**“The Negro Mother” by Langston Hughes**

Children, I come back today

To tell you a story of the long dark way That I had to climb, that I had to know

In order that the race might live and grow. Look at my face—dark as the night—

Yet shining like the sun with love's true light. I am the child they stole from the sand Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.

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

I am the woman who worked in the field Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield. I am the one who labored as a slave,

Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave— Children sold away from me, husband sold, too. No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South:

But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth. God put a dream like steel in my soul.

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

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

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

I had nothing, back there in the night. Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,

But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.

Sometimes, the road was hot with sun,

But I had to keep on till my work was done: I *had* to keep on! No stopping for me—

I was the seed of the coming Free.

I nourished the dream that nothing could smother

Deep in my breast—the Negro mother.

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

Remember my years, heavy with sorrow—

And make of those years a torch for tomorrow. Make of my past a road to the light

Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night. Lift high my banner out of the dust.

Stand like free men supporting my trust. Believe in the right, let none push you back. Remember the whip and the slaver's track.

Remember how the strong in struggle and strife

Still bar you the way, and deny you life—

But march ever forward, breaking down bars. Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.

Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers

Impel you forever up the great stairs— For I will be with you till no white brother

Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.

~Langston Hughes

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