Song for a Dark Girl

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

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

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

The South

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
For a Negro’s bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Passionate, cruel,
Honey-lipped, syphilitic--
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North--
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.

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 sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed,--
I, too, am America.

Question [1]

When the old junk man Death
Comes to gather up our bodies
And toss them into the sack of oblivion,
I wonder if he will find
The corpse of a white multi-millionaire
Worth more pennies of eternity,
Than the black torso of
A Negro cotton-picker.
Poem to a Dead Soldier

“Death is a whore who consorts with all men.”

Ice-cold passion
And a bitter breath
Adorned the bed
Of the youth and Death-
Youth, the young soldier
Who went to the wars
And embraced white Death,
the vilest of whores.

Now we spread roses
Over your tomb-
We who sent you
To your doom.
Now we make soft speeches
And sob soft cries
And through soft flowers
And utter soft lies.

We would mould you in metal
And carve you in stone,
Not daring to make statue
Of your dead flesh and bone,
Not daring to mention
The bitter breath
Nor the ice-cold passion
Of your love-night with Death.

We make soft speeches
We sob soft cries
We throw soft flowers,
And utter soft lies.
And you who were young
When you went to the wars
Have lost your youth now
With the vilest of whores.

Cross
My old man’s a white old man
And my old mother’s black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.
If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I’m sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well
My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder were I’m going to die,
Being neither white nor black?

A Christian Country
God slumbers in a back alley
With a gin bottle in His hand.
Come on, God, get up and fight
Like a man.

Merry-Go-Round (Colored child at carnival)
Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can’t sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There’s a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we’re put in the back-
But there ain’t no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where’s the horse
For a kid that’s black?

The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)

EVERYBODY
Half-pint,-  
Gin?
No, make it
LOVES MY BABY
corn. You like
liquor,
don’t you, honey?
BUT MY BABY
Sure. Kiss me,
DON’T LOVE NOBODY
daddy.
BUT ME.
Say!
EVERYBODY
Yes?
WANTS MY BABY
I’m your
BUT MY BABY
sweetie, ain’t I?
DON’T WANT NOBODY
Sure.
BUT
Then let’s
ME
do it!
SWEET ME.
Charleston,
mamma!
!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Lyrics</th>
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| **Listen Here Blues** | Sweet girls, sweet girls,  
Listen here to me.  
All you sweet girls,  
Listen here to me:  
Gin an’ whiskey  
Kin make you lose yo’ ‘ginity.  
I used to be a good chile,  
Lawd, in Sunday School.  
Used to be a good chile,-  
Always in Sunday School,  
Till these licker-headed rounders  
Made me everybody’s fool.  
Good girls, good girls,  
Listen here to me.  
Oh, you good girls,  
Better listen to me:  
Don’t you fool wid no men cause  
They’ll bring you misery. |
| **Wide River**   | My baby lives across de river  
An’ I ain’t got no boat.  
She lives across de river.  
I ain’t got no boat.  
I ain’t a good swimmer  
An’ I don’t know how to float.  
Wide, wide river  
‘Twixt ma love an’ me.  
Wide, wide river  
‘Twixt ma love an’ me.  
I never knewed how  
Wide a river can be.  
Got to cross that river  
An’ git to ma baby somehow.  
Cross that river,  
Git to ma baby somehow-  
Cause if I don’t see ma baby  
I’ll lay down an’ die right now. |
| **Morning After** | I was so sick last night I  
Didn’t hardly know my mind.  
So sick last night I  
Didn’t know my mind.  
I drunk some bad licker that  
Almost made me blind.  
Had a dream last night I  
Thought I was in hell.  
I drempt last night I  
Thought I was in hell.  
Woke up and looked around me—  
Babe, your mouth was open like a well.  
I said, Baby! Baby!  
Please don’t snore so loud.  
Baby! Please!  
Please don’t snore so loud.  
You jest a little bit o’ woman but you  
Sound like a great big crowd. |
Ballad of the Man Who’s Gone

No money to bury him. 
The relief gave Forty-Four. 
The undertaker told ‘em, 
You’ll need Sixty more

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

His wife took a paper 
And went around. 
Everybody that gave something 
She put ‘em down.

She raked up a Hundred 
For her man that was dead. 
His buddies bought flowers. 
A funeral was had.

A minister preached-
And charged Five 
To bless him dead 
And praise him alive.

Now that he’s buried-
God rest his soul-
Reckon there’s no charge 
For graveyard mold.

* I wonder what makes 
A funeral so high? 
A poor man ain’t got 
No business to die!

50-50

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

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

She answered, Babe, what must I do? 
He said, Share your bed- 
* And your money, too. *

Third Degree

Hit me! Jab me! 
Make me say I did it. 
Blood on my sport shirt 
And my tan suede shoes.

Faces like jack-o’-lanterns 
In gray slouch hats.

Slug me! Beat me! 
Scream jumps out 
Like blowtorch. 
Three kicks between the legs 
That kill the kids 
I’d make tomorrow.

Bars and floor skyrocket 
And burst like Roman candles.

When you throw 
Cold water on me, 
I’ll sign the 
Paper...

Still Here

I’ve 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!