  
re, Lord!  
re gonna burn ma soul!

ll me, brother,  
o you believe  
you wanta go to heaben Got to moan an' grieve?

re,  
re, Lord!  
re gonna burn ma soul!

een stealin',  
en tellin' lies,  
ad more women  
ian Pharaoh had wives.

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

## Sunday Morning Prophecy

*An old Negro minister concludes his sermon in his loudest voice, having previously pointed out the sins of this world:*

. and now  
hen the rumble of death Rushes down the drain Pipe of eternity,  
id hell breaks out Into a thousand smiles, And the devil licks his chops  
Preparing to feast on life, And all the little devils Get out their bibs  
o devour the corrupt bones Of this world— Oh-ooo-oo-o!  
ien my friends!  
y, then! Oh, then!  
hat will you do?

ou will turn back  
id look toward the mountains.  
ou will turn back  
id grasp for a straw.  
ou will holler,  
*rd-d-d-d-d-ah!*  
*ve me, Lord!*  
*ve me!*  
id the Lord will say, *In the days of your greatness*  
*lid not hear your voice!*  
ie Lord will say,  
*the days of your richness*

*lid not see your face!*  
ie Lord will say,  
*o-oooo-ooo-oo-o!*  
*vill not save you now!*

id your soul  
ill be lost!

ome into the church this morning. Brothers and Sisters. And be saved—

And give freely  
the collection basket That I who am thy shepherd Might live.

nen!

## **Sinner**

ave mercy, Lord!

o' an' black

i' humble an' lonesome An' a sinner in yo' sight.

ave mercy, Lord!

## Litany

lather up

the arms of your pity The sick, the depraved, The desperate, the tired,  
All the scum

of our weary city

lather up

the arms of your pity.

lather up

the arms of your love— Those who expect  
no love from above.

## Angels Wings

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

ie angels wings is white as snow, But I drug ma wings In the dirty mire.

O, I drug ma wings All through the fire.

it the angels wings is white as snow, White as snow.



## **Judgment Day**

They put ma body in the ground, Ma soul went flyin' o' the town,  
went flyin' to the stars an' moon A-shoutin', God, I's comin' soon.

Jesus!

Lord in heaven,  
crown on His head,  
y'all don't be 'fraid Cause you ain't dead.

And Jesus!

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

## **Prayer Meeting**

ory! Hallelujah!

ie dawn's a-comin'!

ory! Hallelujah!

ie dawn's a-comin'!

black old woman croons In the amen-corner of the Ebecaneezer Baptist Church.

black old woman croons— The dawn's a-comin'!

## Spirituals

ocks and the firm roots of trees.  
ie rising shafts of mountains.  
omething strong to put my hands on.

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

*onna ride in my 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.

ng, O black mother!  
ng is a strong thing.

## Tambourines

mbourines!  
mbourines!  
mbourines  
o the glory of God!  
mbourines  
o glory!

gospel shout  
nd a gospel song:  
fe is short  
*ut God is long!*

mbourines!  
mbourines!  
mbourines  
o glory!

# SHADOW OF THE BLUES

## The Weary Blues

crooning 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!

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.

ie stars went out and so did the moon.

ie singer stopped playing and went to bed While the Weary Blues echoed  
through his head.

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

## Hope

metimes when I'm lonely, Don't know why,  
ep thinkin' I won't be lonely By and by.

## Late Last Night

te last night I  
t on my steps and cried.  
asn't nobody gone,  
either had nobody died.

vas cryin'  
use you broke my heart in two.  
u looked at me cross-eyed And broke my heart in two—

I was cryin'  
n account of  
u!



## **Bad Morning**

ere I sit  
ith my shoes mismated.  
wdy-mercy!  
frustrated!

## Sylvester's Dying Bed

woke up this mornin'  
out half-past three.  
All the womens in town  
as gathered round me.

Seet gals was a-moanin', "Sylvester's gonna die!"  
And a hundred pretty mamas Bowed their heads to cry.

woke up little later  
out half-past fo',  
The doctor 'n' undertaker's Both at ma do'.

Black gals was a-beggin', "You can't leave us here!"  
Own-skins cryin', "Daddy!  
Mony! Baby! Don't go, dear!"

At I felt ma time's a-comin', And I know'd I's dyin' fast.  
Saw the River Jerden  
Creepin' muddy past—  
At I's still Sweet Papa 'Vester, Yes, sir! Long as life do last!

At I hollers, "Com'ere, babies, Fo' to love yo' daddy right!"  
And I reaches up to hug 'em— When the Lawd put out the light.

When everything was darkness In a great ... big ... night.

## Wake

ll all my mourners  
o mourn in red—  
ause there ain't no sense In my bein' dead.

## Could Be

ould be Hastings Street, Or Lenox Avenue,  
ould be 18th & Vine  
id still be true.

ould be 5th & Mound, Could be Rampart:  
hen you pawned my watch  
u pawned my heart.

ould be you love me,  
ould be that you don't.  
ight be that you'll come back, Like as not you won't.

astings Street is weary, Also Lenox Avenue.  
y place is dreary  
ithout my watch and you.

## Bad Luck Card

ause you don't love me  
awful, awful hard.  
psy done showed me  
y bad luck card.

ere ain't no good left  
this world for me.  
psy done tole me—  
lucky as can be.

lon't know what  
' weary me can do.  
psy says I'd kill my self If I was you.

## Reverie on the Harlem River

Have you ever go down to the river— Two a.m. midnight by your self?  
Laid down by the river  
And wonder what you got left?

Have you ever think about your mother?  
God bless her, dead and gone!  
Have you ever think about your sweetheart And wish she'd never been  
born?

Down on the Harlem River: Two a.m.

Midnight!

By your self!

Well, I wish I could die— But who would miss me if I left?

## Morning After

was so sick last night I Didn't hardly know my mind.

so sick last night I

didn't know my mind.

drunk some bad lickin' that Almost made me blind.

had a dream last night I

thought I was in hell.

Woke up last night I

thought I was in hell.

Woke up and looked around me— Babe, your mouth was open like a well.

Oh, Baby! Baby!

Please don't snore so loud.

Oh, Baby! Please!

Please don't snore so loud.

You're just a little bit o' woman but you Sound like a great big crowd.

## Early Evening Quarrel

here is that sugar, Hammond, I sent you this morning to buy?  
ay, where is that sugar I sent you this morning to buy?  
ffee without sugar  
akes a good woman cry.

*I ain't got no sugar, Hattie, I gambled your dime away.  
Ain't got no sugar, I  
Done gambled that dime away.  
If yous a wise woman, Hattie, You ain't gonna have nothin to say.*

ain't no wise woman, Hammond.  
im evil and mad.  
n't no sense in a good woman Bein treated so bad.

*I don't treat you bad, Hattie, Neither does I treat you good.  
But I reckon I could treat you  
Worser if I would.*

wd, these things we women Have to stand!  
vonder is there nowhere a Do-right man?



## **Evil**

oks like what drives me crazy Don't have no effect on you— But I'm gonna keep on at it Till it drives you crazy, too.

## As Befits a Man

lon't mind dying—  
it I'd hate to die all alone!  
vant a dozen pretty women To holler, cry, and moan.

lon't mind dying  
it I want my funeral to be fine: A row of long tall mamas  
inting, fanning, and crying.

vant a fish-tail hearse And sixteen fish-tail cars, A big brass band  
id a whole truck load of flowers.

hen they let me down,  
own into the clay,  
vant the women to holler: *Please don't take him away!*  
    *Ow-ooo-oo-o!*  
*n't take daddy away!*

SEA  
AND  
LAND

## Havana Dreams

ie dream is a cocktail at Sloppy Joe's— (Maybe—nobody knows.)

ie dream is the road to Batabano.  
ut nobody knows if that is so.)

rhaps the dream is only her face— Perhaps it's a fan of silver lace— Or  
maybe the dream's a Vedado rose— (*Quien sabe?* Who really knows?)

## Catch

g Boy came  
rrying a mermaid  
n his shoulders  
nd the mermaid  
nd her tail  
urved  
neath his arm.

ing a fisher boy,  
e'd found a fish  
o carry—  
alf fish,  
alf girl  
o marry.

## **Water-Front Streets**

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

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

## Long Trip

The sea is a wilderness of waves, A desert of water.

We dip and dive,

Up and roll,

Down and are hidden

In the sea.

Day, night, Night, day, The sea is a desert of waves, A wilderness of  
water.

## Seascape

f the coast of Ireland As our ship passed by We saw a line of fishing  
ships Etched against the sky.

f the coast of England As we rode the foam We saw an Indian  
merchantman Coming home.

## **Moonlight Night: Carmel**

On night the waves march In long ranks  
Cutting the darkness  
With their silver shanks, Cutting the darkness  
And kissing the moon  
And beating the land's Edge into a swoon.



## Heaven

Heaven is  
the place where  
happiness is  
everywhere.

Animals  
and birds sing—  
and does  
everything.

On each stone,  
"How-do-you-do?"  
One answers back,  
"Well! And you?"

## **In Time of Silver Rain**

time of silver rain The earth  
its forth new life again, Green grasses grow  
and flowers lift their heads, And over all the plain The wonder spreads  
Of life, Of life, Of life!

time of silver rain The butterflies  
fit silken wings  
to catch a rainbow cry, And trees put forth  
new leaves to sing  
joy beneath the sky As down the roadway  
singing boys and girls Go singing, too,  
time of silver rain When spring And life Are new.

## Joy

vent to look for Joy, Slim, dancing Joy,  
y, laughing Joy,  
ight-eyed Joy—  
nd I found her  
iving the butcher's cart In the arms of the butcher boy!  
ch company, such company, As keeps this young nymph, Joy!

## Winter Moon

ow thin and sharp is the moon tonight!

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

## Snail

ittle snail,  
reaming you go.  
eather and rose  
all you know.

eather and rose  
all you see,  
inking  
ie dewdrop's  
ystery.

## March Moon

ie moon is naked.

ie wind has undressed the moon.

ie wind has blown all the cloud-garments Off the body of the moon And  
now she's naked,  
ark naked.

it why don't you blush, O shameless moon?

on't you know

isn't nice to be naked?

## Harlem Night Song

me,  
t us roam the night together Singing.

ove you.

ross  
ie Harlem roof-tops  
oon is shining.  
ght sky is blue.  
ars are great drops Of golden dew.

own the street  
band is playing.

ove you.

me,  
t us roam the night together Singing.

## **To Artina**

vill take your heart.

vill take your soul out of your body As though I were God.

vill not be satisfied With the little words you say to me.

vill not be satisfied With the touch of your hand Nor the sweet of your  
lips alone.

vill take your heart for mine.

vill take your soul.

vill be God when it comes to you.



## Fulfilment

ie earth-meaning  
ke the sky-meaning  
as fulfilled.

e got up  
id went to the river, Touched silver water, Laughed and bathed  
the sunshine.

ly  
came a bright ball of light For us to play with,  
nset  
yellow curtain,  
ght  
velvet screen.

ie moon,  
ke an old grandmother, Blessed us with a kiss And sleep  
ok us both in  
ughing.

## Gypsy Melodies

ings that break  
id scatter  
it of the moon:  
ockets of joy  
mmed too soon.

## **Mexican Market Woman**

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

## **A Black Pierrot**

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

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

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

## **Ardella**

would liken you

o a night without stars Were it not for your eyes.

would liken you

o a sleep without dreams Were it not for your songs.

## **When Sue Wears Red**

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

ome with a blast of trumpets, Jesus!

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

ow trumpets, Jesus!

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

weet silver trumpets, Jesus!

## Love

Love is a wild wonder And stars that sing,  
Rocks that burst asunder And mountains that take wing.

Oh Henry with his hammer Makes a little spark.  
That little spark is love Dying in the dark.

## Beale Street

ie dream is vague  
nd all confused  
ith dice and women  
nd jazz and booze.

ie dream is vague,  
ithout a name,  
t warm and wavering And sharp as flame.

ie loss  
' the dream  
aves nothing  
ie same.



## Port Town

ello, sailor boy,  
from the sea!  
ello, sailor,  
me with me!

me on drink cognac.  
ther have wine?  
me here, I love you.  
me and be mine.

ghts, sailor boy,  
arm, white lights.  
lid land, kid.  
ild, white nights.

me on, sailor,  
it o' the sea.  
t's go, sweetie!  
me with me.

## Natcha

Natcha, offering love.

For ten shillings offering love.

Offering: A night with me, honey.

Long, sweet night with me.

Come, drink palm wine.

Come, drink kisses.

Long, dream night with me.

## 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 the green sea  
For strength,  
And the brown land  
For laughter.

And nothing hereafter.

## Sea Calm

ow still,  
ow strangely still  
ie water is today.  
is not good  
r water  
be so still that way.

## **Dream Dust**

Wether out of star-dust Earth-dust, Cloud-dust, Storm-dust, And splinters of  
hail, One handful of dream-dust Not for sale.

## No Regrets

it of love,  
o regrets—  
ough the goodness  
e wasted forever.

it of love,  
o regrets—  
ough the return  
e never.

## Troubled Woman

She stands  
in the quiet darkness, This troubled woman  
flooded by  
loneliness and pain  
like an  
autumn flower  
under the frozen rain,  
like a  
wind-blown autumn flower That never lifts its head Again.

## Island

ave of sorrow,  
not drown me now:

ee the island  
ill ahead somehow.

ee the island  
id its sands are fair:

ave of sorrow,  
ke me there.



## **DISTANCE NOWHERE**

### **Border Line**

used to wonder  
about living and dying— I think the difference lies Between tears and  
crying.

used to wonder  
about here and there— I think the distance Is nowhere.

## Garden

range

storted blades of grass, Strange

storted trees,

range

storted tulips

1 their knees.

## Genius Child

his is a song for the genius child.  
sing it softly, for the song is wild.  
sing it softly as ever you can— Lest the song get out of hand.

*body loves a genius child.*

in you love an eagle, Tame or wild?

ild or tame,  
in you love a monster Of frightening name?

*body loves a genius child.*

*ll him*—and let his soul run wild!

## Strange Hurt

times of stormy weather She felt queer pain That said,  
'ou'll find rain better Than shelter from the rain."

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

months of snowy winter When cozy houses hold, She'd break down  
doors To wander naked  
the cold.

## **Suicide's Note**

ie calm,  
ool face of the river Asked me for a kiss.

## End

There are  
No clocks on the wall, And no time,  
No shadows that move From dawn to dusk  
Across the floor.

There is neither light Nor dark  
Outside the door.

*There is no door!*

## Drum

Far in mind  
That death is a drum Beating forever  
All the last worms come To answer its call, Till the last stars fall, Until the  
last atom Is no atom at all,  
Until time is lost  
And there is no air And space itself  
nothing nowhere, Death is a drum,  
signal drum,  
calling life  
Come!  
Come!  
Come!

## **Personal**

an envelope marked: *Personal*  
d addressed me a letter.

an envelope marked: *Personal*  
ave given my answer.



## Juliet

under  
and pain  
and terror,  
and sick silly songs Of sorrow,  
and the marrow  
of the bone  
of life  
is smeared across  
her mouth.

the road  
from Verona  
to Mantova  
dusty  
with the drought.

## Desire

Desire to us  
as like a double death, Swift dying  
Our mingled breath, Evaporation  
An unknown strange perfume Between us quickly  
A naked  
Room.

## Vagabonds

They are the desperate Who do not care,  
They are hungry  
Who have nowhere  
To eat,  
No place to sleep,  
They are tearless  
Who cannot  
Sleep.

## One

only  
the wind  
the Lincoln  
airies.

only  
a bottle of licker On a table  
by itself.

## Desert

nybody  
tter than  
obody.

the barren dusk  
en the snake  
at spirals  
rror on the sand—

tter than nobody  
this lonely  
nd.

## A House in Taos

*in*

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

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

under 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?

*n*

That there should be a barren garden About this house in Taos Is not so strange,

That there should be three barren hearts In this one house in Taos—  
Who carries ugly things to show the sun?

*oon*

Do you ask for the beaten brass of the moon?

We can buy lovely things with money, You, she, and I,

What you seek,

Although you could keep, This unbought loveliness of moon.

*ind*

Through our bodies, wind.

Our bodies are separate, individual things.

Through our bodies, wind, But blow quickly

Through the red, white, yellow skins Of our bodies

Not the terrible snarl, Not mine,

Not yours,

Not hers,

it all one snarl of souls.

ow quickly, wind, Before we run back  
to the windlessness— With our bodies—  
to the windlessness Of our house in Taos.

## **Demand**

sten!

ear dream of utter aliveness— Touching my body of utter death— Tell  
me, O quickly! dream of aliveness, The flaming source of your bright  
breath.

ll me, O dream of utter aliveness— Knowing so well the wind and the  
sun— Where is this light Your eyes see forever?

And what is this wind You touch when you run?



## Dream

st night I dreamt This most strange dream, And everywhere I saw What  
did not seem could ever be:

*u were not there with me!*

wake,  
urned  
id touched you  
leep,  
ce to the wall.

aid,  
ow dreams  
in lie!

*it you were not there at all!*

## **Night: Four Songs**

ght of the two moons And the seventeen stars, Night of the day before  
yesterday And the day after tomorrow, Night of the four songs unsung:  
Sorrow! Sorrow!

Sorrow! Sorrow!

## **Luck**

metimes a crumb falls From the tables of joy, Sometimes a bone  
flung.

o some people  
ve is given,  
o others  
ily heaven.

## Old Walt

d Walt Whitman

ent finding and seeking, Finding less than sought Seeking more than  
found, Every detail minding Of the seeking or the finding.

asured equally

seeking as in finding, Each detail minding, Old Walt went seeking And  
finding.

## Kid in the Park

nely little question mark on a bench in the park:

e the people passing by?  
e the airplanes in the sky?  
e the birds  
ing home  
fore  
rk?

ome's just around  
e corner  
ere—  
*t not really*  
*ywhere.*

## **Song for Billie Holiday**

What can purge my heart Of the song And the sadness?  
What can purge my heart But the song Of the sadness?  
What can purge my heart Of the sadness Of the song?

I do not speak of sorrow With dust in her hair, Or bits of dust in eyes A  
chance wind blows there.  
The sorrow that I speak of Is dusted with despair.

The voice of muted trumpet, Cold brass in warm air.  
After television blurred By sound that shimmers— Where?

## **Fantasy in Purple**

at the drums of tragedy for me.

at the drums of tragedy and death.

id let the choir sing a stormy song To drown the rattle of my dying  
breath.

at 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.

## AFTER HOURS

### Midnight Raffle

ut my nickel  
the raffle of the night.  
mehow that raffle Didn't turn out right.

ost my nickel.  
ost my time.  
got back home  
ithout a dime.

hen I dropped that nickel In the subway slot, I wouldn't have dropped it,  
Knowing what I got.

ould just as well've Stayed home inside: My bread wasn't buttered On  
neither side.



## What?

me pimps wear summer hats Into late fall  
nce the money that comes in Won't cover it all— Suit, overcoat, shoes—  
And hat, too!

ot to neglect something, So what would you do?

## Gone Boy

ayboy of the dawn, Solid gone!  
it all night  
ntil 12—1—2 a.m.

ext day  
hen he should be gone To work— *Dog-gone!*  
e ain't gone.

## 50–50

n all alone in this world, she said, Ain't got nobody to share my bed,  
Ain't got nobody to hold my hand— The truth of the matter's I ain't got  
no man.

g Boy opened his mouth and said, Trouble with you is You ain't got no  
head!  
you had a head and used your mind You could have *me* with you All the  
time.

e answered, Babe, what must I do?

e said, Share your bed— *And your money, too.*

## Maybe

asked you, baby,  
you understood—  
you told me that you didn't, But you thought you would.

## Lover's Return

y old time daddy  
me back home last night.  
s face was pale and His eyes didn't look just right.

e says, "Mary, I'm Comin' home to you— So sick and lonesome I don't  
know what to do."

*Oh, men treats women  
Just like a pair o' shoes—  
You kicks 'em round and  
Does 'em like you choose.*

ooked at my daddy— Lawd! and I wanted to cry.  
e looked so thin—  
wd! that I wanted to cry.  
it the devil told me: *Damn a lover*  
*Come home to die!*

## **Miss Blues'es Child**

the blues would let me, Lord knows I would smile.  
the blues would let me, I would smile, smile, smile.  
stead of that I'm cryin'— I must be Miss Blues'es child.

ou were my moon up in the sky, At night my wishing star.  
ove you, oh, I love you so— But you have gone so far!

ow my days are lonely, And night-time drives me wild.  
my heart I'm crying, I'm just Miss Blues'es child!

## Trumpet Player

the Negro  
with the trumpet at his lips Has dark moons of weariness Beneath his eyes  
here the smoldering memory Of slave ships  
azed to the crack of whips About his thighs.

the Negro  
with the trumpet at his lips Has a head of vibrant hair Tamed down,  
tent-leathered now Until it gleams  
like jet—  
here jet a crown.

the music  
from the trumpet at his lips Is honey  
mixed with liquid fire.  
the rhythm  
from the trumpet at his lips Is ecstasy  
stilled from old desire—

the sire  
that is longing for the moon Where the moonlight's but a spotlight In his  
eyes,  
the sire  
that is longing for the sea Where the sea's a bar-glass Sucker size.

the Negro  
with the trumpet at his lips Whose jacket  
is a *fine* one-button roll, Does not know  
upon what riff the music slips Its hypodermic needle To his soul—

it softly  
the tune comes from his throat Trouble  
allows to a golden note.

## Monroe's Blues

Monroe's fell on evil days— His woman and his friend is dead.  
Monroe's fell on evil days, Can't hardly get his bread.

Monroe sings a little blues, His little blues is sad.  
Monroe sings a little blues— *My woman and my friend is dead.*



## **Stony Lonesome**

They done took Cordelia Out to stony lonesome ground.

One took Cordelia

to stony lonesome,

and laid her down.

They done put Cordelia Underneath that

boneless mound.

Ay-Lord!

Ay-Lord!

Ay-Lord!

He done left poor Buddy To struggle by his self.

poor Buddy Jones,

now, he's done been left.

She's out in stony lonesome, Lordy! Sleepin' by herself.

Cordelia's In stony Lonesome Ground!

## Black Maria

ust be the Black Maria That I see,  
ie Black Maria that I see— But I hope it  
n't comin' for me.

ear that music playin' upstairs?  
v, my heart is  
ll of cares—  
it that music playin' upstairs *Is* for me.

be, did you ever  
e the sun  
se at dawnin' full of fun?  
ys, did you ever see the sun rise Full of fun, full of fun?  
ien you know a new day's Done begun.

ack Maria passin' by Leaves the sunrise in the sky— And a new day,  
s, a new day's  
one begun!

**LIFE  
IS  
FINE**

**Life Is Fine**

vent down to the river, I set down on the bank.  
ried to think but couldn't, So I jumped in and sank.

ame up once and hollered!  
ame up twice and cried!  
that water hadn't a-been so cold I might've sunk and died.

*But it was  
Cold in that water!  
It was cold!*

ook the elevator  
xteen floors above the ground.  
hought about my baby And thought I would jump down.

tood there and I hollered!  
tood there and I cried!  
it hadn't a-been so high I might've jumped and died.

*But it was  
High up there!  
It was high!*

since I'm still here livin', I guess I will live on.  
ould've died for love— But for livin' I was born.

ough you may hear me holler, And you may see me cry— I'll be dogged,  
sweet baby, If you gonna see me die.

*Life is fine!*

*Fine as wine!*

*Life is fine!*

## Still Here

I've been scarred and battered.

My hopes the wind done scattered.

Now has friz me, sun has baked me.

Looks like between 'em They done tried to make me Stop laughin',  
stop lovin', stop livin'— But I don't care!

*I'm still here!*

## Ballad of the Gypsy

vent to the Gypsy's.  
Gypsy settin' all alone.  
aid, Tell me, Gypsy, When will my gal be home?

Gypsy said, Silver,  
it some silver in my hand And I'll look into the future And tell you all I  
can.

rossed her palm with silver, Then she started in to lie.  
e said, Now, listen, Mister, She'll be here by and by.

*Aw, what a lie!*

een waitin' and a-waitin'  
id she ain't come home yet.  
omething musta happened To make my gal forget.

1! I hates a lyin' Gypsy Will take good money from you, Tell you pretty  
stories And take your money from you—

it if I was a Gypsy  
ould take your money, too.

## **Me and the Mule**

y old mule,  
e's got a grin on his face.  
e's been a mule so long He's forgot about his race.

n like that old mule— Black—and don't give a damn!  
ou got to take me  
ke I am.

## Kid Sleepy

Listen, Kid Sleepy,  
Don't you want to run around To the other side of the house Where the  
shade is?  
It's sunny here  
And your skin'll turn  
reddish-purple in the sun.

Kid Sleepy said, *I don't care.*

Listen, Kid Sleepy,  
Don't you want to get up And go to work down-Town somewhere To earn  
enough  
for lunches and car fare?

Kid Sleepy said, *I don't care.*

Would you rather,  
Kid Sleepy, just  
stay here?

*Rather just  
Stay here.*



## **Little Lyric (*Of Great Importance*)**

vish the rent  
as heaven sent.

## **Fired**

wake all night with loving The bright day caught me Unawares—asleep.

ate to work again,”  
ie boss man said.  
‘ou’re fired!”

I went on back to bed— And dreamed the sweetest dream With  
Caledonia’s arm  
neath my head.

## Midnight Dancer

ine-maiden

the jazz-tuned night, Lips

weet as purple dew,

easts

ke the pillows of all sweet dreams, Who crushed

ie grapes of joy

nd dripped their juice On you?

## Blue Monday

o use in my going  
owntown to work today, It's eight, I'm late— And it's marked down that-  
a-way.

turday and Sunday's  
n to sport around.  
it no use denying—  
onday'll get you down.

iat old blue Monday  
ill surely get you down.

## **Ennui**

s such a  
re  
ing always  
or.

## Mama and Daughter

*Mama, please brush off my coat  
I'm going down the street.*

Where're you going, daughter?

*To see my sugar-sweet.*

Who is your sugar, honey?  
Turn around—I'll brush behind.

*He is that young man, mama, I can't get off my mind.*

Daughter, once upon a time— Let me brush the hem—  
Your father, yes, he was the one!  
I felt like that about him.

Oh, it was a long time ago He up and went his way.  
I hope that wild young son-of-a-gun Rots in hell today!

*Mama, dad couldn't be still young.*

I was young yesterday.  
I was young when he— Turn around!  
I can brush your back, I say!

## Delinquent

ittle Julie  
as grown quite tall.  
lks say she don't like To stay home at all.

ittle Julie  
as grown quite stout.  
lks say it's not just Stomach sticking out.

ittle Julie  
as grown quite wise—  
tiger, a lion, and an owl In her eyes.

ittle Julie  
ys she don't care!  
hat she means is:  
*nobody cares*  
*nywhere.*

**S-sss-ss-sh!**

er great adventure ended As great adventures should In life being created  
new—and good.

*Except the neighbors  
And her mother  
Did not think it good!*

ature has a way  
not caring much  
out marriage  
censes and such.

*But the neighbors  
And her mother  
Cared very much!*

ie baby came one morning, Almost with the sun.

*The neighbors—  
And its grandma—  
Were outdone!*

it mother and child  
ought it fun.



## Homecoming

vent back in the alley And I opened up my door.  
l her clothes was gone: She wasn't home no more.

ulled back the covers, I made down the bed.  
*whole* lot of room Was the only thing I had.

## Final Curve

hen you turn the corner And you run into *yourself*  
ien you know that you have turned All the corners that are left.

## Little Green Tree

looks like to me  
y good-time days done past.  
n'thin' in this world  
due to last.

used to play  
nd I played so dog-gone hard.  
ow old age has  
halt my bad-luck card.

ook down the road  
nd I see a little tree.  
little piece down the road.  
ee a little tree.

em cool green leaves Is waitin' to shelter me.

*little tree!*

## Crossing

was that lonely day, folks, When I walked all by myself.  
My friends was all around me But it was as if they'd left.  
I went up on a mountain In a high cold wind  
And the coat that I was wearing Was mosquito-netting thin.  
I went down in the valley And I crossed an icy stream And the water I was  
crossing Was no water in a dream And the shoes I was wearing No  
protection for that stream.  
When I stood out on a prairie And as far as I could see Wasn't nobody on  
that prairie Looked like me.  
was that lonely day, folks, I walked all by myself: My friends was right  
there with me But was just as if they'd left.

## Widow Woman

1, that last long ride is a Ride everybody must take.  
s, that last long ride's a Ride everybody must take.  
id that final stop is a Stop everybody must make.

hen they put you in the ground and They throw dirt in your face, I say  
put you in the ground and Throw dirt in your face, That's one time,  
pretty papa, You'll sure stay in your place.

u was a mighty lover and you Ruled me many years.  
mighty lover, baby, cause you Ruled me many years— If I live to be a  
thousand I'll never dry these tears.

lon't want nobody else and Don't nobody else want me.  
ay don't want nobody else And don't nobody else want me—

*t you never can tell when a  
oman like me is free!*

# LAMENT OVER LOVE

## Misery

ay the blues for me.  
ay the blues for me.  
o other music  
ease my misery.

ng a soothin' song.  
id a soothin' song, Cause the man I love's done Done me wrong.

in't you understand, O, understand  
good woman's cryin'  
r a no-good man?

ack gal like me,  
ack gal like me  
got to hear a blues For her misery.

## Ballad of the Fortune Teller

adam could look in your hand— Never seen you before— And tell you  
more than You'd want to know.

He could tell you about love, And money, and such.  
And she wouldn't  
worry you much.

A fellow came one day.  
adam took him in.  
He treated him like He was her kin.

He gave him money to gamble.  
He gave him bread,  
and let him sleep in her Walnut bed.

Friends tried to tell her Dave meant her no good.  
Looks like she could've knowed it If she only would.

He mistreated her terrible, Beat her up bad.  
Then went off and left her.  
Took all she had.

He tried to find out What road he took.  
There wasn't a trace No way she looked.

That woman who could foresee What *your* future meant, Couldn't tell, to  
save her, Where Dave went.

## **Cora**

roke my heart this mornin', Ain't got no heart no more.  
ext time a man comes near me Gonna shut an' lock my door Cause they  
treat me mean— The ones I love.  
ey always treat me mean.



## **Down and Out**

by, if you love me Help me when I'm down and out If you love me,  
baby, Help me when I'm down and out, I'm a po' gal  
nobody gives a damn about.

the credit man's done took ma clothes And rent time's nearly here.  
I like to buy a straightenin' comb, An' I need a dime fo' beer.

I need a dime fo' beer.

## Young Gal's Blues

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

n goin' to the po' house To see ma old Aunt Clew.  
oin' to the po' house To see ma old Aunt Clew.  
hen I'm old an' ugly I'll want to see somebody, too.

ie po' house is lonely An' the grave is cold.  
the po' house is lonely, The graveyard grave is cold.  
it I'd rather be dead than To be ugly an' old.

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

## Ballad of the Girl Whose Name Is Mud

girl with all that raising, It's hard to understand How she could get in  
trouble With a no-good man.

ie guy she gave her all to Dropped her with a thud.  
ow amongst decent people, Dorothy's name is mud.

it nobody's seen her shed a tear, Nor seen her hang her head.  
n't even heard her murmur, *Lord, I wish I was dead!*

o! The hussy's telling everybody— Just as though it was no sin— That if  
she had a chance *She'd do it agin'!*

## Hard Daddy

vent to ma daddy,  
ys Daddy I have got the blues.  
ent to ma daddy,  
ys Daddy I have got the blues.  
a daddy says, Honey, Can't you bring no better news?

ried on his shoulder but He turned his back on me.  
ied on his shoulder but He turned his back on me.  
e said a woman's cryin's Never gonna bother me.

vish I had wings to Fly like the eagle flies.  
ish I had wings to  
y like the eagle flies.  
l fly on ma man an'  
l scratch out both his eyes.

## Midwinter Blues

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

on't know's I'd mind his goin'  
it he left me when the coal was low.  
on't know's I'd mind his goin'  
it he left when the coal was low.  
ow, if a man loves a woman That ain't no time to go.

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

n gonna buy me a rose bud An' plant it at my back door, Buy me a rose  
bud,  
ant it at my back door, So when I'm dead they won't need No flowers  
from the store.

## Little Old Letter

was yesterday morning I looked in my box for mail.  
ie letter that I found there Made me turn right pale.

st a little old letter, Wasn't even one page long— But it made me wish  
vas in my grave and gone.

urned it over,  
ot a word writ on the back.  
ever felt so lonesome Since I was born black.

st a pencil and paper, You don't need no gun nor knife— A little old  
letter  
in take a person's life.

## Lament over Love

Hope my child'll  
Never love a man.  
May I hope my child'll Never love a man.  
Love can hurt you  
More'n anything else can.

Am goin' down to the river An' I ain't goin' there to swim; Down to the  
river,  
Amn't goin' there to swim.  
My true love's left me And I'm goin' there to think about him.

Love is like whiskey, Love is like red, red wine.  
Love is like whiskey, Like sweet red wine.  
If you want to be happy You got to love all the time.

Am goin' up in a tower Tall as a tree is tall, Up in a tower  
As tall as a tree is tall.  
Donna think about my man— And let my fool-self fall.

# MAGNOLIA FLOWERS

## Daybreak in Alabama

When I get to be a composer I'm gonna write me some music about  
Daybreak in Alabama

And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it Rising out of the ground like a  
swamp mist And falling out of heaven like soft dew.

I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it And the scent of pine needles And  
the smell of red clay after rain And long red necks

And poppy colored faces And big brown arms

And the field daisy eyes Of black and white black white black people And

I'm gonna put white hands And black hands and brown and yellow

hands And red clay earth hands in it Touching everybody with kind  
fingers And touching each other natural as dew In that dawn of music

when I Get to be a composer

And I write about daybreak In Alabama.



## **Cross**

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

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.

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

## Magnolia Flowers

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

vent lookin' for magnolia flowers But I didn't find 'em.  
vent 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.*

ere ought to be magnolias Somewhere in this dusk.

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

## 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.

What's a body but a toy?

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?*

Over 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.*

ie bright stars scatter everywhere.

ne wood scent in the evening air.

A nigger night, A nigger joy.

*I am your son, white man!*

A little yellow Bastard boy.

## Southern Mammy Sings

Miss Gardner's in her garden.  
Miss Yardman's in her yard.  
Miss Michaelmas is at de mass And I am gettin' tired!  
    Lawd!  
I'm gettin' tired!

De nations they is fightin'  
And de nations they done fit.  
Sometimes I think that white folks Ain't worth a little bit.  
    No, m'am!  
Ain't worth a little bit.

Last week they lynched a colored boy.  
They hung him to a tree.  
That colored boy ain't said a thing But we all should be free.  
    Yes, m'am!  
We all should be free.

It meanin' to be sassy And not meanin' to be smart— But sometimes I  
think that white folks Just ain't got no heart.  
    No, m'am!  
It ain't got no heart.

## **Ku Klux**

They took me out  
To some lonesome place.  
They said, "Do you believe In the great white race?"

I said, "Mister,  
I tell you the truth, I'd believe in anything If you'd just turn me loose."

The white man said, "Boy, Can it be  
You're a-standin' there A-sassin' me?"

They hit me in the head And knocked me down.  
And then they kicked me On the ground.

A Klansman said, "Nigger, Look me in the face— And tell me you believe  
in The great white race."

## West Texas

own in West Texas where the sun Shines like the evil one I had a woman  
and her name  
as Joe.

ckin' cotton in the field Joe said I wonder how it would feel For us to  
pack up  
our things  
and go?

we cranked up our old Ford And we started down the road Where we  
was goin'  
we didn't know—  
or which way.

it West Texas where the sun Shines like the evil one Ain't no place  
for a colored  
man to stay!

## Share-Croppers

st a herd of Negroes Driven to the field,  
owing, planting, hoeing, To make the cotton yield.

hen the cotton's picked And the work is done  
ss man takes the money And we get none,

aves us hungry, ragged As we were before.  
ar by year goes by  
nd we are nothing more

ian a herd of Negroes Driven to the field— Plowing life away  
o make the cotton yield.



## 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,  
Working 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,  
Habitues of the high shuttered houses, Pay more money to her now Than  
they ever did before, When she worked in their kitchens.

## **Roland Hayes Beaten (*Georgia*: 1942)**

egroes,  
weet and docile,  
eek, humble, and kind: Beware the day  
ey change their minds!

ind  
the cotton fields,  
ntle breeze:  
ware the hour  
uproots trees!

## Uncle Tom

ithin—

ie beaten pride.

ithout—

ie grinning face,

ie low, obsequious,

uble bow,

ie sly and servile grace Of one the white folks Long ago

ught well

o know his

ace.

## Porter

must say

Yes, sir,

for you all the time.

Yes, sir!

Yes, sir!

For my days

climbing up a great big mountain Of yes, sirs!

For an old white man

conquers the world.

For my shoes

must shine.

Yes, sir!

## Blue Bayou

vent walkin'  
r the blue bayou  
nd I saw the sun go down.  
hought about old Greeley And I thought about Lou And I saw the sun go  
down.

White man Makes me work all day And I work too hard For too little  
pay— Then a white man Takes my woman away.

I kill old Greeley.

The blue bayou Turns red as fire.  
*Put the black man*  
*On a rope*  
*And pull him higher!*

aw the sun go down.

*Put him on a rope*  
*And pull him higher!*

The blue bayou's A pool of fire.  
nd I saw the sun go down, Down,  
Down, Lawd, I saw the sun go down!

## Silhouette

Southern gentle lady,  
Do not swoon.  
They've just hung a black man In the dark of the moon.

They've hung a black man To a roadside tree  
In the dark of the moon For the world to see  
Now Dixie protects  
White womanhood.

Southern gentle lady,  
Be good!  
Be good!

## **Song for a Dark Girl**

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

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

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

## The South

ie lazy, laughing South With blood on its mouth.  
ie sunny-faced South, Beast-strong, Idiot-brained.  
ie 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.

autiful, like a woman, Seductive as a dark-eyed whore, Passionate, cruel,  
Honey-lipped, syphilitic— That is the South.

id I, who am black, would love her But she spits in my face.

id I, who am black,

ould 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.



## Bound No'th Blues

Goin' down the road, Lawd, Goin' down the road.  
 Goin' down the road, Lawd,  
 Goin' way down the road.  
 Goin' to find somebody  
 Goin' to help me carry this load.

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

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

oad, road, road, O!  
oad, road ... road ... road, road!  
oad, road, road, O!  
n the no'thern road.  
ese Mississippi towns ain't Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

NAME  
IN  
UPHILL  
LETTERS

## One-Way Ticket

ick up my life  
id take it with me  
id I put it down in Chicago, Detroit,  
iffalo, Scranton,  
y place that is  
orth and East—  
id not Dixie.

ick up my life  
id take it on the train To Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Seattle, Oakland, Salt  
Lake, Any place that is  
orth and West—  
id not South.

im fed up  
ith Jim Crow laws,  
ople who are cruel And afraid,  
ho lynch and run,  
ho are scared of me And me of them.

ick up my life  
id take it away  
1 a one-way ticket— Gone up North,  
one out West.

me! me!

## Migrant

Chicago)

addy-o

addy-o

orks at the foundry.

addy-o

addy-o

des the State Street street car, Transfers to the West Side, Polish, Bohunk,  
Irish, Grabs a load of sunrise As he rides out on the prairie, Never knew  
DuSable,

as a lunch to carry.

on lifting iron

akes iron of chocolate muscles.

on lifting iron

akes hammer beat of drum beat And the heat

oulds and melts and moulds it On red heart become an anvil Until a glow  
is lighted In the eyes once soft benighted And the cotton field is  
frightened A thousand miles away.

ey draw up restrictive covenants In Australia, too, they say.

ir President

kes up important matters Still left by V-J Day.

ngress cases Russia.

ie *Tribune's* hair Turns gray.

addy-o

addy-o

gns his name

uphill letters

1 the check that is his pay.

it if he wasn't in a hurry He wouldn't write so Bad that way,

addy-o.

## Summer Evening (*Calumet Avenue*)

others pass,  
weet watermelon in a baby carriage, Black seed for eyes  
nd a rose pink mouth.  
mps in gray go by, Boots polished like a Murray head, Or in reverse  
adam Walker  
n their shoe tips.  
W. Harper  
ops to listen to gospel songs From a tent at the corner Where the carnival  
is Christian.  
neys go by  
ll of chine bones in dark glasses, And a blind man plays an accordion  
Gurgling *Jericho*.

eresa Belle Aletha Throws a toothpick from her window, And the four  
bells she's awaiting Do not ring, not even murmur.  
it maybe before midnight The tamale man will come by, And if Uncle  
Mac brings beer Night will pull its slack taut And wrap a string around  
its finger So as not to forget  
at tomorrow is Monday.

*dime on those two bottles.*  
*s, they are yours, Too!*

nd in another week  
will again  
: Sunday.

## Graduation

nnamon and rayon,  
t and coconut eyes, Mary Lulu Jackson  
nooths the skirt  
her thighs.

ama, portly oven,  
ings remainders from the kitchen Where the people all are icebergs  
Wrapped in checks and wealthy.

PLOMA in its new frame: Mary Lulu Jackson,  
ting chicken,  
lls her mama she's a typist And the clicking of the keys Will spell the  
name  
' a job in a fine office Far removed from basic oven, Cookstoves,  
nd iceberg's kitchen.

ama says, *Praise Jesus!*  
*util then*  
*! bring home chicken!*

ie DIPLOMA bursts its frame To scatter star-dust in their eyes.

ama says, *Praise Jesus!*  
*ie colored race will rise!*

ama says, *Praise Jesus!*

ien,  
cause she's tired, She sighs.

## Interne at Provident

hite coats

hite aprons

hite dresses

hite shoes

in and a learning

take away to Alabama.

actice on a State Street cancer, Practice on a stockyards rupture, Practice  
on the small appendix Of 26-girl at the corner, Learning skills of  
surgeons Brown and wonderful with longing To cure ills of Africa,

Democracy,

id mankind,

so ills quite common Among all who stand on two feet.

own hands

ack hands

olden hands in white coat, Nurses' hands on suture.

iracle maternity:

in on hind legs rising, Pain tamed and subsiding Like a mule broke to  
the halter.

arity's checked money Aids triumphant entry squalling After bitter  
thrust of bearing Chocolate and blood:

ojection of a day!

ars of joy And Coca-Cola

vinkle on the rubber gloves He's wearing.

crown of sweat

eams on his forehead.

the white moon

' the amphitheatre

agi are staring.

ie light on the Palmolive Building Shines like a star in the East.  
urses turn glass doorknobs Opening into corridors.

mist of iodine and ether Follows the young doctor, Cellophanes his long  
stride, Cellophanes his future.



## Railroad Avenue

Dark  
1 Railroad Avenue.  
Lights in the fish joints, Lights in the pool rooms.  
Box-car some train Has forgotten  
the middle of the Block.  
Player piano,  
Victrola.  
942  
Was the number.

Boy  
Hanging on a corner.  
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.

## Mother to Son

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

## Stars

sweep of stars over Harlem streets, O, little breath of oblivion that is night.

A city building To a mother's song.

A city dreaming To a lullaby.

Reach up your hand, dark boy, and take a star.

It of the little breath of oblivion That is night, Take just One star.

## To Be Somebody

ittle girl

reaming of a baby grand piano (Not knowing there's a Steinway bigger,  
bigger) Dreaming of a baby grand to play That stretches paddle-tailed  
across the floor, Not standing upright Like a bad boy in the corner, But  
sending music

o the stairs and down the stairs And out the door

o confound even Hazel Scott Who might be passing!

1!

ittle boy

reaming of the boxing gloves Joe Louis wore,  
ie gloves that sent Two dozen men to the floor.  
ockout!

m! Bop! Mop!

ere's always room, *They say*,  
the top.

## Note on Commercial Theatre

ou've taken my blues and gone— You sing 'em on Broadway And you  
sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl, And you mixed 'em up with symphonies  
And you fixed 'em  
they don't sound like me.  
p, you done taken my blues and gone.

ou also took my spirituals and gone.  
*ou put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones*  
id all kinds of *Swing Mikados*  
id in everything but what's about me— But someday somebody'll Stand  
up and talk about me, And write about me— Black and beautiful— And  
sing about me,  
id put on plays about me!  
eckon it'll be  
e myself!

s, it'll be me.

## Puzzled

ere on the edge of hell Stands Harlem— Remembering the old lies, The  
old kicks in the back, The old, *Be patient*, They told us before.

re, we remember.  
ow, when the man at the corner store Says sugar's gone up another two  
cents, And bread one,  
id there's a new tax on cigarettes— We remember the job we never had,  
Never could get,  
id can't have now  
cause we're colored.

we stand here  
n the edge of hell  
Harlem  
id look out on the world And wonder  
hat we're gonna do  
the face of  
hat we remember.

## Seashore through Dark Glasses (*Atlantic City*)

Big sailors with large noses Binocular the Atlantic.

Club Harlem it's eleven And seven cats go frantic.  
Two parties from Philadelphia Dignify the place  
And murmur:

*Oh Negroes*  
*Uplift the race!*

1 Artie Avenue  
a food joints  
ent salty-colored  
mpass points.

## **Baby**

bert!

ey, Albert!

on't you play in dat road.

You see dem trucks A-goin' by.

One run ovah you An' you die.

bert, don't you play in dat road.



## Merry-Go-Round

*colored child at carnival:*

here is the Jim Crow section On this merry-go-round, Mister, cause I  
want to ride?

own South where I come from White and colored  
n't sit side by side.

own South on the train There's a Jim Crow car.

n the bus we're put in the back— But there ain't no back To a merry-go-  
round!

here's the horse

r a kid that's black?

## Elevator Boy

Got a job now  
Runnin' an elevator  
At the Dennison Hotel in Jersey.  
But ain't no good though.  
No money around.

Jobs are just chances Like everything else.

Maybe a little luck now, Maybe not.

Maybe a good job sometimes: Step out o' the barrel, boy.

No new suits an'  
No woman to sleep with.

Maybe no luck for a long time.

Only the elevators Goin' up an' down, Up an' down, Or somebody  
else's shoes To shine, Or greasy pots in a dirty kitchen.

Been runnin' this  
Elevator too long.  
Unless I'll quit now.

## Who But the Lord?

looked and I saw  
that man they call the Law.  
He was coming  
down the street at me!  
I had visions in my head Of being laid out cold and dead, Or else murdered  
at the third degree.

aid, *O, Lord, if you can, Save me from that man!*  
*Don't let him make a pulp out of me!*  
But the Lord he was not quick.  
The Law raised up his stick And beat the living hell Out of me!

Now, I do not understand Why God don't protect a man From police  
brutality.  
Being poor and black, I've no weapon to strike back So who but the Lord  
can protect me?

## Third Degree

t me! Jab me!  
ake me say I did it.  
ood on my sport shirt And my tan suede shoes.

*ces like jack-o'-lanterns*  
*gray slouch hats.*

ig me! Beat me!  
ream jumps out  
ke blow-torch.  
ree kicks between the legs That km the kids  
l make tomorrow.

*rs and floor skyrocket*  
*id burst like Roman candles.*

hen you throw  
old water on me,  
l sign the  
per....

## Ballad of the Man Who's Gone

o money to bury him.

ie relief gave Forty-Four.

ie undertaker told 'em, You'll need Sixty more

r a first-class funeral, A hearse and two cars— And maybe your friends'll  
Send some flowers.

s wife took a paper And went around.

everybody that gave something She put 'em down.

e raked up a Hundred For her man that was dead.

s buddies brought flowers.

funeral was had.

minister preached— And charged Five

o bless him dead

id praise him alive.

ow that he's buried— God rest his soul—

ckon there's no charge For graveyard mold.

*wonder what makes*

*funeral so high?*

*poor man ain't got*

*o business to die.*

# MADAM TO YOU

## Madam's Past History

y name is Johnson— Madam Alberta K.  
ie Madam stands for business.  
n smart that way.

iad a  
AIR-DRESSING PARLOR  
efore  
ie depression put The prices lower.

ien I had a  
ARBECUE STAND  
ll I got mixed up With a no-good man.

ause I had a insurance The WPA  
id, We can't use you Wealthy that way.

aid,  
ON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!  
st like the song, You WPA folks take care of yourself— And I'll get along.

lo cooking,  
y's work, too!  
berta K. Johnson— *Madam* to you.

## Madam and Her Madam

worked for a woman, She wasn't mean— But she had a twelve-room  
House to clean.

ad to get breakfast, Dinner, and supper, too— Then take care of her  
children When I got through.

ash, iron, and scrub, Walk the dog around— It was too much, Nearly  
broke me down.

aid, Madam,  
in it be  
u trying to make a Pack-horse out of me?

e opened her mouth.  
e cried, Oh, no!  
u know, Alberta, I love you so!

aid, Madam,  
at may be true— But I'll be dogged If I love you!

## Madam's Calling Cards

Had some cards printed The other day.  
They cost me more Than I wanted to pay.

Old the man  
Wasn't no mint, But I hankered to see My name in print

ADAM JOHNSON,  
BERTA K.  
He said, Your name looks good Madam'd that way.

Will I use Old English Or a Roman letter?  
Aid, Use American.  
American's better.

There's nothing foreign To my pedigree:  
Berta K. Johnson— *American* that's me.



## Madam and the Rent Man

The rent man knocked.  
He said, Howdy-do?  
He said, What  
can I do for you?  
He said, You know Your rent is due.

He said, Listen,  
Before I'd pay  
I'd go to Hades  
And rot away!

The sink is broke, The water don't run, And you ain't done a thing You  
promised to've done.

The back window's cracked, Kitchen floor squeaks, There's rats in the cellar,  
And the attic leaks.

He said, Madam,  
It's not up to me.  
It's just the agent, Don't you see?

He said, Naturally, You pass the buck.  
It's money you want You're out of luck.

He said, Madam, I ain't pleased!  
He said, Neither am I.

Now we agrees!

## Madam and the Number Writer

umber runner  
me to my door.  
iad swore  
wouldn't play no more.

e said, Madam,  
0-2  
oks like a likely Hit for you.

aid, Last night, I dreamed 7-0-3.  
e said, That might Be a hit for me.

e played a dime, I played, too,  
ien we boxed 'em.  
ouldn't you?

it the number that day Was 3-2-6— And we both was in The *same* old  
fix.

aid, I swear I Ain't gonna play no more Till I get over  
the other shore—

ien I can play  
n them golden streets Where the number not only Comes out—but  
repeats!

ie runner said, Madam, That's all very well— But suppose  
u goes to hell?

## Madam and the Phone Bill

u say I O.K.ed LONG DISTANCE?  
K.ed it when?  
y goodness, Central, That was *then!*

n mad and disgusted With that Negro now.  
lon't pay no REVERSED  
IARGES nohow.

u say, I will pay it— Else you'll take out my phone?  
u better let  
y phone alone.

lidn't ask him To telephone me.  
scoe knows darn well LONG DISTANCE  
n't free.

I ever catch him, Lawd, have pity!  
lling me up  
om Kansas City

st to say he loves me!  
mowed that was so.  
hy didn't he tell me some'n I don't know?

r instance, what can Them other girls do That Alberta K. Johnson Can't  
do—*and more, too?*

hat's that, Central?  
u say you don't care Nothing about my Private affair?

ell, even less about your PHONE BILL does I care!

1-humm-m! ... Yes!  
u say I gave my O.K.?

ell, that O.K. you may keep—

it I *sure* ain't gonna pay!

## Madam and the Charity Child

nce I adopted  
little girl child.  
e grew up and got ruint, Nearly drove me wild.

en I adopted  
little boy.  
e used a switch-blade For a toy.

hat makes these charity Children so bad?  
n't had no luck With none I had.

or little things, Born behind the 8-rock, With parents that don't even  
Stop to take stock.

ie county won't pay me But a few bucks a week.  
n't raise no child on that, So to speak.

nd the lady from the Juvenile Court  
ways coming around Wanting a report.

st time I told her, Report, my eye!  
ings is bad—  
u figure out why!

## Madam and the Fortune Teller

Fortune teller looked in my hand.

Fortune teller said, Madam, It's just good luck You ain't dead.

Fortune teller squeeze my hand.

She squinted up her eyes.

Fortune teller said, Madam, you ain't wise.

I said, Please explain to me What you mean by that?

She said, You must recognize Where your fortune's at.

I said, Madam, tell me— For she was *Madam*, too— Where *is* my fortune at?

I'll pay some mind to you.

She said, Your fortune, honey, Lies right in yourself.

You ain't gonna find it On nobody else's shelf.

I said, What *man* you're talking 'bout?

She said, Madam! Be calm— For one more dollar and a half, I'll read your other palm.

## Madam and the Wrong Visitor

man knocked three times.  
never seen him before.  
e said, Are you Madam?  
aid, What's the score?

e said, I reckon You don't know my name, But I've come to call On you  
just the same.

tepped back  
ke he had a charm.  
e said, I really Don't mean no harm.

n just Old Death And I thought I might Pay you a visit  
efore night.

e said, You're Johnson— Madam Alberta K.?  
aid, Yes—but *Alberta*  
n't goin' with you today!

o sooner had I told him Than I awoke.  
ie doctor said, Madam, Your fever's broke—

urse, put her on a diet, And buy her some chicken.  
aid, Better buy *two*—  
use I'm still here kickin'!

## Madam and the Minister

Reverend Butler came by My house last week.  
He said, Have you got A little time to speak?

He said, I am interested In your soul.  
Has it been saved, Or is your heart stone-cold?

He said, Reverend, I'll have you know I was baptized  
Long ago.

He said, What have you Done since then?  
He said, None of your Business, friend.

He said, Sister  
Have you back-slid?  
He said, It felt good— If I did!

He said, Sister, Come time to die, The Lord will surely Ask you why!  
I'm gonna pray  
For you!  
Goodbye!

I felt kinder sorry I talked that way After Rev. Butler Went away— So I  
ain't in no mood For sin today.



## Madam and Her Might-Have-Been

I had two husbands.  
I could of had three— But my Might-Have-Been Was too good for me.

When you grow up the hard way Sometimes you don't know What's too good to be true, Just might be so.

He worked all the time, Spent his money on me— First time in my life I had anything free.

He said, Do you love me?  
I am I mistaken?  
You're always giving And never taking.

He said, Madam, I swear All I want is you.  
Right then and there I knowed we was through!

I told him, Jackson, You better leave— You got some'n else Up your sleeve:

When you think you got bread It's always a stone— Nobody loves nobody For yourself alone.

He said, In me  
You've got no trust.  
He said, I don't want My heart to bust.

## Madam and the Census Man

ie census man,  
ie day he came round, Wanted my name  
put it down.

aid, JOHNSON, ALBERTA K.  
it he hated to write The K that way.

e said, What  
oes K stand for?  
aid, K—  
id nothing more.

e said, I'm gonna put it K—A—Y.  
aid, If you do, You lie.

y mother christened me ALBERTA K.  
ou leave my name Just that way!

e said, Mrs.,  
(with a snort)  
st a K  
akes your name too short.

aid, I don't  
ve a damn!  
ave me and my name Just like I am!

urthermore, rub out That MRS., too— I'll have you know I'm *Madam* to  
you!

# MONTAGE OF A DREAM DEFERRED

## Dream Boogie

ood morning, daddy!  
n't you heard  
ie boogie-woogie rumble  
' a dream deferred?

sten closely:  
u'll hear their feet  
ating out and beating out a—

*You think  
It's a happy beat?*

sten to it closely:  
n't you heard  
mething underneath  
ie a—

*What did I say?*

re,  
n happy!  
ke it away!

*Hey, pop!*

*Re-bop!*

*Mop!*

*Y-e-a-h!*

## Parade

ven ladies  
d seventeen gentlemen  
the Elks Club Lounge  
anning planning a parade:  
and Marshal in his white suit will lead it.  
dillacs with dignitaries  
ll precede it.  
d behind will come  
th band and drum  
l foot ... on foot ...  
l foot ...

otorcycle cops,  
nite,  
ll speed it  
it of sight  
they can:  
lid black,  
n't be right.

arching ... marching ...  
arching ...  
on till night ...

*I never knew  
that many Negroes  
were on earth, did you?*

*I never knew!*

PARADE!

A chance to let

PARADE!

the whole world see

PARADE!

old black me!

## Children's Rhymes

hen I was a chile we used to play, "One—two—buckle my shoe!"  
d things like that. But now, Lord, listen at them little varmints!

*By what sends  
the white kids  
I ain't sent:  
I know I can't  
be President.*

ere is two thousand children in this block, I do believe!

*What don't bug  
them white kids  
sure bugs me:  
We knows everybody  
ain't free!*

me of these young ones is cert'ly bad— One batted a hard ball right  
through my window and my gold fish et the glass.

*What's written down  
for white folks  
ain't for us a-tall:  
"Liberty And Justice—  
Huh—For All."*

*Oop-pop-a-da!  
Skee! Daddle-de-do!  
Be-bop!*

Salt'peanuts!

*De-dop!*

## Sister

That little Negro's married and got a kid.  
Why does he keep on foolin' around Marie?  
Marie's my sister—not married to me— But why does he keep on foolin'  
around Marie?  
Why don't she get a boy-friend I can understand—some decent man?

*Did it ever occur to you, son, the reason Marie runs around with trash  
is she wants some cash?*

Don't decent folks have dough?

*Unfortunately usually no!*

Well, anyway, it don't have to be a married man.

*Did it ever occur to you, boy, that a woman does the best she can?*

*Comment on Stoop*  
*does a man.*



## Preference

likes a woman  
or eight and ten years older'n myself.  
don't fool with these young girls.  
young girl'll say,  
    *Daddy, I want so-and-so.*  
    *I needs this, that, and the other.*  
it a old woman'll say, *Honey, what does YOU need?*  
    *I just drawed my money tonight*  
    *and it's all your'n.*  
that's why I likes a older woman who can appreciate me:  
when she conversations you  
ain't forever, *Gimme!*

## Necessity

ork?

lon't have to work.

lon't have to do nothing

it eat, drink, stay black, and die.

his little old furnished room's so small I can't whip a cat

thout getting fur in my mouth and my landlady's so old

r features is all run together and God knows she sure can overcharge—

Which is why I reckon I *does*

ve to work after all.

## Question

id the lady, *Can you do*  
*iat my other man can't do—*  
*iat is*  
*ve me, daddy—*  
*d feed me, too?*

*Figurine*

De-dop!

## Buddy

That kid's my buddy,  
tall and yet  
I don't see him much.  
He works downtown for Twelve a week.  
He has to give his mother Ten—  
He says he can have  
the other Two  
to pay his carfare, buy a suit, coat, shoes,  
anything he wants out of it.

## **Juke Box Love Song**

ould take the Harlem night and wrap around you,  
ke the neon lights and make a crown, Take the Lenox Avenue busses,  
Taxis, subways,  
id for your love song tone their rumble down.  
ke Harlem's heartbeat,  
ake a drumbeat,  
it it on a record, let it whirl, And while we listen to it play, Dance with  
you till day— Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

## Ultimatum

Why, how come you can't see me when I'm paying your bills  
each and every week?

you got somebody else,

tell me—

because I'll cut you off

without your rent.

mean

without a cent.

## Warning

addy,  
n't let your dog  
rb you!

## **Croon**

lon't give a damn  
r Alabam'  
en if it is my home.



## New Yorkers

was born here,  
at's no lie, he said,  
ght here beneath God's sky.

*wasn't born here, she said, I come—and why?  
here I come from  
lks work hard  
! their lives  
til they die  
d never own no parts  
earth nor sky  
I come up here.  
ow what've I got?  
You!*

le lifted up her lips  
the dark:  
ie same old spark!

## Wonder

rly blue evening.  
ghts ain't come on yet.  
*Looky yonder!*  
*They come on now!*

## Easy Boogie

own in the bass  
at steady beat  
alking walking walking  
ke marching feet.

own in the bass That easy roll,  
olling like I like it  
my soul.

Riffs, smears, breaks.

ey, Lawdy, Mama!  
o you hear what I said?  
sy like I rock it  
my bed!

## **Movies**

ie Roosevelt, Renaissance, Gem, Alhambra: Harlem laughing in all the  
wrong places at the crocodile tears of crocodile art that you know  
in your heart  
is crocodile:

(Hollywood laughs at me, black— so I laugh back.)

## Tell Me

hy should it be *my* loneliness, Why should it be *my* song, Why should it  
be *my* dream deferred  
overlong?

## Not a Movie

ell, they rocked him with road-apples because he tried to vote  
d whipped his head with clubs and he crawled on his knees to his house  
and he got the midnight train and he crossed that Dixie line now he's  
livin'  
a 133rd.

e didn't stop in Washington and he didn't stop in Baltimore neither in  
Newark on the way.  
x knots was on his head  
it, thank God, he wasn't dead!  
d there ain't no Ku Klux  
a 133rd.

## Neon Signs

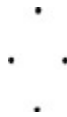
WONDER BAR



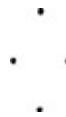
WISHING WELL



MONTEREY



MINTON'S



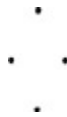
(ancient altar of Thelonious)

MANDALAY

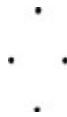
Spots where the booted and unbooted play



SMALL'S



CASBAH



SHALIMAR

•  
• •  
•

Mirror-go-round  
where a broken glass  
in the early bright  
smears re-bop

• •  
•  
sound •



## Numbers

I ever hit for a dollar  
anna salt every dime away  
the Post Office for a rainy day.

in't gonna  
ay back a cent.

of course, I might  
mbinate *a little*  
th my rent.)

## What? So Soon!

I believe my old lady's pregnant again!

te must have some kind of trickeration  
populate the  
llud nation!

*Comment against Lamp Post*  
*u call it fate?*

*Figurette*  
*-daddle-dy!*  
*-dop!*

## Motto

lay it cool  
nd dig all jive.  
iat's the reason  
tay alive.

y motto,  
I live and learn,  
is:  
*g And Be Dug*  
*Return.*

## Dead in There

metimes  
night funeral  
ing by  
urries home  
cool bop daddy.

earse and flowers  
arantee  
e'll never hype  
mother paddy.

s hard to believe,  
it dead in there,  
e'll never lay a  
/pe nowhere!

e's my ace-boy,  
one away.  
*ake up and live!*  
e used to say.

uares  
ho couldn't dig him,  
ant him now—  
it where it makes  
o diff' no how.

## **Situation**

hen I rolled three 7's  
a row  
was scared to walk out  
th the dough.

## Dancer

Two or three things in the past failed him  
that had not failed people  
lesser genius.

the first place  
he didn't have much sense.  
He was no good at making love and no good at making money.

He tapped,  
trucked,  
boogied,  
sanded,  
jittered,  
until he made folks say,

*Looky yonder*

*at that boy!*

*Hey!*

it being no good at lovin'— the girls left him.  
(When you're no good for dough they go.) With no sense, just wonderful  
feet, What could possibly be all-reet?  
Could he get anywhere? No!

Even a great dancer  
can't C.P.T.  
show.

## Advice

lks, I'm telling you,  
rthing is hard  
d dying is mean—  
get yourself  
ittle loving  
between.

## **Green Memory**

wonderful time—the War:  
when money rolled in  
and blood rolled out.

But blood  
was far away  
from here—  
money was near.



## **Wine-O**

itting in the wine-house  
aking up a wine-souse  
aiting for tomorrow to come— Then  
tting in the wine-house  
aking up a new souse.  
omorrow ...  
1, hum!

## Relief

My heart is aching  
for them Poles and Greeks  
on relief way across the sea because I was on relief  
since in 1933.

Now what relief can be—  
it took me two years to get on WPA.  
If the war hadn't come along I wouldn't be out the barrel yet.  
Now, I'm almost back in the barrel again.

Don't tell the truth,  
these white folks want to go ahead and fight another war,  
even two,  
the one to stop 'em won't be me.

Could you?

## Ballad of the Landlord

ndlord, landlord,  
y roof has sprung a leak.  
on't you 'member I told you about it Way last week?

ndlord, landlord,  
ese steps is broken down.  
hen you come up yourself  
s a wonder you don't fall down.

n Bucks you say I owe you?  
n Bucks you say is due?  
ell, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you Till you fix this house up new.

hat? You gonna get eviction orders?  
u gonna cut off my heat?  
u gonna take my furniture and Throw it in the street?

n-huh! You talking high and mighty.  
lk on—till you get through.  
u ain't gonna be able to say a word If I land my fist on you.

*lice! Police!*  
*me and get this man!*  
*'s trying to ruin the government*  
*id overturn the land!*

pper's whistle!  
trol bell!  
rest.

ecinct Station.  
on cell.  
eadlines in press:

IN THREATENS LANDLORD

\*

\* \*

NANT HELD NO BAIL

\*

\* \*

DGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL

## Corner Meeting

dder, flag, and amplifier: what the soap box  
ed to be.

ie speaker catches fire

oking at their faces.

s words

mp down to stand

listeners' places.

## Projection

On the day when the Savoy  
steps clean over to Seventh Avenue and starts jitterbugging  
with the Renaissance,  
on that day when Abyssinia Baptist Church throws her enormous arms  
around St. James Presbyterian  
and 409 Edgecombe  
stops to kiss 12 West 133rd, on that day— Do, Jesus!  
Manhattan Island will whirl  
like a Dizzy Gillespie transcription played by Inez and Timme.  
On that day, Lord,  
Sammy Davis and Marian Anderson will sing a duet,  
Paul Robeson  
will team up with Jackie Mabley, and Father Divine will say in truth,

*Peace!*  
*It's truly*  
*wonderful!*

## Flatted Fifths

ittle cullud boys with beards re-bop be-bop mop and stop.

ittle cullud boys with fears, frantic, kick their draftee years into flatted  
fifths and flatter beers that at a sudden change become sparkling  
Oriental wines  
h and strange  
ken bathrobes with gold twines and Heilbroner, Crawford,  
it-undreamed-of Lewis combines in silver thread and diamond notes on  
trade-marks inside  
oward coats.

ittle cullud boys in berets *oop pop-a-da*  
orse a fantasy of days  
ool ya koo  
d dig all plays.

## **Tomorrow**

Tomorrow may be a thousand years off:

VO DIMES AND A NICKLE ONLY

says this particular cigarette machine.

hers take a quarter straight.

*Some dawns*

*wait*



## Mellow

to the laps  
black celebrities  
nite girls fall  
e pale plums from a tree  
yond a high tension wall  
red for killing  
rich makes it  
ore thrilling.

## **Live and Let Live**

aybe it ain't right—  
at the people of the night  
will give even a snake  
a break.

## Gauge

mp ...

stick ...

roach ...

raw ...

## Bar

That whiskey will cook the egg.

*Say not so!*

*Maybe the egg*

*will cook the whiskey.*

You ought to know!

## Café: 3 A.M.

etectives from the vice squad with weary sadistic eyes  
otting fairies.

*Degenerates*, some folks say.

But God, Nature, or somebody  
made them that way.

lice lady or Lesbian  
er there?

*Where?*

## **Drunkard**

rice grows thicker

song grows stronger

time grows longer until day trying to forget to remember the taste of  
day.

## **Street Song**

ck, if you got to be a rounder Be a rounder right— Just don't let mama  
catch you Makin' rounds at night.

## 125th Street

ce like a chocolate bar  
ll of nuts and sweet.

ce like a jack-o'-lantern, candle inside.

ce like slice of melon,  
in that wide.



## Dive

nox Avenue

· daylight

ns to dive in the Park

it faster ...

ster ...

ter dark.

## **Warning: Augmented**

Don't let your dog curb you!

Curb your doggie Like you ought to do, But don't let that dog curb you!

You may play folks cheap, Act rough and tough, But a dog can tell When you're full of stuff.

Them little old mutts Look all scraggly and bad, But they got more sense Than some people ever had.

Irish dog, fice dog, kerry blue— Just don't let your dog curb you!

## Up-Beat

the gutter  
ys who try  
ight meet girls  
the fly  
out of the gutter girls who will  
ay meet boys  
pping a thrill  
nile from the gutter  
th can rise:  
it it requires  
enty eyes.

## Jam Session

itting midnight

it on bail

*pop-a-da*

ving been

tained in jail

*oop-pop-a-da*

r sprinkling salt

l a dreamer's tail

*pop-a-da*

## **Be-Bop Boys**

Exploring Mecca  
to achieve  
4 discs  
with Decca.

## Tag

ittle cullud boys  
with fears,  
frantic,  
idge their draftee years.

*Pop-a-da!*

## Theme for English B

the instructor said,

*Go home and write  
a page tonight  
And let that page come out of you—  
Then, it will be true.*

wonder if it's that simple?

I'm twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.

I went to school there, then Durham, then here to this college on the hill  
above Harlem.

I'm the only colored student in my class.

The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem, through a park, then I cross  
St. Nicholas, Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y, the Harlem  
Branch Y, where I take the elevator up to my room, sit down, and write  
this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me at twenty-two, my age. But  
I guess I'm what I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you: hear you,  
hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.

I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.

I like a pipe for a Christmas present, or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.

I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like the same things other folks  
like who are other races.

Will my page be colored that I write?

Telling me, it will not be white.

But it will be

A part of you, instructor.

You are white—

I am a part of you, as I am a part of you.

I'm American.

... ..  
ometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me Nor do I often want  
to be a part of you.

it we are, that's true!

I learn from you,

guess you learn from me—

though you're older—and white— and somewhat more free.

is is my page for English B.



## College Formal: Renaissance Casino

golden girl  
a golden gown  
a melody night  
Harlem town  
tall and brown  
l and wise  
college boy smart eyes in eyes  
e music wraps  
em both around  
mellow magic  
dancing sound  
l they're the heart  
the whole big town  
ld and brown

## Low to High

ow can you forget me?

it you do!

ou said you was gonna take me Up with you— Now you've got your  
Cadillac, you done forgot that you are black.

ow can you forget me

hen I'm you?

*it you do.*

ow can you forget me,

low, say?

ow can you low-rate me

is way?

ou treat me like you damn well please, Ignore me—though I pay your  
fees.

ow can you forget me?

*it you do.*

## **Boogie: 1 a.m.**

ood evening, daddy!  
now you've heard  
ie boogie-woogie rumble  
' a dream deferred  
illing the treble  
id twining the bass  
to midnight ruffles  
' cat-gut lace.

## High to Low

od knows  
e have our troubles, too—  
ie trouble is you:  
u talk too loud,  
ss too loud,  
ok too black,  
n't get anywhere,  
d sometimes it seems  
u don't even care.  
ie way you send your kids to school stockings down,  
ot Ethical Culture)  
e way you shout out loud in church, (not St. Phillips)  
d the way you lounge on doorsteps just as if you were down South, (not  
at 409)  
e way you clown—  
e way, in other words,  
u let me down—  
e, trying to uphold the race and you— well, you can see,  
e have our problems,  
o, with you.

## **Lady's Boogie**

e that lady  
ressed so fine?  
e ain't got boogie-woogie  
n her mind—

it if she was to listen  
et she'd hear,  
ay up in the treble  
ie tingle of a tear.

*Be-Bach!*

## So Long

*long*  
in the song  
d it's in the way you're gone but it's like a foreign language in my mind  
d maybe was I blind  
ould not see  
d would not know you're gone so long  
long.

## Deferred

*this year, maybe, do you think I can graduate?  
I already two years late.  
I dropped out six months when I was seven, a year when I was eleven, then got  
put back when we come North.  
I get through high at twenty's kind of late—  
it maybe this year I can graduate.*

*Maybe now I can have that white enamel stove I dreamed about when we  
first fell in love eighteen years ago.  
It you know,  
coming and everything  
even kids,  
old-water flat and all that.  
It now my daughter's married And my boy's most grown— quit school to  
work—  
I'd where we're moving  
there ain't no stove—  
Maybe I can buy that white enamel stove!*

*Yes, I always did want to study French.  
It don't make sense—  
I'll never go to France, but night schools teach French.  
Now at last I've got a job  
where I get off at five, in time to wash and dress, so, si'l-vous plait, I'll study  
French!*

*omeday,  
I'm gonna buy two new suits  
once!*

*What I want is  
one more bottle of gin.*

*What I want is to see*

y furniture paid for.

*l I want is a wife who will  
ork with me and not against me. Say, baby, could you see your way clear?*

aven, heaven, is my home!  
his world I'll leave behind When I set my feet in glory  
l have a throne for mine]

*vant to pass the civil service.*

vant a television set.

*u know, as old as I am, I ain't never  
med a decent radio yet?*

l like to take up Bach.

*Montage  
of a dream  
deferred.*

iddy, have you heard?



## Request

Give me \$25.00

and the change.

I'm going

here in the morning

and the evening

Don't bother me.

## Shame on You

you're great enough  
d clever enough  
e government might honor you.  
it the people will forget—  
cept on holidays.

movie house in Harlem named after Lincoln, Nothing at all named after  
John Brown.  
ack people don't remember any better than white.

you're not alive and kicking, *shame on you!*

## World War II

hat a grand time was the war!

Oh, my, my!

hat a grand time was the war!

My, my, my!

wartime we had fun,

rry that old war is done!

hat a grand time was the war, My, my!

ho:

*Did*

*Somebody*

*Die?*

## Mystery

hen a chile gets to be thirteen and ain't seen Christ yet,  
e needs to set on de moaner's bench night and day.

*sus, lover of my soul!*

ail, Mary, mother of God!

*t me to thy bosom fly!*

nen! Hallelujah!

*ring low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home.*

nday morning where the rhythm flows, how old nobody knows— yet old  
as mystery,  
der than creed,  
sic and wondering  
d lost as my need.

*Eli, eli!*

*Te deum!*

*Mahomet!*

*Christ!*

ther Bishop, Effendi, Mother Home, Father Divine, a Rabbi black as  
black was born,  
ack-leg preacher, a Ph.D.

*The mystery  
and the darkness  
and the song*

*and me.*

## Sliver of Sermon

hen pimps out of loneliness cry: *Great God!*

hores in final weariness say: *Great God!*

*Oh, God!*

*My God!*

Great

God!

## Testimonial

I just had a piano,  
I just had a organ,  
I just had a drum,  
Now I could praise my Lord!

But I don't need no piano,  
neither organ nor drum  
Nor to praise my Lord!

## Passing

1 sunny summer Sunday afternoons in Harlem when the air is one  
interminable ball game and grandma cannot get her gospel hymns from  
the Saints of God in Christ on account of the Dodgers on the radio, on  
sunny Sunday afternoons when the kids look all new  
d far too clean to stay that way, and Harlem has its  
ashed-and-ironed-and-cleaned-best out, the ones who've crossed the line  
to live downtown  
iss you,  
arlem of the bitter dream,  
ice their dream has  
me true.



## Nightmare Boogie

Had a dream  
d I could see  
million faces  
ack as me!  
nightmare dream:  
*flicker than light*  
*all them faces*  
*turned dead white!*  
Boogie-woogie,  
rolling bass,  
whirling treble  
cat-gut lace.

## **Sunday by the Combination**

eel like dancin', baby,  
l the sun goes down.

it I wonder where  
e sunrise  
onday morning's gonna be?

eel like dancin'!  
lby, dance with me!

## Casualty

e was a soldier in the army, But he doesn't walk like one.  
e walks like his soldiering Days are done.

n! ... Son!

## Night Funeral in Harlem

Night funeral In Harlem:

*Where did they get  
Them two fine cars?*

insurance man, he did not pay— His insurance lapsed the other day—  
that they got a satin box For his head to lay.

Night funeral In Harlem:

*Who was it sent  
That wreath of flowers?*

them flowers came  
from that poor boy's friends— They'll want flowers, too,  
when they meet their ends.

Night funeral In Harlem:

*Who preached that  
Black boy to his grave?*

old preacher-man  
preached that boy away—  
charged Five Dollars  
his girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral In Harlem:

when it was all over  
and the lid shut on his head and the organ had done played and the last  
prayers been said and six pallbearers  
carried him out for dead And off down Lenox Avenue

That long black hearse done sped, The street light At his corner Shined just  
like a tear— That boy that they was mournin'  
as so dear, so dear  
O them folks that brought the flowers, To that girl who paid the preacher  
man— It was all their tears that made That poor boy's Funeral grand.

Night funeral In Harlem.

## **Blues at Dawn**

lon't dare start thinking in the morning.

lon't dare start thinking in the morning.

    If I thought thoughts in bed, Them thoughts would bust my head— So  
    I don't dare start thinking in the morning.

lon't dare remember in the morning Don't dare remember in the  
morning.

    If I recall the day before, I wouldn't get up no more— So I don't dare  
    remember in the morning.

## Dime

While, these steps is hard to climb.

*Grandma, lend me a dime.*

Montage of a dream deferred:

*Grandma acts like  
She ain't heard.*

While, Granny ain't got no dime.

*I might've knowed  
It all the time.*

## Argument

hite is right,  
llow mellow,  
ack, get back!

*Do you believe that, Jack?*

re do!

*Then you're a dope  
for which there ain't no hope.  
Black is fine!  
And, God knows, It's mine!*



## Neighbor

own home  
sets on a stoop  
d watches the sun go by.  
Harlem  
nen his work is done  
sets in a bar with a beer.  
e looks taller than he is  
d younger than he ain't.  
e looks darker than he is, too.  
d he's smarter than he looks,

*He ain't smart.*

*That cat's a fool.*

aw, he ain't neither.  
e's a good man,  
cept that he talks too much.  
fact, he's a great cat.  
it when he drinks,  
drinks fast.

*Sometimes*

*he don't drink.*

ue,  
just  
s his glass  
t there.

## Evening Song

woman standing in the doorway Trying to make her where-with-all:  
*Come here, baby, darlin'!*  
*m't you hear me call?*

I was anybody's sister,  
*! tell her, Gimme a place to sleep.*  
it I ain't nobody's sister.  
n just a poor lost sheep.

ary, Mary, Mary,  
ad a little lamb.  
ell, I hope that lamb of Mary's Don't turn out like I am.

## **Chord**

shadow faces  
the shadow night  
before the early dawn  
lips bright.

## **Fact**

There's been an eagle on a nickel, An eagle on a quarter, too.  
If there ain't no eagle  
On a dime.

## Joe Louis

They worshipped Joe.  
School teacher  
His hair was gray  
He said:

*Joe has sense enough to know  
He is a god.  
So many gods don't know.*

They say"...They say"...They say"...  
But the gossips had no  
They say"  
Latched onto  
Mr Joe.

## **Subway Rush Hour**

ingled  
eath and smell  
close  
ingled  
ack and white  
near  
room for fear.

## **Brothers**

e're related—you and I,  
u from the West Indies,  
rom Kentucky.

nsmen—you and I, You from Africa,  
rom the U.S.A.

others—you and I.

## Likewise

ie Jews:

Groceries

Suits

Fruits

Watches

Diamond rings

THE DAILY NEWS

ws sell me things.

om Kippur, no!

ops all over Harlem

ose up tight that night.

me folks blame high prices on the Jews.

ome folks blame too much on Jews.) But in Harlem they don't answer  
back, Just maybe shrug their shoulders, "What's the use?"

hat's the use

Harlem?

hat's the use?

hat's the Harlem

e in Harlem

nat's the lick?

y!

ba-re-bop!

op!

i a be-bop kick!

metimes I think

ws must have heard

e music of a

eam deferred.



## Sliver

heap little rhymes  
cheap little tune  
e sometimes as dangerous  
a sliver of the moon.  
cheap little tune  
o cheap little rhymes  
in cut a man's  
throat sometimes.

## Hope

e rose up on his dying bed

d asked for fish.

s wife looked it up in her dream book and played it.

## **Dream Boogie: Variation**

nkling treble,  
lling bass,  
gh noon teeth  
a midnight face,  
eat long fingers  
1 great big hands,  
reaming pedals  
here his twelve-shoe lands, Looks like his eyes  
e teasing pain,  
few minutes late  
r the Freedom Train.

## Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore— And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over— like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

## Good Morning

Good morning, daddy!  
Was born here, he said,  
Watched Harlem grow  
Till colored folks spread  
From river to river  
Cross the middle of Manhattan out of Penn Station  
Ark tenth of a nation,  
Planes from Puerto Rico,  
And holds of boats, chico,  
Boats from Cuba Haiti Jamaica,  
Buses marked New York  
From Georgia Florida Louisiana to Harlem Brooklyn the Bronx but most of  
all to Harlem  
Sash across Manhattan  
We seen them come dark  
    wondering  
    wide-eyed  
    dreaming  
At of Penn Station—  
At the trains are late.  
The gates open—  
At there're bars  
    each gate.

What happens  
to a dream deferred?

Daddy, ain't you heard?

## Same in Blues

aid to my baby,  
by, take it slow.  
an't, she said, I can't!  
got to go!

*There's a certain  
amount of traveling  
in a dream deferred.*

lu said to Leonard,  
want a diamond ring.  
onard said to Lulu,  
u won't get a goddamn thing!

*A certain  
amount of nothing  
in a dream deferred.*

addy, daddy, daddy,  
l I want is you.  
u can have me, baby—  
it my lovin' days is through.

*A certain  
amount of impotence  
in a dream deferred.*

ree parties  
n my party line—  
it that third party,  
rd, ain't mine!

*There's liable*

*to be confusion  
in a dream deferred.*

om river to river,  
town and down,  
ere's liable to be confusion when a dream gets kicked around.

## Comment on Curb

ou talk like  
ey don't kick  
eams around  
wntown.

*I expect they do—  
But I'm talking about  
Harlem to you!*



## Letter

Dear Mama,

Time I pay rent and get my food  
and laundry I don't have much left  
but here is five dollars for you  
show you I still appreciate you.  
My girl-friend send her love and say  
she hopes to lay eyes on you sometime in life.  
Mama, it has been raining cats and dogs up  
here. Well, that is all so I will close.

Your son baby

Respectably as ever, Joe

## Island

etween two rivers,  
orth of the park,  
ke darker rivers  
ie streets are dark.

ack and white,  
old and brown—  
ocolate-custard  
e of a town.

*ream within a dream, Our dream deferred.*

ood morning, daddy!

n't you heard?

**WORDS  
LIKE  
FREEDOM**

**I, Too**

too, sing America.

in 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 will be at the table  
when company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
talk to me,  
as in the kitchen,"  
then.

Sides,  
they'll see how beautiful I am And be ashamed—

too, am America.

## Freedom Train

I read in the papers about the Freedom Train.  
I heard on the radio about the Freedom Train.  
I seen folks talkin' about the Freedom Train.  
Lord, I been a-waitin' for the Freedom Train!

Down South in Dixie only train I see's Got a Jim Crow car set aside for me.  
No hope there ain't no Jim Crow on the Freedom Train, No back door  
entrance to the Freedom Train, No signs FOR COLORED on the Freedom  
Train, No WHITE FOLKS ONLY on the Freedom Train.

I'm gonna check up on this Freedom Train.

Who's the engineer on the Freedom Train?  
Can a coal black man drive the Freedom Train?  
Am I still a porter on the Freedom Train?  
Where the ballot boxes on the Freedom Train?  
When it stops in Mississippi will it be made plain Everybody's got a right  
to board the Freedom Train?

Somebody tell me about this Freedom Train!

The Birmingham station's marked COLORED and WHITE.  
The white folks go left, the colored go right— They even got a segregated  
lane.  
What the way to get aboard the Freedom Train?

I got to know about this Freedom Train!

My children ask me, *Daddy, please explain*  
*Why there's Jim Crow stations for the Freedom Train?*  
What shall I tell my children? ... *You* tell me— 'Cause freedom ain't  
freedom when a man ain't free.

But maybe they explains it on the Freedom Train.

hen my grandmother in Atlanta, 83 and black, Gets in line to see the  
Freedom, Will some white man yell, *Get back!*  
*Negro's got no business on the Freedom Track!*

Mister, I thought it were the Freedom Train!

er grandson's name was Jimmy. He died at Anzio.  
e died for real. It warn't no show.  
ie freedom that they carryin' on this Freedom Train, Is it for real—or just  
a show again?

Jimmy wants to know about the Freedom Train.

ill *his* Freedom Train come zoomin' down the track Gleamin' in the  
sunlight for white and black?  
ot stoppin' at no stations marked COLORED nor WHITE, Just stoppin' in  
the fields in the broad daylight, Stoppin' in the country in the wide-open  
air Where there never was no Jim Crow signs nowhere,

o Welcomin' Committees, nor politicians of note, No Mayors and such for  
which colored can't vote, And nary a sign of a color line— For the  
Freedom Train will be yours and mine!

ien maybe from their graves in Anzio The G.I.'s who fought will say, *We  
wanted it so!*  
ack men and white will say, *Ain't it fine?*  
*home they got a train that's yours and mine!*

Then I'll shout, *Glory for the  
Freedom Train!*  
*I'll holler, Blow your whistle, Freedom Train!*  
*Thank God-A-Mighty! Here's the  
Freedom Train!*  
*Get on board our Freedom Train!*

## Georgia Dusk

metimes there's a wind in the Georgia dusk That cries and cries and cries  
Its lonely pity through the Georgia dusk Veiling what the darkness hides.

metimes there's blood in the Georgia dusk, Left by a streak of sun,  
crimson trickle in the Georgia dusk.  
hose blood? ... Everyone's.

metimes a wind in the Georgia dusk Scatters hate like seed  
sprout its bitter barriers Where the sunsets bleed.

## **Lunch in a Jim Crow Car**

Put out the lunch-box of your dreams.

Put it into the sandwich of your heart, And ride the Jim Crow car until it  
screams Then—like an atom bomb—it bursts apart.

## In Explanation of Our Times

ie folks with no titles in front of their names all over the world  
e raring up and talking back to the folks called Mister.

u say you thought everybody was called Mister?

, son, not everybody.

Dixie, often they won't call Negroes Mister.

China before what happened They had no intention of calling coolies  
Mister.

xie to Singapore, Cape Town to Hong Kong the Misters won't call lots of  
other folks Mister.

ey call them, Hey George!

Here, Sallie!

Listen, Coolie!

Hurry up, Boy!

And things like that.

orge Sallie Coolie Boy gets tired sometimes.

all over the world today folks with not even Mister in front of their  
names are raring up and talking back to those called Mister.

om Harlem past Hong Kong talking back.

ut up, says Gerald L. K. Smith.

ut up, says the Governor of South Carolina.

ut up, says the Governor of Singapore.

ut up, says Strydom.

ell no shut up! say the people with no titles in front of their names.

ell, no! It's time to talk back now!

story says it's time,

id the radio, too, foggy with propaganda that says a mouthful

d don't mean half it says— but is true anyhow:

LIBERTY!



FREEDOM!

DEMOCRACY!

use anyhow no matter how many Liars use those words.

the people with no titles in front of their names hear those words and shout them back at the Misterys, Lords, Generals, Viceroys, Governors of South Carolina, Gerald L. K. Strydoms.

Shut up, people!

Shut up! Shut up!

Shut up, George!

Shut up, Sallie!

Shut up, Coolie!

Shut up, Indian!

Shut up, Boy!

George Sallie Coolie Indian Boy black brown yellow bent down working earning riches for the whole world with no title in front of name just man woman tired says:

No shut up!

Hell no shut up!

So, naturally, there's trouble in these our times because of people with no titles in front of their names.

## Africa

leepy giant,  
ou've been resting awhile.

ow I see the thunder  
id the lightning  
your smile.  
ow I see  
ie storm clouds  
your waking eyes:  
ie thunder,  
ie wonder,  
id the young  
rprise.

our every step reveals  
ie new stride  
your thighs.

## Democracy

Democracy will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand  
On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say, *Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed Planted  
In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want freedom Just as you.

## Consider Me

nsider me,  
colored boy,  
nce sixteen,  
nce five, once three,  
nce nobody,  
ow me.  
fore me  
pa, mama,  
andpa, grandma,  
on back  
original  
..

(A capital letter there, *He*  
Being Mystery.)

nsider me,  
lored boy,  
owntown at eight,  
metimes working late,  
vertime pay  
sport away,  
save,  
give my Sugar  
r the things  
e needs.

y Sugar,  
nsider her  
ho works, too—  
is to.  
ie don't make enough

or all the stuff It takes to live.  
forgive me  
what I lack,  
lack,  
ought in a crack  
that splits the world in two From China  
or way of Arkansas  
or Lenox Avenue.

Consider me,  
on Friday the eagle flies.  
Saturday laughter, a bar, a bed.  
Sunday prayers syncopate glory.  
Monday comes,  
or work at eight,  
te,  
maybe.

Consider me,  
descended also  
from the  
mystery.

## The Negro Mother

Children, I come back today To tell you a story of the long dark way That I  
had to climb, that I had to know In order that the race might live and  
grow.

Look at my face—dark as the night— Yet shining like the sun with love's  
true light.

I am the child they stole from the sand Three hundred years ago in Africa's  
land.

I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea Carrying in my body the seed  
of the free.

I am the woman who worked in the field Bringing the cotton and the corn  
to yield.

I am the one who labored as a slave, Beaten and mistreated for the work  
that I gave— Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.

No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South: But God put a song and a prayer  
in my mouth.

God put a dream like steel in my soul.

Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.

Now, through my children, young and free, I realize the blessings denied to  
me.

I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.

I had nothing, back there in the night.

Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears, But I kept trudging on through  
the lonely years.

Sometimes, the road was hot with sun, But I had to keep on till my work  
was done: I *had* to keep on! No stopping for me— I was the seed of the  
coming Free.

I nourished the dream that nothing could smother Deep in my breast—the  
Negro mother.

I had only hope then, but now through you, Dark ones of today, my  
dreams must come true: All you dark children in the world out there,  
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.

Remember my years, heavy with sorrow— And make of those years a torch  
for tomorrow.

FOR TOMORROW.

Take of my past a road to the light Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.

Lift high my banner out of the dust.

And like free men supporting my trust.

Believe in the right, let none push you back.

Remember the whip and the slaver's track.

Remember how the strong in struggle and strife Still bar you the way, and deny you life— But march ever forward, breaking down bars.

Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.

O, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers Impel you forever up the great stairs— For I will be with you till no white brother Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.

## Refugee in America

Here are words like *Freedom*  
Sweet and wonderful to say.  
In my heart-strings freedom sings All day everyday.

Here are words like *Liberty*  
That almost make me cry.  
If you had known what I knew You would know why.



## Freedom's Plow

When a man starts out with nothing, When a man starts out with his hands  
Empty, but clean,  
When a man starts out to build a world, He starts first with himself And  
the faith that is in his heart— The strength there,  
The will there to build.

First in the heart is the dream.  
Then the mind starts seeking a way.  
His eyes look out on the world, On the great wooded world, On the rich  
soil of the world, On the rivers of the world.

His eyes see there materials for building, See the difficulties, too, and the  
obstacles.  
His hand seeks tools to cut the wood, To till the soil, and harness the  
power of the waters.  
Then the hand seeks other hands to help, A community of hands to help—  
Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone, But a community  
dream.  
Not my dream alone, but our dream.  
Not my world alone,  
But *your world and my world*, Belonging to all the hands who build.

Long time ago, but not too long ago, Ships came from across the sea  
Bringing Pilgrims and prayer-makers, Adventurers and booty seekers,  
Free men and indentured servants, Slave men and slave masters, all new  
— To a new world, America!

With billowing sails the galleons came Bringing men and dreams, women  
and dreams.  
Little bands together,  
Heart reaching out to heart, Hand reaching out to hand, They began to  
build our land.  
Some were free hands  
Seeking a greater freedom. Some were indentured hands Hoping to find

their freedom, Some were slave hands  
warding in their hearts the seed of freedom.  
it the word was there always: FREEDOM.

own into the earth went the plow In the free hands and the slave hands,  
In indentured hands and adventurous hands, Turning the rich soil went  
the plow in many hands That planted and harvested the food that fed  
And the cotton that clothed America.  
ang against the trees went the ax in many hands That hewed and shaped  
the rooftops of America.  
lash into the rivers and the seas went the boat-hulls That moved and  
transported America.  
ack went the whips that drove the horses Across the plains of America.  
ee hands and slave hands, Indentured hands, adventurous hands, White  
hands and black hands Held the plow handles,  
 handles, hammer handles, Launched the boats and whipped the horses  
That fed and housed and moved America.  
us together through labor, All these hands made America.  
bor! Out of labor came the villages And the towns that grew to cities.  
bor! Out of labor came the rowboats And the sailboats and the  
steamboats, Came the wagons, stage coaches, Out of labor came the  
factories, Came the foundries, came the railroads, Came the marts and  
markets, shops and stores, Came the mighty products moulded,  
manufactured, Sold in shops, piled in warehouses, Shipped the wide  
world over: Out of labor—white hands and black hands— Came the  
dream, the strength, the will, And the way to build America.  
ow it is Me here, and You there.  
ow it's Manhattan, Chicago, Seattle, New Orleans,  
oston and El Paso—  
ow it is the U.S.A.

long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL ...  
ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR  
WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE  
RIGHTS ...

AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY  
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

His name was Jefferson. There were slaves then, But in their hearts the  
slaves believed him, too, And silently took for granted That what he said  
was also meant for them.  
It was a long time ago,  
It is not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN  
WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

There were slaves then, too, But in their hearts the slaves knew What he  
said must be meant for every human being— Else it had no meaning for  
anyone.  
When a man said:

BETTER TO DIE FREE, THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.

There was a colored man who had been a slave But had run away to freedom.  
And the slaves knew  
That Frederick Douglass said was true.  
With John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Negroes died.  
John Brown was hung.  
Before the Civil War, days were dark, And nobody knew for sure  
When freedom would triumph.  
"Or if it would," thought some.

But others knew it had to triumph.  
In those dark days of slavery, Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,  
The slaves made up a song:

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

That song meant just what it said: *Hold on!*  
Freedom will come!

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

It of war, it came, bloody and terrible!  
It it came!  
Where there were, as always, Who doubted that the war would end right,  
That the slaves would be free, Or that the union would stand.  
It now we know how it all came out.  
It of the darkest days for a people and a nation, We know now how it  
came out.  
Where there was light when the battle clouds rolled away.  
Where there was a great wooded land, And men united as a nation.

America is a dream.  
The poet says it was promises.  
The people say it is promises—that will come true.  
The people do not always say things out loud, Nor write them down on  
paper.  
The people often hold  
Great thoughts in their deepest hearts And sometimes only blunderingly  
express them, Haltingly and stumbling say them, And faultily put them  
into practice.  
The people do not always understand each other.  
But there is, somewhere there, Always the *trying* to understand, And the  
*trying* to say, “You are a man. Together we are building our land.”

America!  
And created in common,  
Team nourished in common, Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!  
The house is not yet finished, Don't be discouraged, builder!  
The fight is not yet won, Don't be weary, soldier!  
The plan and the pattern is here, Woven from the beginning  
to the warp and woof of America:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN WITHOUT  
THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

BETTER DIE FREE, THAN LIVE SLAVES.

Who said those things? Americans!

Who owns those words? America!

Who is America? You, me!

We are America!

Who the enemy who would conquer us from without, We say, NO!

Who the enemy who would divide and conquer us from within, We say, NO!

FREEDOM!

BROTHERHOOD!

DEMOCRACY!

Who all the enemies of these great words: We say, NO!

A long time ago,

When enslaved people heading toward freedom Made up a song:

*Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!*

That plow plowed a new furrow Across the field of history.

Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.

From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.

That tree is for everybody, For all America, for all the world.

May its branches spread and its shelter grow Until all races and all peoples  
know its shade.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!

HOLD ON!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. After graduation from high school, he spent a year in Mexico with his father, then a year studying at Columbia University. His first poem in a nationally known magazine was "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which appeared in *Crisis* in 1921. In 1925, he was awarded the First Prize for Poetry of the magazine *Opportunity*, the winning poem being "The Weary Blues," which gave its title to his first book of poems, published in 1926. As a result of his poetry, Mr. Hughes received a scholarship at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where he won his B.A. in 1929. In 1943, he was awarded an honorary Litt. D. by his alma mater; he has also been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship (1935), a Rosenwald Fellowship (1940), and an American Academy of Arts and Letters Grant (1947). From 1926 until his death in 1967, Langston Hughes devoted his time to writing and lecturing. He wrote poetry, short stories, autobiography, song lyrics, essays, humor, and plays. A cross section of his work was published in 1958 as *The Langston Hughes Reader*.

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