

THRENODY FOR A BROWN GIRL<sup>1</sup>

Weep not, you who love her;  
What rebellious flow  
Grief undams shall recover  
Whom the gods bid go?  
Sorrow rising like a wall,  
Bitter, blasphemous,  
What avails it to recall  
Beauty back to us?

Think not this grave shall keep her,  
This marriage-bed confine;  
Death may dig it deep and deeper;  
She shall climb it like a vine.  
Body that was quick and sentient,  
Dear as thought or speech,  
Death could not with one trenchant  
Blow snatch out of reach.

She is nearer than the word  
Wasted on her now,  
Nearer than the swaying bird  
On its rhythmic bough.  
Only were our faith as much  
As a mustard seed,  
Aching, hungry hands might touch  
Her as they touch a reed.

Life who was not loth to trade her  
Unto death, has done  
Better than he planned, has made her  
Wise as Solomon.  
Now she knows the Why and Wherefore,  
Troublous Whence and Whither,  
Why men strive and sweat, and care for  
Bays that droop and wither.

All the stars she knows by name,  
End and origin thereof,  
Knows if love be kin to shame,  
If shame be less than love.  
What was crooked now is straight,  
What was rough is plain;  
Grief and sorrow have no weight  
Now to cause her pain.

Plain to her why fevered blisters  
Made her dark hands run,  
While her favored, fairer sisters  
Neither wrought nor spun;  
Clear to her the hidden reason  
Men daily fret and toil,  
Staving death off for a season  
Till soil return to soil.

One to her are flame and frost;  
Silence is her singing lark;  
We alone are children, lost,  
Crying in the dark.  
Varied feature now, and form,  
Change has bred upon her;  
Crush no bug nor nauseous worm  
Lest you tread upon her.

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<sup>1</sup>A threnody is a lamentation or dirge.

Pluck no flower lest she scream;  
Bruise no slender reed,  
Lest it prove more than it seem,  
Lest she groan and bleed.  
More than ever trust your brother,  
Read him golden, pure;  
It may be she finds no other  
House so safe and sure.

Set no poet carving  
Rhymes to make her laugh;  
Only live hearts starving  
Need an epitaph.  
Lay upon her no white stone  
From a foreign quarry;  
Earth and sky be these alone  
Her obituary.

Swift as startled fawn or swallow,  
Silence all her sound,  
She has fled; we cannot follow  
Further than this mound.  
We who take the beaten track  
Trying to appease  
Hearts near breaking with their lack,  
We need elegies.