

Mother to Son

(21)

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

1922, 1926

LANGSTON HUGHES

I, Too

(22)

I, too, sing America.  
 I am the darker brother.  
 They send me to eat in the kitchen  
 When company comes,  
 But I laugh,  
 And eat well,  
 And grow strong.  
 Tomorrow,  
 I'll be at the table  
 When company comes.  
 Nobody'll dare  
 Say to me,  
 "Eat in the kitchen,"  
 Then.  
 Besides,  
 They'll see how beautiful I am  
 And be ashamed—  
 I, too, am America.

1925, 1959

The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
 I heard a Negro play.  
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
 He did a lazy sway. . . .  
 He did a lazy sway. . . .  
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key.  
 He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
 O Blues!  
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
 He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
 Sweet Blues!  
 Coming from a black man's soul.  
 O Blues!  
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—  
 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
 Ain't got nobody but ma self.  
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
 And put ma troubles on de shelf."  
 Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
 He played a few chords then he sang some more—  
 "I got de Weary Blues  
 And I can't be satisfied.  
 Got de Weary Blues  
 And can't be satisfied—  
 I ain't happy no mo'  
 And I wish that I had died."  
 And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
 The stars went out and so did the moon.  
 The singer stopped playing and went to bed,  
 While the Weary Blues echoes through his head  
 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

1925

Mulatto

*I am your son, white man!*  
 Georgia dusk  
 And the turpentine woods.  
 One of the pillars of the temple fell.

*You are my son!  
 Like hell!*

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