

The Essential

Gwendolyn Brooks

EDITED BY

ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

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elizabeth alexander editor

AMERICAN POETS PROJECT

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Gwendolyn Brooks



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INTRODUCTION

Since she began publishing her tight lyrics of Chicago's great South Side in the 1940s, Gwendolyn Brooks has been one of the most influential American poets of the twentieth century. Her poems distill the very best aspects of Modernist style with the sounds and shapes of various African-American forms and idioms. Brooks is a consummate portraitist who found worlds in the community she wrote out of, and her innovations as a sonneteer remain an inspiration to more than one generation of poets who have come after her. Her career as a whole also offers an example of an artist who was willing to respond and evolve in the face of the dramatic historical, political, and aesthetic changes and challenges she lived through.

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was born in 1917 in Topeka, Kansas, the daughter of Keziah Wims Brooks and David Anderson Brooks. Her father aspired to be a doctor and studied medicine for a year and a half at Fisk, but ended up working as a janitor. He was the son of a runaway slave. Her mother was a teacher before her marriage and then turned her full attention to homemaking, attending fiercely to the creative talent of young Gwendolyn from an early age. Her mother would tell her that she was going to be "the *lady* Paul Laurence Dunbar." The family moved to Chicago shortly after Brooks's birth, and she would spend the rest of her life on that city's South Side—a great "Negro metropolis"—through years when the innovation, strength, struggle, and vision of its black residents gave her a backdrop and context for all that would interest her in her work.

The Chicago of Brooks's formative years bustled with creative and political energy. Black Southern migrants from the second wave of the Great Migration flocked to the city in large numbers. In 1936, Harlem was the only neighborhood in the United States with a larger black population than Chicago's South Side. For many of the Chicago characters in Brooks's poems, as well as its real-life residents, the rural South was close at hand in memory and ways even as people navigated the rough and ready wind-whipped city. The South represented the beauty of home ways, but it was also the economically, spiritually, and physically violent home of white supremacy.

In 1935, the WPA Federal Writers' Project began, and Chicago was a hive of subsidized artistic activity that often dovetailed with progressive interracial (if problematically so) political movements. More artists participated in the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago than in any other city in the United States. In 1936, the novelist Richard Wright formed the South Side Writers group that included poets Frank Marshall Davis and Margaret Walker, playwright Theodore Ward, and the admired poet-critic Edward Bland, who died in World War II and whom Brooks memorialized in a poem. In the flourishing years from 1935 to the end of World War II, Chicago was home at various times to a collection of creative people that rivaled the Harlem Renaissance. There were artists such as Charles Sebree, Eldzier Cortor, Charles White, Elizabeth Catlett, Gordon Parks, Hughie Lee-Smith, Archibald Motley, and writers such as Wright, Walker, Davis, Fenton Johnson, Margaret Cunningham Danner, Margaret Burroughs, Bernard Goss, Arna Bontemps, Frank Yerby, Marita Bonner, and Willard Motley. Dancer Katherine Dunham was finishing her studies in anthropology at the University of Chicago. Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes would frequently pass through and connect with that crowd. Claude McKay attended the publication party for Brooks's first book. In the first installment of her autobiography, Report From Part One, Brooks describes the exciting social life that she and her husband, Henry, enjoyed in the early 1940s:

My husband and I knew writers, knew painters, knew pianists and dancers and actresses, knew photographers galore. There were always weekend parties to be attended where we merry Bronzevillians could find each other and earnestly philosophize sometimes on into the dawn, over martinis and Scotch and coffee and an ample buffet. Great social decisions were reached. Great solutions for great problems were provided. . . . Of course, in that time, it was believed, still, that the society could be prettied, quieted, cradled, sweetened, if only people talked enough, glared at each other yearningly enough, waited enough.

The black press was also a powerful force. John Sengstacke was building the *Chicago Defender* into the most noted black paper in the country, where one could regularly read cutting-edge political news, poetry, and the column by Langston Hughes which began in 1942. John Johnson, who went on to found and publish *Jet*, *Ebony*, *Sepia*, and *Negro Digest/Black World*, under the aegis of his Johnson Publications, was in a writers' group with Brooks.

Brooks attended junior college, began working, and soon married Henry Blakely, who was also a poet. They were both intensely devoted to their work, though like most poets they did other work for money. Their first child, Henry Jr., was born in 1940. In 1941, Brooks joined a poetry workshop organized by a wealthy white woman, Inez Cunningham Stark, who had been the president of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and had helped bring the likes of Leger, Prokofiev, and Le Corbusier to the city. Stark also had a long affiliation with *Poetry*, one of the most influential literary magazines of its time. In Stark's all-black workshop, held in the South Shore Community Center, writers studied Modernist poets and rigorously critiqued one another's work. In Brooks's teenage correspondence with James Weldon Johnson (whose 1922 and 1931 editions of the *Book of American Negro Poetry* would undoubtedly have brought the best of the African-American tradition to the young poet), Johnson had urged her to read Eliot, Pound, and Cummings; she was well-read on her

own, and so already familiar with the Modernists. But the intensive group study and conversation in the Stark workshop was galvanizing. They studied *Poetry* magazine (which Brooks continued to support by creating prizes for the magazine over the years) and moved forward in intent and focus with their poems and ambitions. Though Brooks had first published poems when she was a teenager, during this period she began to see publication in serious journals and to win prizes.

Brooks's first collection of poems, *A Street in Bronzeville*, was published by Harper & Brothers in 1945. The poet Paul Engle wrote the book's first review, in the *Chicago Tribune* book section: "The publication of *A Street in Bronzeville* is an exceptional event in the literary life of Chicago, for it is the first book of a solidly Chicago person." He called her a "young but permanent talent."

The poems of A Street in Bronzeville incorporate many aspects of poetic tradition and conversation. Brooks is attuned to the sounds heard and spoken in various spaces on Chicago's South Side. "If you wanted a poem," she wrote in her autobiography, "you only had to look out of a window. There was material always, walking or running, fighting or screaming or singing." She writes of the front and back yards, beauty shops, vacant lots, and bars. Her formal range is most impressive, as she experiments with sonnets, ballads, spirituals, blues, full and off-rhymes. She is nothing short of a technical virtuoso. Her incisive, distilled portraits of individuals taken together give us a collage of a very specific community, in the fashion of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology and Jean Toomer's Cane. And in that keen and satisfying specificity are universal questions: How do people tend their dreams in the face of day-today struggle? How do people constitute community? How do communities respond when their young are sent off to a war full of ironies and contradictions? How do black communities grapple with the problems of materialism, racism, and blind religiosity? Brooks took especially seriously the inner lives of young black women: their hopes, dreams, aspirations, disappointments. How do they make their analytical voices heard in their communities? She continued to explore these themes in her second book, *Annie Allen*.

In the first half of the twentieth century, black writers were still confronted with the pressure, as had Phillis Wheatley, to effectively "prove" their literacy and, thus, their humanity—through mastery of European forms. Paul Laurence Dunbar, for example, was a soul tormented by many demons, and he lamented the constraints white audiences placed on his work. According to James Weldon Johnson, Dunbar often said, "I've got to write dialect poetry; it's the only way I can get them to listen to me," and toward the end of his brief life he confessed to Johnson, "I have not grown. I am writing the same things I wrote ten years ago, and I am writing them no better." Countee Cullen knew that many saw him as representative and the future of the race and its prime ambassador on the cultural front. So writing expertly within prescribed European forms was a particular, if implicit, pressure on both these relatively successful black poets, Brooks's generational predecessors whom we know she read and studied and who, like her, favored the sonnet. This form suited Dunbar and Cullen and they spread their wings elegantly within it, but they also labored under the expectation that certain rules must be followed in order to assure one's place within the mainstream canon. Brooks, on the other hand, worked with expert subtlety to make the sonnet her own.

In *A Street in Bronzeville*, she concludes with a series of off-rhyme sonnets on black soldiers in World War II, "Gay Chaps at the Bar." Brooks grasped the profound contradictions these soldiers faced, fighting for their country but knowing all along that they would remain second-class citizens—think, for example, of black soldiers who liberated concentration camps being forced to ride in the back cars of military trains upon their return while German prisoners of war rode in the front. Brooks said that the sonnets of "Gay Chaps at the Bar" are off-rhyme because "I felt it was an off-rhyme situation." Within conventional form, Brooks made subtle breaks so that her poetics underscore and enact what she speaks of. In so doing, she makes the form do something unexpected and

makes an argument for the absolute rightness and necessity of innovating from within that form to make poetry that speaks powerfully to and out of its black reality.

"The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith" is the longest poem in *A Street*. Brooks wrote it after Richard Wright evaluated an early version of the book's manuscript for Harpers and observed that most successful volumes of poems had a long centerpiece poem around which the book coalesced. "Sundays" is a tour de force that showcases much Brooksian strength: language that is as "rich" and "elaborate" as Satin-Legs himself but that at the same time displays awareness of its own decoration as well as of the shortcomings of decoration. Satin-Legs is a dandy whose self-image is expressed in his rococo dress and way with the ladies. "He sheds, with his pajamas, shabby days," Brooks writes, and in that shedding and subsequent ornamentation always leaves behind "his desertedness, his intricate fear, the postponed resentments and the prim precautions." He is in many ways a pitiable character. Brooks shows us the hysterical pitch of his wish for life's beauty ("life must be aromatic. / There must be scent, somehow there must be some.") and yet his wish for and will to beauty is powerful, true, and beautiful unto itself. He loves artifice but also has a "heritage of cabbage and pigtails, / Old intimacy with alleys, garbage pails, / Down in the deep (but always beautiful) South / Where roses blush their blithest (it is said) / And sweet magnolias put Chanel to shame." Brooks also never lets us forget, in the subtlest way, that Satin-Legs' life is set against a backdrop of economic and racial challenge.

The poem is at its mock-heroic best when Brooks takes the reader through Satin-Legs' closet: "Let us proceed. Let us inspect, together / With his meticulous and serious love, / The innards of this closet." Here she echoes Eliot's Prufrock—"Let us go then, you and I"—another sad character in a similarly ironic "love song" whose love of language and beauty walks a path toward spiritual and emotional drowning. She takes great poetic pleasure in describing Satin-Legs' "wonder-suits in yellow and in wine, / Sarcastic green

and zebra-striped cobalt," and yet her empathy forces her to note, without condescension, "People are so in need, in need of help. / People want so much that they do not know." The poem is mock-heroic, lament, and ballad all at once. Brooks goes beneath the masks of thwarted masculinity to show us "men estranged / From music and from wonder and from joy / But far familiar with the guiding awe / Of foodlessness."

In her second book, *Annie Allen*, Brooks invented a form she called the "anniad" for her heroine, a "plain black girl" named Annie Allen whose interior life is richly detailed and deserving its own form; the name of course echoed the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. She won the Pulitzer Prize for the book, the first African-American to be so honored. J. Saunders Redding praised *Annie Allen* in *Saturday Review of Literature* but said, "I do not want to see Miss Brooks's fine talents dribble away in the obscure and the too oblique." This note would be sounded intermittently throughout her early career by those who were not responsive to her very particular sense of aesthetics as well as those who expected black literature to speak clearly and directly "to the people" and "their issues." Her response in later years to those pressures would prove dramatic.

Brooks and Blakely's second child, Nora, was born in 1951. Throughout the 1950s Brooks raised her children, reviewed books, worked at her poems, and wrote and published the novel *Maud Martha*. She cast the book as a novel in hopes it would earn her more money than the meager spoils that even a Pulitzer prize—winning poet could expect. *Maud Martha* was well reviewed when it appeared, but it wasn't until the 1980s, with black feminist scholarly interest in teaching and writing about the book, that its extraordinariness became fully appreciated and the book found its place in larger conversations about the African-American novel and formal innovation.

In 1963 she accepted her first teaching job and also published her third collection of poems, *The Bean Eaters*. Many poems in that book were explicitly tied to social issues of the day (though no more so than her poems about World War II and the Bronzeville neighborhood), such as her two poems about Emmett

Till, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" and "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till," and "The Chicago *Defender* Sends a Man to Little Rock," which is set in the context of the violent battles for school desegregation. She also further honed the concise short lyric in poems such as "The Bean Eaters," "Old Mary," and her most famous poem, "We Real Cool":

We real cool. We Left school. We The podmik bail awæ lies in its economy and manipulation of space. By the end, the missimik wæighat whe poem's pattern has led us to anticipate is a yawning chasm, the absence of the we, these young black boys, from the poem and from the earth once they have frittered their lives away. Brooks read the poem with a swift, whispery "we," moving quickly past the word and using it metronomically to punctuate the rhythm of the poem. The poem's bebop seduces, as the boys at the pool hall are seduced by the finger-popping siren song of the street, which may make you finger-pop but ultimately offers nothing that lasts.

"Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat" tells a small, explosive story of a white woman who is horrified to see her child kissed by the black maid. Brooks concentrates all the energy and focus of the poem on the single moment in which the white mother witnesses this kiss and experiences:

Heat at the hairline, heat between the bowels, Examining seeming coarse unnatural scene, She saw all things except herself serene: Child, big black woman, pretty kitchen towels. Sing sin. We Thin gin. We

This is a scenario Brooks has explored in poems like "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters . . .": the corrosive effects of racism on the children and white women who are a part of its system. She critiques ideologies of domestic order and white femininity that would have white women believe that the pedestals on which they've been placed are desirable and secure. That devastating line, "She saw all things except herself serene" is where Brooks puts the mirror to her character's face and exposes the woman's sense of superiority and order.

Most critics, and Brooks herself, divide her creative life into two parts. The

dividing line was 1967, when at the Fisk writers' conference—in the confrontational midst of vibrant young black writers who were envisioning a new social order and the role the arts should play in it—she had a revelation. "It frightens me to realize that if I had died before the age of fifty," she wrote in her autobiography, "I would have died a 'negro' fraction." She soon left the main stream publishing house Harper and Row and intensified her relationship and affiliation with young black poets such as Haki Madhubuti (formerly Don L. Lee), wearing her hair in what she called a "natural," that most symbolic of hairstyles, the Afro. Further, the style of her work changed discernibly. The tight formal coil of her previous work loosened and the allusions and references were no longer as soonse.

Her subject matter did not change—her subjects were still mostly black people who lived in the kitchenette apartments of Bronzeville. Brooks was always clear in her work about who black people were and what it meant to write about them. Her final collection for Harper and Row was *In the Mecca*, published in 1968. Brooks aficionados will notice one major omission from this collection, her great late 1960s epic "In the Mecca." It is only length that prevented its inclusion here. Brooks tried to write this important poem for over thirty years—including a version in prose— after her brief stint working for a charlatan "spiritual adviser" named French who sold love and luck potions door to door in the Mecca apartment building in Chicago. The poem centers on the drama of a child named Pepita, who has gone missing in the warrens of the decrepit building. We meet the building's residents who together form a portrait of a black community along the lines of A Street in Bronzeville. But in "In the Mecca" the community is in crisis and has fallen prey to its own problems. The child, who is a poet and the hope of her family and community, is found murdered under the bed of one of the building's residents. The poem ends and so closes the first half of the book in an awful silence that asks, in 1968, what next? The poems included here from In the Mecca (from "Boy Breaking Glass" to "The Second Sermon on the Warpland") serve as an answer to that question as

the community reconstitutes itself and finds a philosophy ("Conduct your blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind") with which to move forward.

After *In the Mecca*, Brooks published only with black presses, from Dudley Randall's Broadside Press to her own The David Company, ending with Madhubuti's Third World Press. She continued to explore form and its challenges in her poems as she asked herself what it meant for her to be "an African poet." The long poem "The Near-Johannesburg Boy," written before the end of apartheid and with its powerful refrain "We shall flail in the Hot Time," concludes without punctuation. Brooks said she did that "because there's no punctuation in that situation." She also coined the term and form "verse journalism" (as she had coined "sonnet-ballad" earlier) for the remarkable piece commissioned by *Ebony* magazine and published in August 1971, "In Montgomery," which explored that seat of the civil rights movement in the words of its residents, after the whirl of that "hot time" was stilled. The poem was recently published in book form with other poems, some never before collected, in the posthumous book of the same name.

Brooks's self-commentary was always pithy and vivid. In an interview conducted by Professor Joanne Gabbin, who created the Furious Flower Poetry Festival at James Madison University to commemorate Brooks's work specifically and African-American poetry in general, Brooks made these assessments: "I am 'an organic' Chicagoan." "The Black experience is any experience that a Black person has." "I want to report; I want to record. I go inside myself, bring out what I feel, put it on paper, look at it, pull out all of the clichés. I will work hard in *that* way." "I don't like the term African American. It is very excluding. I like to think of Blacks as family. . . . As a people, we are not of one accord on what we should be called. Some people say it doesn't matter, 'call me anything.' I think *that* is a pitiful decision."

Brooks titled her collected poems *Blacks*. She continually strove to articulate an unambiguous race pride in a woman's voice that was true to the complex and contradictory poetic details of black people's lives. She was not

hyperbolical; she wrote of mighty heroes and those with feet of clay. In her very celebratoriness she practiced a kind of sober love for community. In *In the Mecca*, for example, she described "blackness stern and blunt and beautiful, / organ-rich blackness telling a terrible story." She makes her readers think emotionally and philosophically about what it is to be black and therefore human, to struggle through blackness to struggle against and within one's community. She made public her own struggle for racial self-acceptance in her autobiography, and she was a pioneer in her presentation of the intimate perspectives of young black protagonists whose ideas often ran counter to any expected communal doctrine.

In December 2000, Brooks died at 83. Her loved ones at her bedside said that she died literally pen in hand. On the day of her funeral, Chicago saw a snowstorm wilder and fiercer than any in years. Nonetheless, people came from all over to celebrate that great life, soul, and artistic accomplishment. There was a sense of an era coming to a close. Brooks's work moved with the times, but her early poems remained indelible. In the 1940s her remarkable voice burst on the scene, and she was an acclaimed poet for the entire second half of the twentieth century, taking us from the age of the Harlem Renaissance through twenty years past the Black Arts and Black Power movements. She was a central figure in the equally potent parallel movements in Chicago, the late years of the Chicago renaissance in the early 1940s and then the Chicago Black Arts movement, which in a sense was institutionalized with the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University and the creative writing MFA there (only the second at a predominately black university), which uses writers of Africa and the African Diaspora as its core.

The late jazz-folk singer Oscar Brown, Jr., with whom Brooks worked in community arts in the early 1960s in Chicago, sang a song called "Elegy," which is Brooks's "of DeWitt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery" set to music. The poem invokes the spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," but as Brown sang it, he invoked no tonal remnant of the original. The poem refuses to "carry me

home." Perhaps there is no heaven for DeWitt Williams, no heaven for so many "plain" black boys and girls, those whom Brooks "loved so well" in her poems. The repetition of "sweet" in the line "sweet sweet chariot" resists the full match of the spiritual reference and emphasizes instead the sweet life DeWitt and so many like him loved and which in part took him down: sweet women, sweet wine, "liquid joy." And yet, true sweetness, too, which Brooks knew and understood and respected because she knew and respected the people she wrote about. She wrote truly great poems whose technical achievements are still guiding many poets. The taut strength of her lines, her formal rigor combined with subtle invention, her syntactical originality, all hold up over the years. At the end of all of this work, its sense of intimacy is most striking. She wrote poems about people she loved who lived in a place she loved and knew. Those necessary American songs had not been sung before Gwendolyn Brooks and now they have.

Elizabeth Alexander 2005

FROM A Street in Bronzeville

kitchenette building

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan, Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

the mother

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Abortions will not let you forget.
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
You remember the children you got that you did not get,
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms
The singers and workers that never handled the air.

You will never neglect or beat

Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.

You will never wind up the sucking-thumb

Or scuttle off ghosts that come.

You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,

Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

Evenhunchback girllishethinks of heaven

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.

My Fattlet it Sattlety a blue flace Lhave contracted. I have easet Anticipate, a message, let it begin?

And straight Right Regular Where I shall find My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.

No need for scholarly nonchalance or looks I have said. Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized

A little to the left or guards upon the

Heart to halt love that runs without grookedness And your lives from your unfinished reach,

Along its crooked corridors. My Father, if I stole your births and your names,

It is a planned place surely. Out of coils. Your straight baby tears and your games,

Unscrewed, released, no more to be marvelous, Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches, and your I shall walk straightly through most proper halls deaths,

Proper myself, princess of properness. If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,

Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.

Though why should I whine,

Whine that the crime was other than mine?—

Since anyhow you are dead.

Or rather, or instead,

You were never made.

But that too, I am afraid,

Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said? You were born, you had body, you died. It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
Believe me I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you weising of in the water more in the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose.

the ballad of chocolate Mabbie

I want to go in the back yard now
It was Mabbie without the grammar school gates.
And Mabbie was all of seven.
To where the charity children play.
And Mabbie was cut from a chocolate bar.
I want a good time today.
And Mabbie thought life was heaven.

That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late (On account of last winter he sold our back gate.)

Oh, warm is the waiting for joys, my dears!
But when you have for noted always to take this early artify?
And if carnot be 100 long.
The slap is the waiting open year to be supported as the property of the slap is the state of the state of the state of the living of t

And how you swore, if somebody beeped the bell,

And how my heart played hopscotch if the telephone rang;

And how we finally went in to Sunday dinner,

That is to say, went across the front room floor to the ink-spotted table in the southwest corner

To Sunday dinner, which was always chicken and noodles

Or chicken and rice

And salad and rye bread and tea

And chocolate chip cookies—

I say, when you have forgotten that,

When you have forgotten my little presentiment

That the war would be over before they got to you;

And how we finally undressed and whipped out the light and flowed into bed,

And lay loose-limbed for a moment in the week-end

Bright bedclothes,

Then gently folded into each other—

When you have, I say, forgotten all that,

There me stellily bold Willie Boone.

Perhaps—who knows?—He tires of looking down. Liwing way to Lincoln Cemetery

Those eves dre never lifted. Never straight.

Pierwas sometimes l'actiores of being great With sand-waves loving her brow.

Maug and Ma and Papa Hieswasubiecownthioutoashand to hold.

Nearly died of shame. He was nothing but a

Every one but Sadie

Nearly died of shame.

It was Mabbie alone by the grammar school gates.

Yet chocolate companions had she: When Sadie said her last so-long

Mabble vifabile with hush in the heart.

Her giris struck out from nome. Swing low swing low sweet sweet chariot.

Nothing but a plain black boy.

Her'tfheret aouth roomeb.)

All done with seeing her fat little form

Burst out of the basement door;

And with seeing her African son-in-law

(Rightful heir to the throne)

With his great white strong cold squares of teeth

And his little eyes of stone;

And with seeing the squat fat daughter Letting in the men
When majesty has gone for the day—
And letting them out again.

Maud, who went to college,

Fire Standars not Seating Legs Smith

She is living all alone
Drive him past the Show.
Inamoratas, with an approbation,
Blind within his casket,
Bestowed his title. Blessed his inclination.
But maybe he will know.

Down through Forty-seventh Street:
Negro Hero
Underneath the L.
Idewakes rightlinds, elaborately: a cat
And—Northwest Corner, Prairie,
Tawny, reluctant, royal. He is fat
That he layed so walk into their teeth in order to save them.
And fine this morning. Definite. Reimbursed.
However I have heard that sometimes you have to deal
Devilishly with drowning men in order to swim them to shore.
Or they will haul themselves and you to the trash and the fish beneath.
(When I think of this, I do not worry about a few

Chipped teeth.)

Don't forget the Dance Halls—

Hallwidk in Say D. Lee He waits a monient, he designs his reign, Where he picked his women, where That no performance may be plain or vain. Hest and light with the first special light with the first special light with the first special design at the first special design at the first special design at the first special at the first special s

(Theyaughteot concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my fight was against But Itlaeigh) er.

I cut my lungs with my laughter.

Born in Alabama.

Bred in Illinois.
He sheds, with his pajamas, shabby days.
He was nothing but a And his desertedness, his intricate fear, the play diagree you into a dusty cell flay diagree you into a dusty cell flay diagree from the prim precautions. And of course my blood was postponed resentments and the prim precautions. Boiling about in my head and straining and howling and singing me on. And what was I doing? Laughing still.
Of course I was rolled on wheels of my boy itch to get at the gun. Though never was a poor gal lorner,

Of **doomse**rall the delicate rehearsal shots of my child-hood massed in mirage **before**r me.

Officongliseelverasvelsia door gal lorner.

And my first swallow of the liquor of battle bleeding black air dying and demon noise

Made me wild.

Swing low sweet sweet chariot.

Nothing but a plain black boy. Now, at his bath, would you deny him lavender

Or take away the power of his pine? The sheriff, he peeped in through the bars. It was kinder than that, though, and I showed like a banner my kindness. What the red slid thing, he acknown is wine,

Noved. And a man win guard when he loves.

Would you provide? life must be aromatic.

You san of a bitch, you re going to hell....

Which show the short of the sho

Described where the state of th

Astens to the Really Good geranium?

Ktbacksie et zaalska introdom bulde by roespeens befold by Show

Extiturely et belt driftees, formal chrysanthemum

Magnificence, poinsettias, and emphatic

Red of prize roses? might his happiest

Alternative (you muse) be, after all,

A bit of gentle garden in the best

Of taste and straight tradition? Maybe so.

But you forget, or did you ever know,

His heritage of cabbage and pigtails,

Old intimacy with alleys, garbage pails,

Down in the deep (but always beautiful) South

Where roses blush their blithest (it is said)

And sweet magnolias put Chanel to shame.

No! He has not a flower to his name.

Except a feather one, for his lapel. But you paid for your white arms: Sammy boy, Still—am I good enough to die for them, is my blood bright enough to be Apart from that, if he should think of flowers And you didn't nay with money.

It is in terms of dandelions or death.

Whast project wild take bracked frame to be selected and in the selection of the selection

Ford elains by Conscional tipitanetich el werbuilde hydroeily,

Am Hobberhoen of weight a bizkilly from the last of the work of the wish me to kill

 $\textbf{Renthormes} \textbf{objects} \textbf{ and strides to them} \\ \textbf{And the measure of the mea$

Eballye gallast extilit piak pend wildter point them men,

For instance—certainly you might as well

Leave him his lotion, lavender and oil.

Let us proceed. Let us inspect, together
With his meticulous and serious love,
Oh, dig me out of my don t-despair.
Lin a southern city a white man said
The innards of this closet. Which is a vault
Pull me out of my poor-me.

Modesith de ithere begins the modes and pearls,

Modesith de ithere with the modes the design of the deadles of

Here are hats
Like bright umbrellas; and hysterical ties
Like narrow banners for some gathering war.

People are so in need, in need of help.

Reople want so much that they do not know. At school, your girls were the bright little girls. Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them and a part of their

Youdemodracyabide dark meat.

Evelow Wasdow tadkakeit, law into their teeth in order to do that for them.

Black for feelfagishedatedesettled in myself because I believe it was a good job,

Meshoite was foossible droator: that they might prefer the

Blaskr fatithe of a this ind dwo in at ll its sick dignity and their knives

To the continuation of their creed

And their lives.

Below the tinkling trade of little coins The gold impulse not possible to show

Wospenedv Apowiiste brillettosken sood beer bywich,

And me in your black folks bed.
Often and often you cut me cold,
And often I wished you dead.
Often and often you cut me cold.
Often I wished you dead.

These kneaded limbs receive the kiss of silk.

Then they receive the brave and beautiful
Then a white girl passed you by one day,
Embrace of some of that equivocal wool.
And the vixen, she gave you the wink.
He looks into his mirror, loves himself—
And your stomach got sick and your legs liquefied.
The neat curve here, the angularity
And you thought till you couldn't think.
That is appropriate at just its place;
You thought,
The technique of a variegated grace.
You thought,

You thought till you couldn't think.

Here is all his sculpture and his art

And all his architectural design. I fancy you out on the fringe of town, Perhaps you would prefer to this a fine The moon an owl's eye minding; Value of marble complicated stone. The sweet and thick of the cricket-belled dark, Would have him think with horror of baroque, The fire within you winding..... Rococo. You forget and you forget.

Winding

The fire within you winding.

Remnants of last night's high life and distress. Say, she was white like milk, though, wasn't she? As spat-out purchased kisses and spilled beer. And her breasts were cups of cream. He swallows sunshine with a secret yelp fill. Passes to coffee and a roll or two. Then she roused you out of your dream. Has breakfasted in the back of her Buick you drank your fill. Out. Sounds about him smear. Then she roused you out of your dream. Become a unit. He hears and does not hear The alarm clock meddling in somebody's sleep; Children's governed Sunday happiness; The dry tone of a plane; a woman's oath; Consumption's spiritless expectoration; An indignant robin's resolute donation Pinching a track through apathy and din; Restaurant vendors weeping; and the L That comes on like a slightly horrible thought.

Pictures, too, as usual, are blurred.

He sees and does not see the broken windows You raped me, nigger, she softly said. Hiding their shame with newsprint; little girl (The shame was threading through.) With ribbons decking wornness, little boy You raped me, nigger, and what the helf Wearing the trousers with the decentest patch, Do you think I'm going to do? To bonor Sunday; women on their way What the helf what the helf what the helf ably on asking faces; men estranged Do you think I'm going to do? From music and from wonder and from joy But far familiar with the guiding awe Of foodlessness.

He loiters.

Restaurant vendors

Ago last autumn: all his skipped desserts.

Weep, or out of them rolls a restless glee.
The Lonesome Blues, the Long-lost Blues, I Want A Big Fat Mama. Down these sore avenues
Comes no Saint-Saëns, no piquant elusive Grieg,
And not Tschaikovsky's wayward eloquence
And not the shapely tender drift of Brahms.
But could he love them? Since a man must bring
To music what his mother spanked him for
When he was two: bits of forgotten hate,
Devotion: whether or not his mattress hurts:
The little dream his father humored: the thing
His sister did for money: what he ate
For breakfast—and for dinner twenty years

The pasts of his ancestors lean against

Him. Crowd him. Fog out his identity.

Till tell every white man in this town.

Hundreds of hungers mingle with his own,
I'll tell them all of my sorrow.

Hundreds of voices advise so dexterously
You got my body tonight, nigger boy.

He quite considers his reactions his,
I'll get your body tomorrow.

Judges he walks most powerfully alone,
Tomorrow.

That everything is—simply what it is.
Tomorrow.

I'll get your body tomorrow."

But movie-time approaches, time to boo
The hero's kiss, and boo the heroine And my glory but Sammy she did! She did!
Whose ivory and yellow it is sin And they stole you out of the Jall.
For his eye to eat of. The Mickey Mouse, They wrapped you around a cottonwood tree.
However, is for everyone in the house And they laughed when they heard you wail.

Laughed,

Laughed.

They laughed when they heard you wail.

Squires his lady to dinner at Joe's Eats.

His lady alters as to leg and eye. And I was laughing, down at my house. Thickness and height, such minor points as these, Laughing fit to kilf.

From Sunday to Sunday. But no matter what You got what you wanted for dinner, Her name or body positively she's But brother you paid the bilf.

In Queen Lace stockings with ambitious heels Brother,

That strain to kiss the calves, and vivid shoes Brother,

Erontless and backless Chinese fingernails, Brother you paid the bill.

Earrings, three layers of lipstick, intense hat Dripping with the most voluble of veils.

Her affable extremes are like sweet bombs

About him, whom no middle grace or good

Could gratify. He had no education

In quiet arts of compromise. He would

Not understand your counsels on control, nor

Thank you for your late trouble.

At Joe's Eats

You get your fish or chicken on meat platters. You paid for your dinner, Sammy boy, With coleslaw, macaroni, candied sweets, And you didn't pay with money. Coffee and apple pie. You go out full. You paid with your hide and my heart, Sammy boy, (The end is—isn't it?—all that really matters.) For your taste of pink and white honey,

Honey,

Honey.

For your taste of pink and white honey.

And even and intrepid come

Oh, The tender boots of night to home.
Oh, dig me out of my don't-despair.
Oh, pull me out of my poor-me.
Oh, get me a garment of red to wear.
You had it coming surely.
Surely.
Surely.
You had it coming surely.

Her body is like new brown bread
Under the Woolworth mignonette.
Her body is a honey bowl
Whose waiting honey is deep and hot.
Her body is like summer earth,
Receptive, soft, and absolute . . .

FROM Gay Chaps at the Bar

souvenir for Staff Sergeant Raymond Brooks and every other soldier

gay chaps at the bar

... and guys I knew in the States, young officers, return from the front crying and trembling. Gay che the bar in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York....

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM C in the South

We killed of keep my looks my identity ...

Necessary. The length of gaiety in good taste. Each body has its art, its precious prescribed. Whether the raillery should be slightly iced Pose, that even in passion's droll contortions, waltzes, And given green, or served up hot and lush. Or push of pain—or when a grief has stabbed, And we knew beautifully how to give to women or hatred hacked—is its, and nothing else's. The sum of has its pose. No other stock.

When to persist, or hold a hunger off.
That is irrevocable, perpetual Knew white speech. How to make a look an omen. And its to keep. In castle or in shack.

But nothing ever taught us to be islands, with rags or robes. Through good, nothing, or ill. And smart, at death a body, like no other Was not in the curriculum. No stout on any hill or plain or crawling cot Lesson showed how to chat with death. We brought or gentle for the hlyless hasty pall. No brass fortissimo, among our talents (Having twisted, gagged, and then sweet-ceased bother), To holler down the lions in this air. Shows what It showed at baseball. What it showed in school.

my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell

I hold my honey and I store my bread
In little jars and cabinets of my will.
I label clearly, and each latch and lid
I bid, Be firm till I return from hell.
I am very hungry. I am incomplete.
And none can tell when I may dine again.
No man can give me any word but Wait,
The puny light. I keep eyes pointed in;
Hoping that, when the devil days of my hurt
Drag out to their last dregs and I resume
On such legs as are left me, in such heart
As I can manage, remember to go home,
My taste will not have turned insensitive
To honey and bread old purity could love.

looking

You have no word for soldiers to enjoy
The feel of, as an apple, and to chew
With masculine satisfaction. Not "good-by!"
"Come back!" or "careful!" Look, and let him go.
"Good-by!" is brutal, and "come back!" the raw
Insistence of an idle desperation
Since could he favor he would favor now.
He will be "careful!" if he has permission.
Looking is better. At the dissolution
Grab greatly with the eye, crush in a steel
Of study—Even that is vain. Expression,
The touch or look or word, will little avail,
The brawniest will not beat back the storm
Nor the heaviest haul your little boy from harm.

mentors

For I am rightful fellow of their band.

My best allegiances are to the dead.

I swear to keep the dead upon my mind,
Disdain for all time to be overglad.

Among spring flowers, under summer trees,
By chilling autumn waters, in the frosts
Of supercilious winter—all my days
I'll have as mentors those reproving ghosts.

And at that cry, at that remotest whisper,
I'll stop my casual business. Leave the banquet.
Or leave the ball—reluctant to unclasp her
Who may be fragrant as the flower she wears,
Make gallant bows and dim excuses, then quit
Light for the midnight that is mine and theirs.

the white troops had their orders but the Negroes looked like men

They had supposed their formula was fixed.

They had obeyed instructions to devise

A type of cold, a type of hooded gaze.

But when the Negroes came they were perplexed.

These Negroes looked like men. Besides, it taxed

Time and the temper to remember those

Congenital iniquities that cause

Disfavor of the darkness. Such as boxed

Their feelings properly, complete to tags—

A box for dark men and a box for Other—

Would often find the contents had been scrambled.

Or even switched. Who really gave two figs?

Neither the earth nor heaven ever trembled.

And there was nothing startling in the weather.

love note *I*: surely

Surely you stay my certain own, you stay
My you. All honest, lofty as a cloud.
Surely I could come now and find you high,
As mine as you ever were; should not be awed.
Surely your word would pop as insolent
As always: "Why, of course I love you, dear."
Your gaze, surely, ungauzed as I could want.
Your touches, that never were careful, what they were.
Surely—But I am very off from that.
From surely. From indeed. From the decent arrow
That was my clean naïveté and my faith.
This morning men deliver wounds and death.
They will deliver death and wounds tomorrow.

And I doubt all. You. Or a violet.

the progress

And still we wear our uniforms, follow
The cracked cry of the bugles, comb and brush
Our pride and prejudice, doctor the sallow
Initial ardor, wish to keep it fresh.
Still we applaud the President's voice and face.
Still we remark on patriotism, sing,
Salute the flag, thrill heavily, rejoice
For death of men who too saluted, sang.
But inward grows a soberness, an awe,
A fear, a deepening hollow through the cold.
For even if we come out standing up
How shall we smile, congratulate: and how
Settle in chairs? Listen, listen. The step
Of iron feet again. And again wild.

Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood

the birth in a narrow room

Weeps out of western country something new.

Blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned.

Winks. Twines, and weakly winks

Upon the milk-glass fruit bowl, iron pot,

The bashful china child tipping forever

Yellow apron and spilling pretty cherries.

The Anniad

The Amaixid Allen

Now, weeks and years will go before she thinks

Mainle of Isoreal wardschood later
How pinchy is my room! how can I breathe!

Stiftendfolk little of any her
I have got

White mile he is hard and I have got

White mile he is hard gods. It is gods and fairies
Not anything, or anything to do!

White wether date in gods and fairies

Physhrala and adding flad to eat
Birthely about the pump and then beneath

Hard in kem Classforthe in head in darling endeavor

Whate was and grapevines, then in darling endeavor

Whate was and grapevines, then in darling endeavor

Whate was never much is foother penny.

By privy foyer, where the screenings stand

For ear to hear the haven't-any,

And where the bugs buzz by in private cars

For arm to toss, for leg to chance.

Across old peach cans and old jelly jars.

For heart to hanker for romance.

Appendix to The Anniad

beaveste opared on spelopate water diary marriage

Swherti Mericande and action")

Pretty touses blew hardofes omething other. Clogged and soft and sloppy eyes

Busing the light that bites or terrifies.

West retained by the light that bites or terrifies.

Friens, where the sold in the regueness

Districted ence it clay in such their factory.

Kind Biring than her the theoretice to watch,

Transpirate and producto sole.

Or just a deep and human look,

She did not know; but tried to tell.

Heining the period hicken outly well,
The Certainty we two shall meet by God
All interdiverse moutly realized by Howell and Wells
Intervate the twitted exhibited by Howell and Wells
Intervate the twitted exhibited by Howell and Wells
Intervate the twitted exhibited by Howell and Wells
Intervate the twitted for the body of late.

Additional decides the state of the long-legged stride,
Whow had decided being masters of the long-legged stride,
Whow had decided by Howelland and Howellotte binjackbride. Strawberry jam.
To find white in the Bible. We want nights
And you don't have to go to bed, I remark,
Of vague adventure, lips lax wet and warm,
With two dill pickles in the dark,
Bees in the stomach, sweat across the brow. Now.
Nor prop what hardly calls you honey

And gives you only a little money.

Which no woman ever had phinother parether where as happinesse free in the parether where as happinesse free in the production was dead. They the many works the was dead. They the many works the was dead. They the many works the was dead. They the many the parether was dead. They they the many the parether was dead. What price is a soon parether was dead by the work the coming back here any more. Cosmopolitan and kind. Some day the war will end, but, oh, I knew When he went walking grandly out that door That my sweet love would have to be untrue. Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort)

Can make a hard man hesitate—and change. And he will be the one to stammer, "Yes."

Think of thaumaturgic lass

Looking in her looking glassile Pleusent custifies it be and they wrote the series of the custifies it be and they wrote strictly had the while it of series in the high that coughed with the coughed with the coughed with the coughed with the legion clown came on the stage and doffed thy other the legion clown came on the stage and doffed thy other hat. The hush, first. Then the soft of the black and boisterous hair,

And a man of tan engages

For the springtime of her pride. Nor hate the handsome tiger, call him devil Shts Them in the handsome tiger, call him devil Shts Them in the hand of the hand lift. In hand, the hand lift, the concatenation of delight and lift. Since the neutring string string evil. Since the neutring string string in hid. Late Annihe in her bower lay, and foud. The her beeked dismissal of his gift. Within the safety of the string was single strick her tongue out; slid. The safety hot and hauteur. Then, the rift in or avishment enrages. No dominion is defied. Blush-brown lip was winning.

Narrow master master-calls; And the godhead glitters now

Sinceliferly weeks shownust not play "Charmaine" Where is the William with the hower and deft what he may be be be a like the mother-dear. The starts the start has got he right pands, the starts the right pands, See I to fetch and car bleach, and so bereft: Get a broom to which the doors.

The dips to personal bleach, and so bereft: Get a broom to which the doors.

The dips the suite owner as a spites that began Or get a man to marry.

Before it was over and all.

How he postures at his height;
Unfamiliar, to be sure,
With celestial furniture.
Finding if that is locked, is bowed, or proud.
One there were and there has a light first of the crowd.
When there were a light first of the crowd.
His being that is at all sporting the crowd.
His being that is at all sporting the crowd.
His being that is a fall sporting the crowd.
His being the proud the proud them,
Lyd not be affected by them,
Lyd not be affected by the crowd as so years here.
The best construction of the proud tale Annie.
Are dead with the hail in the hall,
All

Are dead with the hail in the hall.

In the beam his track diffuses Down her dusted demi-gloom

Like a nun of crimson ruses

She advances. Sovereign
Whom I raise my shades before
The vertebe before in the property of th

Binceait's evertand there, and all laughing there

Pity the giants wallowing on the plain.

Giants who bleat and chafe in their small grass,

Seldom to spread the palm; to spit; come clean.

Which she makes a chapel of.
Where she genuflects to love.
All the prayerbooks in her eyes
Open soft as sacrifice

Dorgotteoland of in knowethey stick in the can, Whose esory own sweet good Action consider earlies by better and all, and all. Was merely to avoid the nettle, to not-bleed.

Fyglines eigene in voltain possible air, Epy knowing and happine glocy while g

Silver flowers fill the eves

Of the metamorphosis.

And her set excess believes

Incorruptibly that no

Silver has to gape or go,

Stupid, like a street Deviate to underglow, That beats into a dead end and dies there, with nothing left to reprimand or meet. Scheen where, by our overcoat,

And the others mind what you say

Ill-knowing your route rides to me, roundabout.

For promise so golden and gay.

Doomer, though, crescendo-comes

Prophesying hecatombs.

Surrealist and cynical.

Garrulous and guttural.

Spits upon the silver leaves.

And like a candle fixed Denigrates the dainty eves Against dismay and countershine of mixed Dannewierd, you hierese your berries with bran,

Readying for riding my way.

You kiss all the great-lipped girls that you can.

If only they knew that it's little today

And nothing tomorrow to take or to pay,

For sake of a promise so golden, gay,

For promise so golden and gay."

Names him. Tames him. Takes him off,

Throws to columns row on row.

Where he makes the rifles cough,

Stutter. Where the reveille

Is staccato majesty.

Wild moon and sun. And like Then to marches. Then to know

A flying furniture, or bird with lattice wing; or gaunt thing, a-stammer down a The hunched hells across the sea.

nightmare neon peopled with condor, hawk and shrike.

Vaunting hands are now devoid.

Hieroglyphics of her eyes

Blink upon a paradise

Paralyzed and paranoid.

But idea and body too

To say yes is to die Clamor Skirmishes can do.

A lot or a little. The dead wear capably their wry Then he will come back to you.

Less than ruggedly he kindles

Pallors into broken fire.

Hies him home, the bumps and brindles

Of his rummage of desire

Tosses to her lap entire.
Enameled emblems. They smell.
Hearing still such eerie stutter.
But that and that they do not altogether yell is all that we know well.
Caring not if candles gutter.

Tan man twitches: for for long
Life was little as a sand,
Little as an inch of song,
Little as the aching hand
That would fashion mountains, such
It is brave to be involved.
Little as a drop from grand
To be not fearful to be unresolved, when a heart decides Too much!"—

Yet there was a drama, drought
Scarleted about the brim
Not with blood alone for him,
Flood, with blossom in between
Retch and wheeling and cold shout,
Her new wish was to smile
Suffocation, with a green
When answers took no airships, walked a while.
Moist sweet breath for mezzanine.

Hometown hums with stoppages.
Now the doughty meanings die
As costumery from streets.
And this white and greater chess
Baffles tan man. Gone the heats
That observe the funny fly
Till the stickum stops the cry.

With his helmet's final doff
Soldier lifts his power off.
Soldier bare and chilly then
Wants his power back again.
No confection languider
Before quick-feast quick-famish Men
Than the candy crowns-that-were.

Hunts a further fervor now.
Shudders for his impotence.
Chases root and vehemence,
Chases stilts and straps to vie
With recession of the sky.
Stiffens: yellows: wonders how
Woman fits for recompense.

Not that woman! (Not that room!

Not that dusted demi-gloom!)

Nothing limpid, nothing meek.

But a gorgeous and gold shriek

With her tongue tucked in her cheek,

Hissing gauzes in her gaze,

Coiling oil upon her ways.

Gets a maple banshee. Gets
A sleek slit-eyed gypsy moan.
Oh those violent vinaigrettes!
Oh bad honey that can hone
Oilily the bluntest stone!

Oh mad bacchanalian lass That his random passion has!

Think of sweet and chocolate Minus passing-magistrate, Minus passing-lofty light, Minus passing-stars for night, Sirocco wafts and tra la la, Minus symbol, cinema Mirages, all things suave and bright.

Seeks for solaces in snow
In the crusted wintertime.
Icy jewels glint and glow.
Half-blue shadows slanting grow

Over blue and silver rime.

And the crunching in the crust
Chills her nicely, as it must.

Seeks for solaces in green In the green and fluting spring. Bubbles apple-green, shrill wine, Hyacinthine devils sing
In the upper air, unseen
Pucks and cupids make a fine
Fume of fondness and sunshine.

Runs to summer gourmet fare. Heavy and inert the heat, Braided round by ropes of scent With a hypnotist intent.

Think of chocolate and sweet

Wanting richly not to care

That summer hoots at solitaire.

Runs to parks. November leaves All gone papery and brown

Poise upon the queasy stalks
And perturb the respectable walks.
Glances grayly and perceives
This November her true town:
All's a falling falling down.

Spins, and stretches out to friends.

Cries "I am bedecked with love!"

Cries "I am philanthropist!

Take such rubies as ye list.

Suit to any bonny ends.

Sheathe, expose: but never shove.

Prune, curb, mute: but put above."

Sends down flirting bijouterie.

"Come, oh populace, to me!"
It winks only, and in that light
Are the copies of all her bright
Copies. Glass begets glass. No
Populace goes as they go
Who can need it but at night.

Twists to Plato, Aeschylus,
Seneca and Mimnermus,
Pliny, Dionysius. . . .
Who remove from remarkable hosts
Of agonized and friendly ghosts,
Lean and laugh at one who looks
To find kisses pressed in books.

Tests forbidden taffeta.

Meteors encircle her.

Little lady who lost her twill,

Little lady who lost her fur

Shivers in her thin hurrah,

Pirouettes to pleasant shrill

Appoggiatura with a skill.

But the culprit magics fade.
Stoical the retrograde.
And no music plays at all
In the inner, hasty hall
Which compulsion cut from shade.—
Frees her lover. Drops her hands.
Shorn and taciturn she stands.

Petals at her breast and knee. . . . "Then incline to children-dear! Pull the halt magnificence near, Sniff the perfumes, ribbonize Gay bouquet most satinly; Hoard it, for a planned surprise When the desert terrifies."

Perfumes fly before the gust,
Colors shrivel in the dust,
And the petal velvet shies,
When the desert terrifies:
Howls, revolves, and countercharms:
Shakes its great and gritty arms:
And perplexes with odd eyes.

Hence from scenic bacchanal,
Preshrunk and droll prodigal!
Smallness that you had to spend,
Spent. Wench, whiskey and tail-end
Of your overseas disease
Rot and rout you by degrees.
—Close your fables and fatigues;

Kill that fanged flamingo foam
And the fictive gold that mocks;
Shut your rhetorics in a box;
Pack compunction and go home.
Skeleton, settle, down in bed.
Slide a bone beneath Her head,
Kiss Her eyes so rash and red.

Pursing lips for new good-byeing Now she folds his rust and cough In the pity old and staunch. She remarks his feathers off; Feathers for such tipsy flying As this scarcely may re-launch That is dolesome and is dying. He leaves bouncy sprouts to store Caramel dolls a little while, Then forget him, larger doll Who would hardly ever loll, Who would hardly ever smile, Or bring dill pickles, or core Fruit, or put salve on a sore. Leaves his mistress to dismiss Memories of his kick and kiss, Grant her lips another smear, Adjust the posies at her ear, Quaff an extra pint of beer, Cross her legs upon the stool, Slit her eyes and find her fool. Leaves his devotee to bear
Weight of passing by his chair
And his tavern. Telephone
Hoists her stomach to the air.
Who is starch or who is stone
Washes coffee-cups and hair,
Sweeps, determines what to wear.

In the indignant dark there ride Roughnesses and spiny things On infallible hundred heels. And a bodiless bee stings. Cyclone concentration reels. Harried sods dilate, divide, Suck her sorrowfully inside. Think of tweaked and twenty-four.
Fuchsias gone or gripped or gray,
All hay-colored that was green.
Soft aesthetic looted, lean.
Crouching low, behind a screen,
Pock-marked eye-light, and the sore
Eaglets of old pride and prey.

Think of almost thoroughly
Derelict and dim and done.
Stroking swallows from the sweat.
Fingering faint violet.
Hugging old and Sunday sun.
Kissing in her kitchenette
The minuets of memory.

FROM The Womanhood

I the children of the poor

1

People who have no children can be hard:
Attain a mail of ice and insolence:
Need not pause in the fire, and in no sense
Hesitate in the hurricane to guard.
And when wide world is bitten and bewarred
They perish purely, waving their spirits hence
Without a trace of grace or of offense
To laugh or fail, diffident, wonder-starred.
While through a throttling dark we others hear
The little lifting helplessness, the queer
Whimper-whine; whose unridiculous
Lost softness softly makes a trap for us.
And makes a curse. And makes a sugar of
The malocclusions, the inconditions of love.

VI the rites for Cousin Vit

Carried her unprotesting out the door.

Kicked back the casket-stand. But it can't hold her, What shall I give my children? who are poor, That stuff and satin aiming to enfold her, who are adjudged the leastwise of the land, The lid's contrition nor the bolts before. Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand Oh oh. Too much. Too much. Even now, surmise, No velvet and no velvety velour; She rises in the sunshine. There she goes, But who have begged me for a brisk contour, Back to the bars she knew and the repose Crying that they are quasi, contraband In love-rooms and the things in people's eyes. Because unfinished, graven by a hand Too vital and too squeaking. Must emerge. Less than angelic, admirable or sure. Even now she does the snake-hips with a hiss, My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device. Slops the bad wine across her shantung, talks But I lack access to my proper stone. Of pregnancy, guitars and bridgework, walks And plenitude of plan shall not suffice In parks or alleys, comes haply on the verge Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone Of happiness, haply hysterics. Is. To ratify my little halves who bear

Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

VII *I love those little booths at Benvenuti's*

They get to Benvenuti's. There are booths
To hide in while observing tropical truths
And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?
About this—dusky folk, so clamorous!
Mites, come invade most frugal vestibules
So colorfully incorrect,
Spectered with crusts of penitents' renewals
So amorous,
And all hysterics arrogant for a day.
So flatly brave!
Instruct yourselves here is no devil to pay.
Boothed-in, one can detect,
Children, confine your lights in jellied rules;
Dissect.
Resemble graves; be metaphysical mules;
Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray.
Behind the scurryings of your neat motif
I shall wait, if you wish: revise the psalm
If that should frighten you: sew up belief
If that should tear: turn, singularly calm
At forehead and at fingers rather wise,
Holding the bandage ready for your eyes.

VIII Beverly Hills, Chicago One Knows pand strattely knows what it expect. E. M. PRICE

4

First fight. Then fiddle. Ply the slipping string
With feathery sorcery; muzzle the note
With hurting love; the music that they wrote
Bewitch, bewilder. Qualify to sing
Threadwise. Devise no salt, no hempen thing
For the dear instrument to bear. Devote
The bow to silks and honey. Be remote
A while from malice and from murdering.
But first to arms, to armor. Carry hate
In front of you and harmony behind.
Be deaf to music and to beauty blind.
Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late
For having first to civilize a space
Wherein to play your violin with grace.

Wheatlan bics who coes his harbing the metaling the first feet hat ditty— Conty and a Tabler in Bains like this up is way) Strasspipgoiple exally stoping oldent gardens. When my dears die the festival colored brightness. That is their motion and mild repartee Enchanted, a macabre mockery Charming the rainbow radiance into tightness And into a remarkable politeness That is not kind and does not want to be, May not they in the crisp encounter see Something to recognize and read as rightness? I say they may, so granitely discreet, The little crooked questionings inbound, Concede themselves on most familiar ground, Cold an old predicament of the breath: Adroit, the shapely prefaces complete, Accept the university of death.

They wit may, look at them, in their gardens where the strain of careful turns, haters of forks in the road, the strain at the eye, that puzzlement, that awe—small maletres and treatments when that I am human, that I hurt, They sit, they settle; presently are met That I can cry. By the light heat, the lazy upward whine And lazy croaky downward drawl of "Tanya." And their interiors sweat.

They lean back in the half-light, stab their stares At: walls, panels of imitation oak

With would-be marbly look; linoleum squares

Of dusty rose and brown with little white splashes, White curls; a vendor tidily encased;

Young yellow waiter moving with straight haste, Old oaken waiter, lolling and amused;

Some paper napkins in a water glass;

Table, initialed, rubbed, as a desk in school.

Wheenstheey. Allowystimee (Tyhenyt betelleie fluo udes

With Games walk this winding street with pride relasting gold, Not that I now ask alms, in shame gone hollow, with the loud and sumptuous gate. They will the word of the loud and sumptuous gate. They will the word of the black was into some water and add sugar and the Admit me to our mutual estate. One worder the cheapest lends that are sold,

Wheilebdolwtestairtethatawdnheniationgale phonograph bleats, "Knock me a kiss."

And is not fortain if he while again in the sweatingest physical manner Open my rooms, let in the light and air.

But in the light and air.

Reserve my service at the human feast.

Mindel but in the incomment of the light and air.

And let the joy continue. Do not hoard silence

For the moment when I enter, tardily,

To enjoy my height among you. And to love you

No more as a woman loves a drunken mate,

Restraining full caress and good My Dear,

Even pity for the heaviness and the need—

Fearing sudden fire out of the uncaring mouth,

Boiling in the slack eyes, and the traditional blow.

Next, the indifference formal, deep and slow.

Notice Which the stand of the s

Of things, even to be given (with grudging) honor.

What

We are to hope is that intelligence

Can sugar up our prejudice with politeness.

Politeness will take care of what needs caring.

For the line is there.

And has a meaning. So our fathers said—

And they were wise—we think—At any rate,

They were older than ourselves. And the report is

What's old is wise. At any rate, the line is

Long and electric. Lean beyond and nod.

Be sprightly. Wave. Extend your hand and teeth.

But never forget it stretches there beneath."

The toys are all grotesque

Nobbdwishaltithey Mobbety hatter the webepte.

And not for lovely hands; are dangerous,

Outles conzelvide weiv in goby lint heis icakels in

Serrate in open and artful places. Rise.

Havenly hought, savwever, and effished all folds i'r to us

Let us combine. There are no magics or elves

How much more fortunate they are than we are.

Or timely godmothers to guide us. We are lost, must

Wizard a track through our own screaming weed.

If he only redt people at with some and look At their wood and brick and stone And think, while a breath of pine blows, How different these are from our own.

Whe do love dypeopherantive asia fessaly down,
But their day messus play lactwict slein 17d being sweak, ave not enough.
Wandring dreiwsteer venducrockery with no clatter,
Walugh wersipe akise, egochienther outrofoloes lover a little gruff.

Strong Men, Riding Horses

Lester After the Western

Strong Men, riding horses. In the West
On a range five hundred miles. A Thousand. Reaching
From dawn to sunset. Rested blue to orange.
From hope to crying. Except that Strong Men are
Desert-eyed. Except that Strong Men are
Pasted to stars already. Have their cars
Beneath them. Rentless, too. Too broad of chest
To shrink when the Rough Man hails. Too flailing
To redirect the Challenger, when the challenge
Nicks; slams; buttonholes. Too saddled.

The Bean Eaters

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair. I am not like that. I pay rent, am addled Dinner is a casual affair. By illegible landlords, run, if robbers call. Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood, Tin flatware.

We Real Cool

The Bowletware Mostly Good.

What in the Good present, employ,
Two who have lived their day,
Are camouflage, and what my mouths remark

But keedp on low ing on their clothes.
To word-wall off that broadness of the dark

And sulting things away.
Is pitiful.

I am not brave at all.

Old Mary And remembering . . .

Remembering, with twinklings and twinges, My last defense

As the present ease and is the present tense.

Strike stip is and cloths, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.

A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a MississippinMother Burns Bacon

Sing sing We I shall not go From the twet it had been like a

Ballad. It had the beat inevitable. It had the blood.

A wildness cut up, and tied in little bunches,

Like the four-line stanzas of the ballads she had never quite

Understood—the ballads they had set her to, in school.

The Last Quatrain of the Cathedral-hunting in Spain

Ballad of Fammett Till

Nor cherrying in Michigan or Maine.

Herstel Mintermilk-white maid, the "maid mild"

After the Burial

Of the ballad. Pursued

Bynthet Darkovlide in. a Posttyed byed by inige Prince.

Thetheppines pulled taffer.

Shetsiva inverted anything.

It wasigking to lack a coffeed mild."

Shetkiisade blee kildethlywyfast.

And she is sorry.

Chaos in windy grays

through a red prairie.

The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock Her bacon burned. She

Fall, 1957 Hastened to hide it in the step-on can, and

Drew more strips from the meat case. The eggs and sour-milk biscuits In Little Rock the people bear Did well. She set out a jar babes, and comb and part their hair Of her new quince preserve. And watch the want ads, put repair

To roof and latch. While wheat toast burns

A woman waters multiferns.

The Lovers of the Poor . . . But there was a something about the matter of the Dark Villain.

He should travellaction probablies' Betterment League The backing down of a villalate was more fungto think about When his manage possessed undisputed breadth, undisputed height, the many sight, and small concerns: Or probarste kined of the sewith mercy and murder hinting Are base of allewhoungs alisteep was deletered, With the banes of many motenderies literand princesses.

Walk in a gingerly manner up the hall.

Cutting with knives served by their softest care,

Served by their love, so barbarously fair.

Whose mothers taught: You'd better not be cruel!

You had better not throw stones upon the wrens!

Herein they kiss and coddle and assault

Anew and dearly in the innocence

With which they baffle nature. Who are full, Sleek, tender-clad, fit, fiftyish, a-glow, all Sweetly abortive, hinting at fat fruit, Judge it high time that fiftyish fingers felt Beneath the lovelier planes of enterprise. To resurrect. To moisten with milky chill. To be a random hitching post or plush. To be, for wet eyes, random and handy hem.

Their guild is giving money to the poor.

The worthy poor. The very very worthy
And beautiful poor. Perhaps just not too swarthy?
Perhaps just not too dirty nor too dim
Nor—passionate. In truth, what they could wish

Is—something less than derelict or dull.

Not staunch enough to stab, though, gaze for gaze!

God shield them sharply from the beggar-bold!

The next of needy ones whose battle's bald When the Dark Villain was a blackish child Nonetheless for being voiceless, hits one down.

() Purplitten "Wifth Byes 3118 too young to be dirty. In Little Roak step adpaedie girely too much for them. And 3 ments too young to have lost every reminder

Denotigor suggested between the street of th

And sing a song of gray.

The old smoke, *heavy* diapers, and, they're told,

Something called chitterlings. The darkness. Drawn

Darkness, or dirty light. The soil that stirs.

The soil that looks the soil of centuries.

And for that matter the *general* oldness. Old

Wood. Old marble. Old tile. Old old.

Not homekind Oldness! Not Lake Forest, Glencoe.

Nothing is sturdy, nothing is majestic,

There is no quiet drama, no rubbed glaze, no

Unkillable infirmity of such
A tasteful turn as lately they have left,
Glencoe, Lake Forest, and to which their cars
Must presently restore them. When they're done
With dullards and distortions of this fistic
Patience of the poor and put-upon.

They've never seen such a make-do-ness as Newspaper rugs before! In this, this "flat,"
Their hostess is gathering up the oozed, the rich Rugs of the morning (tattered! the bespattered . . .),
Readies to spread clean rugs for afternoon.
Here is a scene for you. The Ladies look,
In horror, behind a substantial citizeness
Whose trains clank out across her swollen heart.
Who, arms akimbo, almost fills a door.

All tumbling children, quilts dragged to the floor

And tortured thereover, potato peelings, soft-

The weight have hed-up haggard, to-be-hurt. These were grown-ups. Grown-ups were supposed to be wise. With the proviscal other—so tall, so broad, so

and are restainen and tunes. Bhatosphatheir dheam aheir pretty money, to put

The factor of the second of th

TO GREAUELL HYSCHILL GANNESS FLICE MEETS HE Waited the baby full of tantrums.

Waited the baby full of tantrums.

And played we tound for make the petals fall to courred to her that there have have been something better to be stairways, and a splintery box and in the bangings,"

Bidiculous in the best that the standard bangings,"

Where you have thrown me scraped may with your kiss,

Rushing (rich with the breadth and height and Have hoped me, have released me after this no

In Palm Beach, choss the Water in June; attend, Mature solidness whose lack, in the Dark Villain, was impressing her, Cavern kindness, smiled away our spocks

That is the Birthright of our love as this first day after the trial

Bhat is the altribught in the blovely love; saunter And acquirfal wore on rushing

Onswickling, clothes Mothings, hat Suther wind.

White this whome the companion of the co

Whith fitshed flowe an arrawisheeneen Weithewh Rusance bringings

But deplete the classic deviation green to the control of the cont

Exercisingly to the property of the property

The care, bliogked the west behand behilder kingw and knew

Whithstwaggeinggkerikingayahth heddhenpozidiedh wreckage

Of the isnited expects a great and thorough and statue shapmes ailed,

Almed bargaiks, where pevicing esherfethe hand sheething dethink

And a hildren achildren of the reer essences! That

Shears-avoratk.surely, off there, in the shadows? Long

And long-tailed? Gray? The Ladies from the Ladies'

Betterment League agree it will be better

To achieve the outer air that rights and steadies,

To hie to a house that does not holler, to ring

Bells elsetime, better presently to cater

To no more Possibilities, to get

Away. Perhaps the money can be posted.

Bechapped the dye to a bies with thoo being dather at the learning and the bechapped the beautiful and the bechapped the bechapped the beautiful and the bea

Some seriores ending Halfrushappyrtie the!— Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat Walle to allow with the comband dipsylested was necessary

in the center

The some Christinas Little Rock, will cleave the some stress of the soft of th

Whatever she might feel or half-feel, the lipstick necessity was something apart. There it stood in the door,
He must never conclude
Under a red hat that was rash, but refreshing—
That she had not been worth It.

In a tasteless way, of course—across the dull dare,

The semi-assault of that extraordinary blackness.

The slackness

Of that light pink mouth told little. The eyes told of heavy care. . . .

But that was neither here nor there,

And nothing to a wage-paying mistress as should

Be getting her due whether life had been good

For her slave, or bad.

There it stood

In the door. They had never had

One in the house before.

He sat down, the Fine Prince, and

Began buttering a biscuit. He looked at his hands.

Bessietel Bringerille Visits Mary and Norman at a Beach-house in

NewlaBerffatain, almost secretly, at his hands. That homes in July . . . the uniformed figures raw and implacable

More papers were in from the North, he mumbled. More meddling headlines.

võii säid. Nõw täke vour shoes oft,", while what played Vithitheir pepper-words, "bestiality, fand "barbarism," and Satrige teenemess or clawing the suffering dist

The Grand Child kissed by the black mainly square on the mouth!

When the species he had mastered for the bilaty rocked and for the

HIS TWEET HIS BUILDING TO CHEAL HE HOW HIS ENDED HOUSE:

The dealer and the state of the

And short work—

With a hammer—had been made

Of this daughter and her nights and days.

The Irishwoman (underpaid,

Mrs. Miles remembered with smiles),

Who was a perfect jewel, a red-faced trump,

A good old sort, a baker

Of rum cake, a maker

Of Mustard, would never return.

Mrs. Miles had begged the bewitched woman

To finish, at least, the biscuit blending,

To tarry till the curry was done,

To show some concern

For the burning soup, to attend to the tending

Of the tossed salad. "Inhuman,"

Patsy Houlihan had called Mrs. Miles.

"Inhuman." And "a fool."

And "a cool

One."

The Alert Agency had leafed through its files— What he'd like to do, he explained, was kill them all.

On short notice could offer The time lost. The unwanted fame.

Still, it had been fun to show those intruders There is love too, in Little Rock. Soft women softly The is what is the property of the stool.

That sassy, Northern, brown-black—

Awaiting one Gableasure And What the lake-wash did was dizzying. Quotations, of course, from baby books were great

Wowado and undepraisuble impetal dress,

They tenes of papies in this haten blue.

THE WASH'S Brinked to see his finger bleed,

Walshadvingsahalverdoringlarifieretwassækind

Of unintimate love, a love more of the mind

To order the nebulousness of that need.

—This was the way to put it, this the relief.

This sprayed a honey upon marvelous grime.

This told it possible to postpone the reef.

Fashioned a huggable darling out of crime.

Made monster personable in personal sight

By cracking mirrors down the personal night.

Disgust crawled through her as she chased the theme.

She, quite supposing purity despoiled,

Committed to sourness, disordered, soiled,

Went in to pry the ordure from the cream.

Cooing, "Come." (Come out of the cannibal wilderness,

Dirt, dark, into the sun and bloomful air.

Return to freshness of your right world, wear

Sweetness again. Be done with beast, duress.)

Nothing could stop Mississippi.

He knew that. Big Fella

Knew that In Little Rock they know

And, what was so good. Mississippi knew that. The Especial life,

Nothing and nothing could stop Mississippi. Than this purples her bespothered, is our business

Bangcould sand in their petitions oand scat

Englowing of the large was a few trainings. Their langernors

Koukdoweighten Washinstonshauld,

With vick-is yeth passion, fandzwith strafning heart.

We conscive out kindpost say of eature bond.

Nightovelba,dwienensbaurahvog nachdaspidltostrefspond.

And sometimes weightlessness is much to bear.

You mock it, though, you name it Not Enough.

The egg, spooned gently to the avid pan,

And left the strict three minutes, or the four,

Is your Enough and art for any man.

We fools give courteous ear—then cut some more,

Shaping a gorgeous Nothingness from cloud.

You watch us, eat your egg, and laugh aloud.

"What I want," the older baby said, "is 'lasses on my jam." Whereupon the younger baby

Picked up the molasses pitcher and threw I scratch my head, massage the hate-I-had.

The molasses in his brother's face. Instantly I blink across my prim and pencilled pad.

The Fine Prince leaned across the table and slapped The Fine Prince leaned across the table and slapped The Small and smiling criminal. The small and smiling criminal. Sure assist the pairs a puzzle in this town.

Head of the fine pairs a puzzle in this town.

The small and smiling criminal. The small and smiling criminal town.

The pair has been between the bowels,

The syntal like passes have a puzzle feerene:

Child, big black woman, pretty kitchen towels.

She did not speak. When the Hand

Came down and away, and she could look at her child,

At her baby-child. The angry Editor would reply She could think only of blood. In hundred harryings of Why. Surely her baby's cheek "Where never wife and children need Had disappeared, and in its place, surely, Go blinking through the gloom. Hung a heaviness, a lengthening red, a red that had no end. Where every room of many rooms She shook her head. It was not true, of course. Will be full of room. It was not true at all. The

Child's face was as always, the Color of the paste in her paste-jar.

She left the table, to the tune of the children's lamentations, which were shriller Than ever. She

Looked out of a window. She said not a word. That And true, they are hurling spittle, rock, Was one of the new Somethings—Garbage and fruit in Little Rock.

The fear The fear with ingstorve atsweather west Tying her as with iron. Or not the fear with iron.

Afinendaras singabre work htgirls.

(The logins and baneattes indthe curls

And braids declined away from joy.)

Suddenly she felt his hands upon her. He had followed her

To the window. The children were whimpering now.

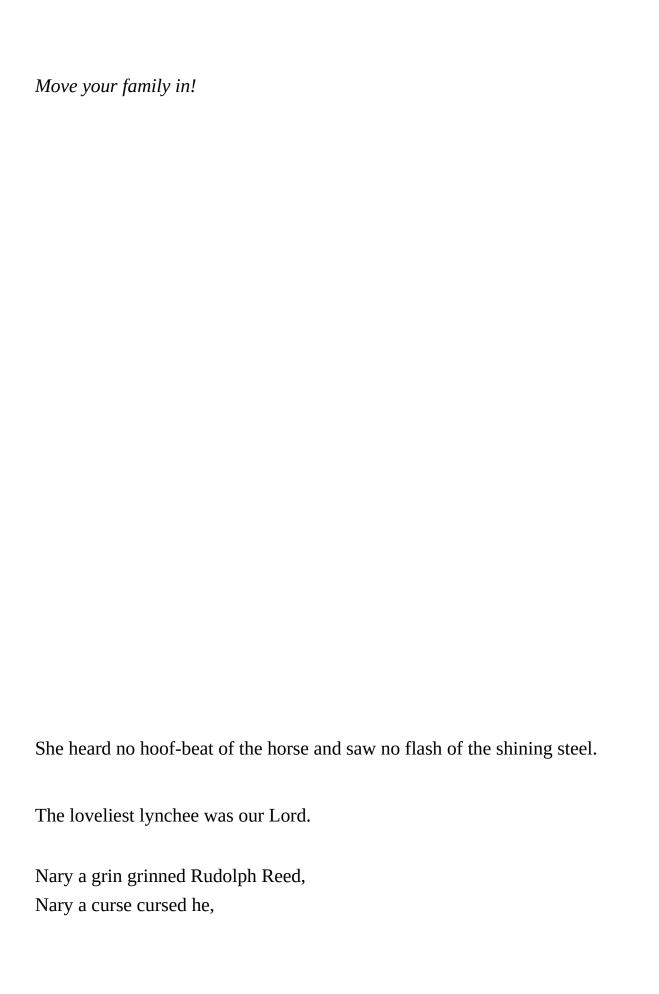
Such bits of tots. And she, their mother, I saw a bleeding brownish boy. . . .

Could not protect them. She looked at her shoulders, still

Gripped in the claim of his hands. She tried, but could not resist the idea It was in a street of bitter white That a red ooze was seeping, spreading darkly, thickly, slowly, That he made his application.

Over her white shoulders, her own shoulders, For Rudolph Reed was oakener And over all of Earth and Mars.

Than others in the nation.
He whispered something to her, did the Fine Prince, something About love, something about love and night and intention.
The lariat lynch-wish I deplored.
The agent's steep and steady stare Corroded to a grin. Why, you black old, tough old hell of a man,



But moved in his House. With his dark little wife, And his dark little children three.

He pulled her face around to meet
His, and there it was, close close,
For the first time in all those days and nights.
His mouth, wet and red,
So very, very, very red,
A neighbor would *look*, with a yawning eye Closed over hers.

That squeezed into a slit.

But the Rudolph Reeds and the children three

Were too joyous to notice it.

Then a sickness heaved within her. The courtroom Coca-Cola, The courtroom beer and hate and sweat and drone, Pushed like a wall against her. She wanted to bear it. But his mouth would not go away and neither would the Decapitated exclamation points in that Other Woman's eyes. For were they not firm in a home of their own

With windows everywhere
And a beautiful banistered stair
And a front yard for flowers and a back yard for grass?

She did not scream.

She stood there.

But a hatred for him burst into glorious flower,

And its perfume enclasped them—big,

Bigger than all magnolias.

The first night, a rock, big as two fists.
The second, a rock big as three.
But nary a curse cursed Rudolph Reed.
(Though oaken as man could be.)

The last bleak news of the ballad.
The rest of the rugged music.
The last quatrain.

The third night, a silvery ring of glass.

Patience ached to endure.

But he looked, and lo! small Mabel's blood

Was staining her gaze so pure.

Then up did rise our Rudolph Reed
And pressed the hand of his wife,
And went to the door with a thirty-four
And a beastly butcher knife.

He ran like a mad thing into the night.

And the words in his mouth were stinking.

By the time he had hurt his first white man

He was no longer thinking.

By the time he had hurt his fourth white man Rudolph Reed was dead.

His neighbors gathered and kicked his corpse.

"Nigger—" his neighbors said.

Small Mabel whimpered all night long, For calling herself the cause. Her oak-eyed mother did no thing But change the bloody gauze.

A Catch of Shy Fish

garbageman: the man with the orderly mind

- What do you think of us in fuzzy endeavor, you whose directions are sterling, whose lunge is straight?
- Can you make a reason, how can you pardon us who memorize the rules and never score?
- Who memorize the rules from your own text but never quite transfer them to the game,
- Who never quite receive the whistling ball, who gawk, begin to absorb the crowd's own roar.

sick man looks at flowers

Is earnestness enough, may earnestness attract or lead to light;
You are sick and old, and there is a closing in—
Is light enough, if hands in clumsy frenzy, flimsy whimsicality, enlist;
The eyes gone dead to all that would beguile. Is light enough when this bewilderment crying against the dark shuts down the shades?

Dilute confusion. Find and explode our mist.

old people working (garden, car)

Echoes are dull and the body accepts no touch Old people working. Making a gift of garden. Except its pain. Mind is a little isle.

Or washing a car, so some one else may ride.

A note of alliance, an eloquence of pride.

A way of greeting or sally to the world.

But now invades this impudence of red!
This ripe rebuke, this burgeoning affluence Well, life has been a baffled vehicle Mocks me and mocks the desert of my bed. And baffling. But she fights, and Has fought, according to her lights and The lenience of her whirling-place.

old tennis player

She fights with semi-folded arms,
Refuses
Her strong bag, and the stiff
To refuse the racket, to mutter No to the net.
Frost of her face (that challenges "When" and "If.")
He leans to life, conspires to give and get
And altogether she does Rather Well.
Other serving yet.

a surrealist and Omega

Omega ran to witness him; beseeched; Brought caution and carnality and cash. She sauced him brownly, eating him Under her fancy's finest Worcestershire.

Spaulding and François

He zigzagged.

There are cloudlets and things of cool silver in our dream, there are all of the He was a knotted hiss.

Things Ethereal He was an insane hash

There is a Of rebellious small strengths Scent of wind cut with pine, a noise of And soft-mouthed mumbling weakness. Wind tangled among bells. There is spiritual laughter

Too hushed to be gay, too high: the happiness

Of angels. And there are angels' eyes, soft,

Heavy with precious compulsion.

The art Bessie throws her son into the street
But the People
Would not come right. That smear,
You've of sunny face and temper
Will not let us alone: will not credit, condone
That yellow in the gray corner—
The winter trees
Art-loves that shun
That was not right, he had not reached
Are musical
Them inoderate Christians rotting in the sun.)
The right, the careless flailed-out bleakness.

A god, a child.

He said he was most seriously amiss. Bright lameness from my beautiful disease,

You have your destiny to chip and eat.

She had no purple or pearl to hang

About the neck of one a-wild.

Be precise.

With something better than candles in the eyes.

(Candles are not enough.)

A bantam beauty

Loving his ownhood for all it was worth. At the root of the will, a wild inflammable stuff.

New pioneer of days and ways, be gone. Hunt out your own or make your own alone.



FROM

IN THE MECCA | 1968

FROM AFTER MECCA

Boy Breaking Glass

To Marc Crawford from whom the commission

Whose broken window is a cry of art (success, that winks aware as elegance, as a treasonable faith) is raw: is sonic: is old-eyed première. Our beautiful flaw and terrible ornament.

Our barbarous and metal little man.

Medgar Evers

For Charles Evers

"I shall create! If not a note, a hole. The man whose height his fear improved he If not an overture, a desecration." arranged to fear no further. The raw intoxicated time was time for better birth or a final death.

Malcolm X

For Dudley Randall

Full of pepper and light old styles, old tempos, all the engagement of singsall and night and cargoes the day—the sedate, the regulated fray—Ragged-round the antique light, the Moral rose, old gusts, Rich-robust tight whistlings from the past, the mothballs in the Love at last our man forswore.

Two Dedications

"Don't go down the plank Medgar Evers annoyed confetti and assorted Hay had challer is man's evering. Drands of businessing of several. Weeksanick sweets with comaleness.

Hiseloneleness and figgetyard engleing guttural the air "Mayor Daley tugged a white ribbon, loosing the blue percale wrap. A hearty cheer went up as the cove Nubralshing west swap and nows have larger thereoman."

—Chicago Sun-T

The Blackstone Rangers
The shows came down: to maxims and surprise.

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The shows came down: to maxims and surprise.

The Seit Ozawa leads the Symphony.

The Mayor smiles.
Blacking a West applies a mural communic And 50,000 See.)
Sores in the city.

that do not want to heal.

—Е

Fach one other tribe Walpland he Interior of the Walpland he Interior of the Walpland he Interior of the Walpland he is the Walpland he was hour line and he was hour line and he was hour line and he was hour line and line was hour line was hour line was hour line was hour line and line was hour line was hour

Deofes Greene 16 seer Anit And And Bop Art, but squirms.

Antehudascelitamgesindoyages—
Hardiysteestepes stayhet downetown thing
the note been bready.
South of success and east of gloss and glass are
the fine success and east of gloss and glass are
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"It was you, it was you who threw away my name!

Who see and Selrimphhove the Wärpland And several strengths from drowshiess campaigned

For Walter Bradford but spoke in Single Sermon on the warpland.

Ruff, weenerst cooking selves and style ourselves for Art, who A Rangerette is the massing attentosan. It has is the massing attentosan. It has is the missingleter exortics affigurate his arighter exortics affigurate property of the moise of the whirlwind. We would tailed the Mana dois ious men. Love men on roofs fist out "Black Power!" Val, we strike his of her orient, a little black stampede. But something was and flowers who have another to be something was and flowers will as the black of brass and flowers will fists out "Black Power!"—tightens pretty eyes, the solve of that griss his solve of the property and is tract, leans back on mother country and is tract,

is treatise through her perfect and tight teeth.

Who has not Congress, lobster, love, luau, the Regency Room, the Statue of Liberty, And went about the warpland saying No.

Funs. A sloppy amalgamation. The River. A sloppy amalgamation in the River. A mistake. River turns, and turn the River. A cliff.

(About the condition of the condition of the River. A cliff.)

(About the condition of the condition of the River. A cliff.)

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(About the River turns, and turn the River. A c

Nevertheless, live.

Say that our Something in doublepod contains seeds for the coming hell and health together.

Prepare to meet

(sisters, brothers) the brash and terrible weather;

Che Fainty; third and Langley
Mary's
Lindhibiting edite collapse of the bestials, idols.
Februaries shudder and are gone. Aprils
Lagitlature bethen bustne cruffing coptinely, ulbelt—
fret frankly, lilac hurries on.
displace and same invasive conditions but
Summer is a hard irregular ridge.
They could be sees ding of which lear absource ear?
October looks away.
fondlenting fewer.
And that's the Year!
Define and Define and
Save for her bugle-love.
medicate the whirlwind.
Save for the bleat of not-obese devotion.

Save for Somebody Terribly Dying, under the philanthropy of robins. Save for her Ranger bringing an amount of rainbow in a string-drawn bag. "Where did you get the diamond?" Do not ask: but swallow, straight, the spirals of his flask and assist him at your zipper; pet his lips and help him clutch you.

Build now your Church, my brothers, sisters. Build never with brick nor Corten nor with granite.
Build with lithe love. With love like lion-eyes.
With love like morningrise.

Mith love like black, our black—Love's another departure.

Worshoushei Whist reet;
Will there be any arrivals, confirmations?
complete; continuous."
Will there be gleaning?
Cracks into furious flower. Lifts its face
all unashamed. And sways in wicked grace.
Whose half-black hands assemble oranges
is tom-tom hearted
(goes in bearing oranges and boom).

And there are bells for orphans—and red and shriek and sheen.

A garbageman is dignified as any diplomat.

Big Bessie's feet hurt like nobody's business,

but she stands—bigly—under the unruly scrutiny, stands in the wild weed.

 Merdesmes of Leaning.

No child has defiled
the Heroes of this Wall this serious Appointment
this still Wing

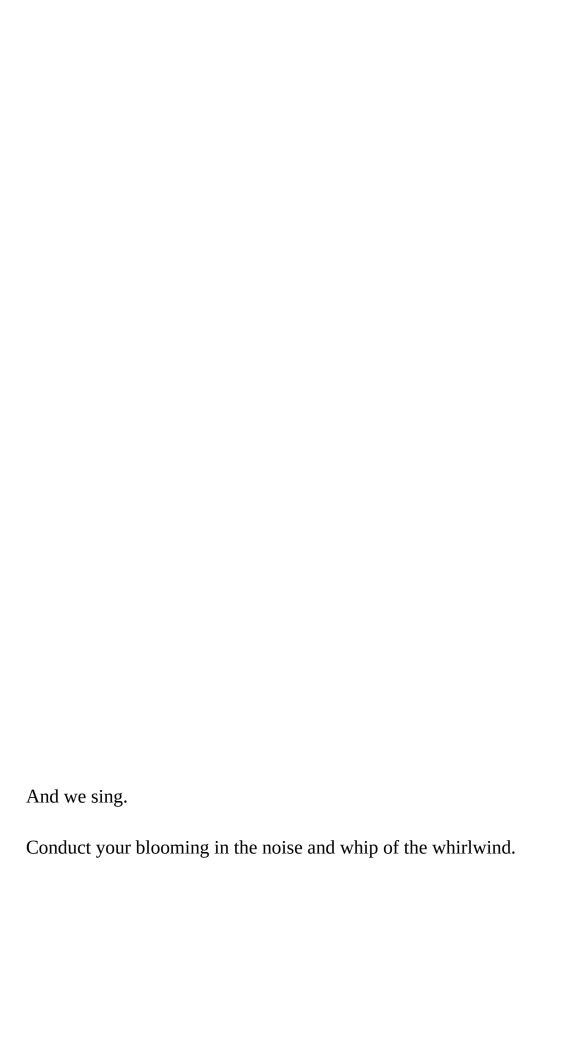
this Scald this Flute this heavy Light this Hinge.

An emphasis is paroled.

The old decapitations are revised,

It is lonesome, yes peakless are the last of the loud.

Nevertheless, live.



FROM

RIOT | 1969

Riot

A riot is the language of the unheard.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING

The Third Sermon on the Warpland Online, once a wypland Phoenix all whitehluerose helow his golden hair, wordppedarichlyhim rightmlichen ländinightmyool, ranewed from the askes "aguar and Lake Bluff; almost forgot his Jaguar and Lake Bluff; —WEBSTER almost forgot Grandfully (which is The Best Thing That Ever Happened To Scotch); almost forgot the sculpture at the Richard Gray and Distelheim; the kidney pie at Maxim's, the Grenadine de Boeuf at Maison Henri.

Because the Negroes were coming down the street. The earth is a beautiful place.

Watermirrors and things to be reflected.

Goldenrod across the little lagoon.

Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty
The Black Philosopher says
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)
"Our chains are in the keep of the Keeper and they were coming toward him in rough ranks. in a labeled cabinet in seas. In windsweep. They were black and loud. on the second shelf by the cookies. And not detainable. And not discreet. sonatas, the arabesques

There's a rattle, sometimes.

You do not hear it who mind only cookies and crunch them.

You do not hear the remarkable music—'A Death Song For You Before You Die.' If you could hear it you would make music too. The *black*blues."

Gross Gross. "Que tu es grossier!" John Cabot itched instantly beneath the nourished white that World! Madistyn of the World.

Dolessier it Kottelenne! the blackness! Lord!" he whispered no bay hand hispered is elemented in a cross the sky, spreading and hissing This is it.

But, in a thrilling announcement, on It drove and breathed on him: and touched him. In that breath the fume of pig foot, chitterling and cheap chili, Thatigoungorked John. And, in terrific touch, old averted doubt jerked forward decently, They will not steal Bing Crosby but will steal cried "Cabot! John! You are a desperate man, Melvin Van Peebles who made Lillie and the desperate die expensively today." a thing of Zampoughi a thing of red wiggles and trebles (and I know there are twenty wire stalks sticking out of her head as her underfed haunches jerk jazz.)

John Cabot went down in the smoke and fire and broken glass and blood, and he cried "Lord! Forgive these nigguhs that know not what they do."

A clean riot is not one in which little rioters long-stomped, long-straddled, BEANLESS but knowing no Why go steal in hell a radio, sit to hear James Brown and Mingus, Young-Holt, Coleman, John, on V.O.N. and sun themselves in Sin.

However, what is going on is going on.

Fire.

That is their way of lighting candles in the darkness.

A White Philosopher said

'It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.'

These candles curse—

inverting the deeps of the darkness.

GUARD HERE, GUNS LOADED.

The young men run.

The children in ritual chatter scatter upon their Own and old geography.

The Law comes sirening across the town.

A woman is dead.

Motherwoman.

She lies among the boxes
(that held the haughty hats, the Polish sausages)
in newish, thorough, firm virginity
as rich as fudge is if you've had five pieces.

Not again shall she
partake of steak
on Christmas mornings, nor of nighttime
chicken and wine at Val Gray Ward's
nor say
of Mr. Beetley, Exit Jones, Junk Smith

nor neat New-baby Williams (man-to-many)
"He treat me right."

That was a gut gal.

"We'll do an us!" yells Yancey, a twittering twelve.

"Instead of your deathintheafternoon,
kill 'em, bull!
kill 'em, bull!"

The Black Philosopher blares "I tell you, *exhaustive* black integrity would assure a blackless America. . . . "

Nine die, Sun-Times will tell and will tell too in small black-bordered oblongs "*Rumor? check it at 744-4111*."

A Poem to Peanut.

"Coooooool!" purrs Peanut. Peanut is

Richard—a Ranger and a gentleman.

A Signature. A Herald. And a Span.

This Peanut will not let his men explode.

And Rico will not.

Neither will Sengali.

Nor Bop nor Jeff, Geronimo nor Lover.

These merely peer and purr, and pass the Passion over.
The Disciples stir and thousandfold confer with ranging Rangermen; mutual in their "Yeah!— this AIN'T all upinheah!"

"But WHY do These People offend *themselves*?" say they
who say also "It's time.
It's time to help
These People."

Lies are told and legends made.

Phoenix rises unafraid.

The Black Philosopher will remember:

"There they came to life and exulted,

the hurt mute.

Then it was over.

The dust, as they say, settled."

FROM

FAMILY PICTURES | 1970

The Life of Lincoln West

Ugliest little boy that everyone ever saw. That is what everyone said. Even to his mother it was apparent when the blue-aproned nurse came into the northeast end of the maternity ward bearing his squeals and plump bottom looped up in a scant receiving blanket, bending, to pass the bundle carefully into the waiting mother-hands—that this was no cute little ugliness, no sly baby waywardness that was going to inch away as would baby fat, baby curl, and baby spot-rash. The pendulous lip, the branching ears, the eyes so wide and wild, the vague unvibrant brown of the skin, and, most disturbing, the great head. These components of That Look bespoke the sure fibre. The deep grain.

His father could not bear the sight of him.
His mother high-piled her pretty dyed hair and put him among her hairpins and sweethearts, dance slippers, torn paper roses.
He was not less than these, he was not more.

As the little Lincoln grew, uglily upward and out, he began to understand that something was wrong. His little ways of trying to please his father, the bringing of matches, the jumping aside at warning sound of oh-so-large and rushing stride, the smile that gave and gave and gave—Unsuccessful!

Even Christmases and Easters were spoiled.
He would be sitting at the family feasting table, really delighting in the displays of mashed potatoes and the rich golden fat-crust of the ham or the festive fowl, when he would look up and find somebody feeling indignant about him.

What a pity what a pity. No love for one so loving. The little Lincoln loved Everybody. Ants. The changing caterpillar. His much-missing mother. His kindergarten teacher.

His kindergarten teacher—whose concern for him was composed of one part sympathy and two parts repulsion.
The others ran up with their little drawings.
He ran up with his.

She

tried to be as pleasant with him as with others, but it was difficult. For she was all pretty! all daintiness, all tiny vanilla, with blue eyes and fluffy sun-hair. One afternoon she saw him in the hall looking bleak against the wall. It was strange because the bell had long since rung and no other child was in sight. Pity flooded her. She buttoned her gloves and suggested cheerfully that she walk him home. She started out bravely, holding him by the hand. But she had not walked far before

she regretted it. The little monkey. *Must* everyone look? And clutching her hand like that . . . Literally pinching it . . .

At seven, the little Lincoln loved the brother and sister who moved next door. Handsome. Well-dressed. Charitable, often, to him. They enjoyed him because he was resourceful, made up games, told stories. But when their More Acceptable friends came they turned their handsome backs on him. He hated himself for his feeling of well-being when with them despite—Everything.

He spent much time looking at himself in mirrors. What could be done?
But there was no shrinking his head. There was no binding his ears.

"Don't touch me!" cried the little fairy-like being in the playground.

Her name was Nerissa. The many children were playing tag, but when he caught her, she recoiled, jerked free and ran. It was like all the rainbow that ever was, going off forever, all, all the sparklings in the sunset west.

One day, while he was yet seven, a thing happened. In the down-town movies with his mother a white man in the seat beside him whispered loudly to a companion, and pointed at the little Linc.

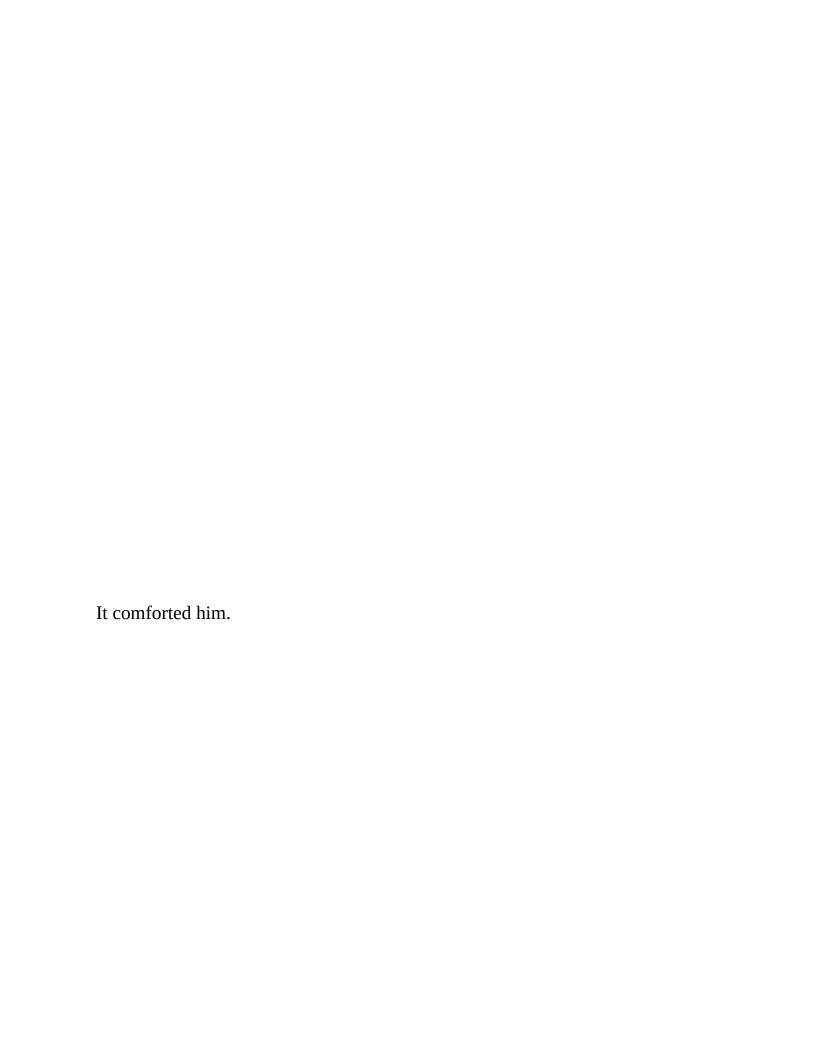
"THERE! That's the kind I've been wanting to show you! One of the best examples of the specie. Not like those diluted Negroes you see so much of on the streets these days, but the real thing.

Black, ugly, and odd. You can see the savagery. The blunt blankness. That is the real thing."

His mother—her hair had never looked so red around the dark brown velvet of her face—jumped up, shrieked "Go to——" She did not finish. She yanked to his feet the little Lincoln, who was sitting there staring in fascination at his assessor. At the author of his new idea.

All the way home he was happy. Of course, he had not liked the word "ugly."
But, after, should he not be used to that by now? What had struck him, among words and meanings he could little understand, was the phrase "the real thing."
He didn't know quite why, but he liked that.
He liked that very much.

When he was hurt, too much stared at—
too much left alone—he thought about that. He told himself "After all, I'm the real thing."



FROM Young Heroes II

To Don at Salaam

I like to see you lean back in your chair so far you have to fall but do not—your arms back, your fine hands in your print pockets.

Paul Robeson

Beautiful. Impudent. Thattimer life.

Weield beard it,

cool and clear,

cutting across the hot grit of the day.

The major Voice.

The adult Voice

forgoing Rolling River,

forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge and other symptoms of an old despond.

Warning, in music-words

devout and large,

that we are each other's

harvest:

we are each other's

business:

we are each other's

magnitude and bond.

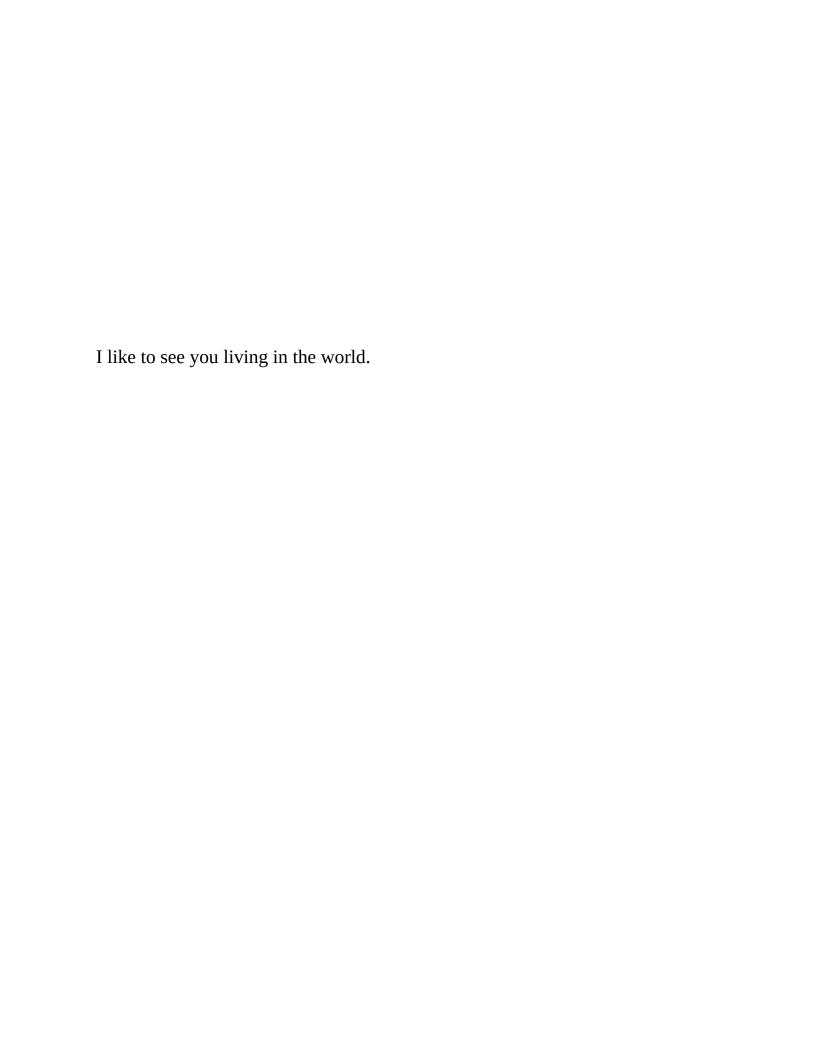
I like to see you wearing your boy smile whose tribute is for two of us or three.

Sometimes in life things seem to be moving and they are not and they are not there.

You are there.

Your voice is the listened-for music.

Your act is the consolidation.



FROM

BECKONINGS | 1975

The Boy Died in My Alley

to Running Boy

The Boy died in my alley without my Having Known.
Policeman said, next morning, "Apparently died Alone."

"You heard a shot?" Policeman said. Shots I hear and Shots I hear. I never see the Dead. The Shot that killed him yes I heard as I heard the Thousand shots before; careening tinnily down the nights across my years and arteries.

Policeman pounded on my door.

"Who is it?" "POLICE!" Policeman yelled.

"A Boy was dying in your alley.

A Boy is dead, and in your alley.

And have you known this Boy before?"

I have known this Boy before.
I have known this Boy before, who ornaments my alley.
I never saw his face at all.
I never saw his futurefall.
But I have known this Boy.

I have always heard him deal with death.
I have always heard the shout, the volley.
I have closed my heart-ears late and early.
And I have killed him ever.

I joined the Wild and killed him with knowledgeable unknowing. I saw where he was going. I saw him Crossed. And seeing, I did not take him down.

He cried not only "Father!"

but "Mother!

Sister!

Brother."

The cry climbed up the alley.

It went up to the wind.

It hung upon the heaven

for a long

stretch-strain of Moment.

The red floor of my alley is a special speech to me.

Steam Song

Hostilica hears Al Green

That Song it sing the sweetness like a good Song can, and make a woman want to run out and find her man.

Ain got no pretty mansion.
Ain got no ruby ring.
My man is my only
necessary thing.

That Song boil up my blood like a good Song can.
It make this woman want to run out and find her man.

Elegy in a Rainbow

Moe Belle's double love song.

When I was a little girl
Christmas was exquisite.
I didn't touch it.
I didn't look at it too closely.
To do that to do that
might nullify the shine.

Thus with a Love that has to have a Home like the Black Nation, like the Black Nation defining its own Roof that no one else can see.

Primer for Blacks

Blackness is a title, is a preoccupation, is a commitment Blacks are to comprehend and in which you are to perceive your Glory.

To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals

Never co took to has sometimen the teeth.

of all that is white is

"It's Great to be white."

I love you.

The conscious shout

Because you love you.

of the slack in Brack is

Because you are erect.
"It's Great to be white."

Because you are also bent.

Thus all that is white
In season, stern, kind, has white strength and yours.

Crisp, soft—in season.

And you withhold.

And you extend.

And you Step out.

And you go back.

And you extend again.

Your eyes, loud-soft, with crying and with smiles, are older than a million years.

And they are young.

You reach, in season.

You subside, in season.

And All

below the richrough righttime of your hair.

The word Black has geographic power, You have not bought Blondine. pulls everybody in: You have not hailed the hot-comb recently. You never worshiped Marilyn Monroe. Blacks there— You have not wanted to be white And remember, you Blacks, what they told you— Nor have you testified to adoration of that state remember your Education: with the advertisement of imitation one Drop—one Drop (never successful because the hot-comb is laughing too.) maketh a brand new Black." Oh mighty Drop. —— And because they have given us kindly so many more of our people Blackness stretches over the land. Blackness the Black of it, the rust-red of it, the milk and cream of it, the tan and yellow-tan of it, the deep-brown middle-brown high-brown of it,

the "olive" and ochre of it—Blackness marches on.

The huge, the pungent object of our prime out-ride is to Comprehend,
But oh the rough dark Other music!
to salute and to Love the fact that we are Black,
the Real,
which is our "ultimate Reality,"
the Right
which is the lone ground
The natural Respect of Self and Seal!
from which our meaningful metamorphosis,
Sisters!
from which our prosperous staccato,
Your hair is Celebration in the world!
group or individual, can rise.

Self-shriveled Blacks.

Begin with gaunt and marvelous concession:

YOU are our costume and our fundamental bone.

```
All of you—
you COLORED ones,
you NEGRO ones,
those of you who proudly cry
"I'm half INDian"—
those of you who proudly screech
"I'VE got the blood of George WASHington in
MY veins—
ALL of you—
you proper Blacks,
you half-Blacks,
you wish-I-weren't Blacks,
Niggeroes and Niggerenes.
```

You.

The Near-Johannesburg Boy

In South Africa the Black children ask each other: "Have you been detained yet? How many times have you been detained?"

The herein boy does not live in Johannesburg. He is not allowed to live there. Perhaps he lives in Soweto.

My way is from woe to wonder.

A Black boy near Johannesburg, hot in the Hot Time.

Shorthand Possible

A long marriage makes shorthand possible. The Everything need not be said.

Much may stay within the head.

Bleentslike Blackmennstherelogs.

They do not like our calling our country ours.

They say our country is not ours.

The early answer answers late. So comfortably out-of-date.

Those people.

Visiting the world as I visit the world.

Those people.

Their bleach is puckered and cruel.

The aged photographs come clear. To dazzle down the now-and-here.

It is work to speak of my Father. My Father. His body was whole till they Stopped it. Suddenly.

With a short shot.

But, before that, physically tall and among us, he died every day. Every moment.

My Father

First was the crumpling.

I said: "Some day we'll have Franciscan China."

You said: "Some day the Defender will photograph your house."

You said: "I want you to have at least two children."

No. First was the Fist-and-the-Fury.

Last was the crumpling. It is

a little used rag that is Under, it is not,

it is not my Father gone down.

About my Mother. My Mother
was this loud laugher
below the sunshine, below the starlight at festival.
My Mother is still this loud laugher!
Still moving straight in the Getting-It-Done (as she names it.)
Oh a strong eye is my Mother.
Except when it seems we are lax in our looking.

Well, enough of slump, enough of Old Story.
Like a clean spear of fire
I am moving. I am not still. I am ready
to be ready.
I shall flail
in the Hot Time.

Tonight I walk with
a hundred of playmates to where
the hurt Black of our skin is forbidden.
There, in the dark that is our dark, there,
a-pulse across earth that is our earth, there,
there exulting, there Exactly, there redeeming, there Roaring Up
(oh my Father)
we shall forge with the Fist-and-the-Fury:
we shall
we shall

Infirm

Everybody here is infirm.

Everybody here is infirm.

Oh. Mend me. Mend me. Lord.

Today I
say to them
say to them
say to them, Lord:
look! I am beautiful, beautiful with
my wing that is wounded
my eye that is bonded
or my ear not funded
or my walk all a-wobble.
I'm enough to be beautiful.

You are beautiful too.

CHILDREN COMING HOME | 1991

The Coora Flower

Tinsel Marie

Today I learned the *coora* flower grows high in the mountains of Itty-go-luba Bésa. Province Meechee.

Pop. 39.

Now I am coming home.

This, at least, is Real, and what I know.

It was restful, learning nothing necessary.

School is tiny vacation. At least you can sleep.

At least you can think of love or feeling your boy friend against you (which is not free from grief.)

But now it's Real Business. I am Coming Home.

My mother will be screaming in an almost dirty dress. The crack is gone. So a Man will be in the house. I must watch myself.
I must not dare to sleep.

Nineteen Cows in a Slow Line Walking

Jamal

When I was five years old I was on a train.
From a train window I saw nineteen cows in a slow line walking.

Each cow was behind a friend. Except for the first cow, who was God. I smiled until one cow near the end jumped in front of a friend. That reminded me of my mother and of my father. It spelled what is their Together.





I Am A Black

Kojo

According to my Teachers, I am now an African-American.

Uncle Seagram

Merle

They call me out of my name. My uncle likes me too much.

BLACK is an open umbrella. I am five and a half years old, and in kindergarten. I am Black and A Black forever. In kindergarten everything is clean. I am one of The Blacks. My uncle is six feet tall with seven bumps on his chin. My uncle is six feet tall, and he stumbles. He stumbles because of his Wonderful Medicine packed in his pocket all times. We are Here, we are There. Family is ma and pa and my uncle, We occur in Brazil, in Nigeria, Ghana, three brothers, three sisters, and me in Botswana, Tanzania, in Kenya, in Russia, Australia, in Haiti, Soweto, in Grenada, in Cuba, in Panama, Libya, in England and Italy, France.

We are graces in any places.

Every night at my house we play checkers and dominoes.

Tam Black and A Black

My uncle sits *close*. forever.

There aren't any shoes or socks on his feet.

Under the table a big toe tickles my ankle.

Under the oilcloth his thin knee beats into mine.

And mashes. And mashes.

I am other than Hyphenation.
When we look at TV
my uncle picks *me* to sit on his lap.
As I sit, he gets hard in the middle.
I squirm, but he keeps me, and kisses my ear.

I say, proudly, MY PEOPLE! I am not even a girl I say, proudly, OUR PEOPLE! Our People do not disdain to eat yams or melons or grits Once, when I went to the bathroom, or to put peanut butter in stew. my uncle noticed, came in, shut the door, put his long white tongue in my ear, and whispered "We're Best Friends, and Family, and we know how to keep Secrets."

I am Kojo. In West Afrika Kojo My uncle likes me too much. I am worried. means Unconquerable. My parents named me the seventh day from my birth in Black spirit, Black faith, Black communion. I am Kojo. I am A Black. And I Capitalize my name. Do not call me out of my name. I do not like my uncle anymore.

Abruptly

Buchanan

God is a gorilla.

I see him standing in the sky. He is clouds. There's a beard that is white and light gray. His arms are gorilla arms, limp at his sides; his fists not easy but not angry.

I tell my friend.

Pointing, I tell my friend

"God is a gorilla. Look!

There!"

My friend says "It is a crime to call God a gorilla. You have insulted our God."

I answer:
"Gorilla is majesty.
Other gorillas
know."

An Old Black Woman, Homeless, and Indistinct

1.

Your every day is a pilgrimage.

A blue hubbub.

Your days are collected bacchanals of fear and selftroubling.

And your nights! Your nights.

When you put you down in alley or cardboard or viaduct, your lovers are rats, finding your secret places.

When you rise in another morning, That's her story, you hit the street, your incessant enemy. You're going to vanish, not necessarily nicely, fairly soon, Although essentially dignity itself a death is not necessarily tidy, modest or discreet. When they find you your legs may not be tidy nor aligned.

Your mouth may be all crooked or destroyed.

See? Here you are, in the so-busy world.
Black old woman, homeless, indistinct—
You walk. You walk.
You pass The People.
No. Folks used to celebrate your birthday!
Folks used to say "She's such a pretty little thing!"
Folks used to say "She draws such handsome horses, cows and houses,"
Folks used to say "That child is going far."

September, 1992.

Here's a Rich Girl marching briskly to her charms.

She is suede and scarf and belting and perfume.

She sees you not, she sees you very well.

At five in the afternoon Miss Rich Girl will go Home to brooms and vacuum cleaner and carpeting, two cats, two marble-top tables, two telephones, shiny green peppers, flowers in impudent vases, visitors. Before all that there's luncheon to be known.

Lasagna, lobster salad, sandwiches.

All day there's coffee to be loved.

There are luxuries of Plan.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE NOTE ON THE TEXTS NOTES INDEX OF TITLES & FIRST LINES

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas, on June 7, 1917. She was raised in Chicago, where her parents—Keziah Corinne Wims Brooks, a teacher, and David Anderson Brooks, a janitor—had moved while she was an infant. She graduated from Englewood High School in 1934, and from Wilson Junior College, where she majored in English literature, in 1936. While pursuing her studies, she became a regular contributor of poetry and prose to "Lights and Shadows," a column in the weekly *Chicago Defender*. She hoped unsuccessfully to join the *Defender* staff as a reporter, working instead at a number of odd jobs and eventually as publicity director for the NAACP Youth Council. She married Henry L. Blakely, a writer, in 1939, and had a son, Henry, in 1940 (her daughter, Nora, was born in 1951). In the early 1940s, she began to publish poetry in national magazines such as Harper's, Poetry, and the Saturday Review of Literature; her first book, A Street in Bronzeville, appeared in 1945. She was awarded Guggenheim fellowships in 1946 and 1947. Her second collection of poetry, Annie Allen (1949), won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Her first and only novel, Maud Martha (1953), was followed by Bronzeville Girls and Boys (1956), The Bean Eaters (1960), and Selected Poems (1963). She began a career as a professor of poetry in 1963, at Columbia College in Chicago, and later taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the City College of New York, Northeastern Illinois University, and Chicago State University. In 1968, after the death of Carl Sandburg, she was named poet laureate of Illinois. Her later poetry collections include In the Mecca (1968), Riot (1969), Family Pictures (1970),

Beckonings (1975), Primer for Blacks (1980), The Near-Johannesburg Boy (1986), Gottschalk and the Grand Tarantelle (1988), and Children Coming Home (1991); she also edited a number of books, including Jump Bad: A New Chicago Anthology (1971), and wrote two volumes of autobiography: Report from Part One (1972) and Report from Part Two (1996). In 1985–86, she served as Consultant in Poetry, the unofficial poet laureate, at the Library of Congress; in 1995 she won the National Medal of Arts. She died of cancer on December 3, 2000, at her home in Chicago.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

The poems in this volume are presented in the order in which they first appeared in one of Gwendolyn Brooks's books; some had been published earlier in periodical form, and some were republished—without revision, generally—in one or more collections of her poetry. The texts have been taken from the first printings, listed below:

A Street in Bronzeville. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945.

Annie Allen. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.

The Bean Eaters. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.

Selected Poems. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

In the Mecca. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Riot. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1969.

Family Pictures. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1970.

Beckonings. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975.

Primer for Blacks. Chicago: Brooks Press, 1980.

The Near-Johannesburg Boy, and Other Poems. Chicago: The David Company, 1986.

Children Coming Home. Chicago: The David Company, 1991.

In Montgomery, and Other Poems. Chicago: Third World Press, 2003.

The texts of the original printings chosen for inclusion here are presented without change, except for the correction of typographical errors. Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are often expressive features and are not altered,

even when inconsistent or irregular. Two errors have been corrected: 10.16, inclination.); 108.26, Well—.

NOTES

- <u>16.10</u> *Dorie Miller*] Dorie Miller (1919-1943), who served as ship's cook, third class, on the battleship *West Virginia*, was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He was killed in the sinking of the escort carrier *Liscome Bay* in the Gilbert Islands.
- 35.5–7 "pygmies . . . Young] From Young's Night Thoughts (1742–46): "Pygmies are pygmies still, though percht on Alps; / And pyramids are pyramids in vales. / Each man makes his own stature, builds himself. / Virtue alone outbuilds the Pyramids; / Her monuments shall last when Egypt's fall."
- 68.2 Emmett Till] Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy from Chicago, was beaten and shot to death in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, on August 28, 1955, after he allegedly whistled at a white woman; the two white men charged with the crime were acquitted on September 23.
- 90.9 Dudley Randall] Poet (b. 1914) and founder of Broadside Press.
- <u>92.7</u> *Edward Christmas*] Chicago-based flutist and composer.
- 93.2 Phil Cohran] Chicago-based trumpeter and composer who played with the Sun Ra Arkestra in the late 1950s and was a founder of the AACM.
- 94.5 Blackstone Rangers] Chicago street gang founded in the early 1960s; it established branches in other cities and was later known variously as the Black P. Stone Nation and El Rukns.

- 97.4 RON KARENGA] Black nationalist organizer (b. 1941) who founded the group US in the 1960s.
- <u>98.2</u> *Walter Bradford*] Writer associated with the Chicago group Organization of Black American Culture, founded in 1967.
- "Que tu es grossier!"] "How crude you are!"
- <u>102.21–22</u> Melvin Van Peebles . . . Lillie . . . Zampoughi] "Lilly Done the Zampoughi Every Time I Pulled Her Coattail," song by Melvin Van Peebles from his theatrical work *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (1971).
- 103.6 Young-Holt Joung-Holt Unlimited, a Chicago-based instrumental group founded by members of the Ramsey Lewis Trio, had a number of hit records including "Wack Wack" (1967) and "Soulful Strut" (1968).
- 116.2 *Al Green*] Soul singer who enjoyed great success beginning in the early 1970s; his records included "I'm Still in Love with You" and "Let's Stay Together."
- 121.14 Farrah's hair] Farrah Fawcett (b. 1947), sometimes known as Farrah Fawcett-Majors, star of the television series *Charlie's Angels* in its first season, 1976–77, was known for her elaborate and widely imitated hairstyle.

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