Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

I, Too

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

Tomorrow,
I'll 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.

As I Grew Older

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun--
My dream.
And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky--
The wall.
Shadow.
I am black.
I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.
My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night
And I love the rain.

Justice

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

Juke Box Love Song

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

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

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

Oppression

Now dreams
Are not available
To the dreamers,
Nor songs
To the singers.

In some lands
Dark night
And cold steel
Prevail
But the dream
Will come back,
And the song
Break
Its jail.

The Dream Keeper

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

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.

But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

My People

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

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

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

Quiet Girl

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

Been scared and battered.  
My hopes the wind done scattered.  
Snow has friz me,  
Sun has baked me,  

Looks like between 'em they done  
Tried to make me  

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'--  
But I don't care!  
I'm still here!

**Democracy**

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

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

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

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.  

I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.

**The Weary Blues**

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

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more--  
"I got the Weary Blues  
And I can't be satisfied.  
Got the Weary Blues  
And can't be satisfied--  
I ain't happy no mo'  
And I wish that I had died."  
And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.  

**Walkers with the Dawn**

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

Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be. Let it be the pioneer on the plain Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed -- Let it be that great strong land of love Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme That any man may be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath, But opportunity is real, and life is free, Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me, Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free." )

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark? And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart, I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. I am the red man driven from the land, I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek-- And finding only the same old stupid plan Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope, Tangled in that ancient endless chain Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land! Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need! Of work the men! Of take the pay! Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil. I am the worker sold to the machine. I am the Negro, servant to you all. I am the people, humble, hungry, mean-- Hungry yet today despite the dream. Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers! I am the man who never got ahead, The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream In the Old World while still a serf of kings, Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true, That even yet its mighty daring sings In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned That's made America the land it has become. O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas In search of what I meant to be my home-- For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore, And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea, And torn from Black Africa's strand I came To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me? Surely not me? The millions on relief today? The millions shot down when we strike? The millions who have nothing for our pay? For all the dreams we've dreamed And all the songs we've sung And all the hopes we've held And all the flags we've hung, The millions who have nothing for our pay-- Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again-- The land that never has been yet-- And yet must be--the land where every man is free. The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME-- Who made America, Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain, Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain, Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose-- The steel of freedom does not stain. From those who live like leeches on the people's lives, We must take back our land again, America!

O, yes, I say it plain, America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath-- America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death, The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies, We, the people, must redeem The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers. The mountains and the endless plain-- All, all the stretch of these great green states-- And make America again!