

# Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

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?*

# Where Have You Gone

By Mari Evans

Where have you gone  
with your confident walk  
with your crooked smile  
why did you leave me  
when you took your laughter  
and departed are you aware  
that with you went the sun  
all light and what few stars there were?  
Where have you gone  
with your confident walk  
your crooked smile  
the rent money in one pocket  
and my heart in another...

# *This Is a Photograph of Me*

**By Margaret Atwood**

*It was taken some time ago.  
At first it seems to be  
a smeared  
print: blurred lines and grey flecks  
blended with the paper;*

*then, as you scan  
it, you see in the left-hand corner  
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree  
(balsam or spruce) emerging  
and, to the right, halfway up  
what ought to be a gentle  
slope, a small frame house.*

*In the background there is a lake,  
and beyond that, some low hills.*

*(The photograph was taken  
the day after I drowned.*

*I am in the lake, in the center  
of the picture, just under the surface.*

*It is difficult to say where  
precisely, or to say  
how large or small I am:  
the effect of water  
on light is a distortion*

*but if you look long enough,  
eventually  
you will be able to see me.)*

# Beethoven

By Shane Koyczan

Listen

his father

made a habit

out of hitting him

see

some men drink

some men yell

some men hit their children

this man

did it all

because I guess all men

want their boys

to be geniuses

Beethoven

little boy

living in a house

where a name meant nothing

living in a house

where mercy had to be earned

through each perfect note

tumbling up through the roof

to tickle the toes of angels

whose harps

couldn't hold half the passion

that was held in the hands

of a young boy

who was hard of hearing

Beethoven

who heard

his father's anthem

every time he put finger

to ivory

it was not good enough

so he played slowly

not good enough

so he played softly

not good enough

so he played strongly

and when he could play no more

when his fingers cramped up

into the gnarled roots of tree trunks

it was

not good enough

Beethoven

a musician

without his most precious tool

his eardrums

could no longer pound out rhythms

for the symphonies playing in his mind

he couldn't hear the audiences clapping

couldn't hear the people loving him

couldn't hear the women in the front row

whispering

Beethoven

as they let the music

invade their nervous system

like an armada marching through

firing cannonballs

detonating every molecule in their bodies

into explosions of heavenly sensation

each note

leaving track marks

over every inch of their bodies

making them ache

for one more hit

he was an addiction

and kings/queens

it didn't matter

the man got down on his knees

for no one

but amputated the legs of his piano

so he could feel the vibrations

through the floor

the man got down on his knees

for music

and when the orchestra played his

symphonies

it was the echoes of his father's anthem

repeating itself

like a brok-broken recor-brok-broken record

it was

not good enough

so they played slowly

not good enough

so they played softly

not good enough

so they played strongly

not good enough

so they tried to mock the man

make fun of the madness

by mimicking the movements

holding their bows

a quarter of an inch above the strings

not making a sound

it was

perfect

see  
the deaf have an intimacy with silence  
it's there in their dreams  
and the musicians turned to one another  
not knowing what to make of the man  
trying to calculate  
the distance between madness and genius  
realizing that Beethoven's musical  
measurements  
could take you to distances  
reaching past the towers of Babylon  
turning solar systems into symbols  
that crashed together  
causing comets to collide  
creating crescendos that were so loud  
they shook the constellations  
until the stars began to fall from the sky  
and it looked like the  
entire universe  
had begun to cry  
distance must be an illusion  
the man must be

a genius  
Beethoven  
his thoughts moving at  
the speed of sound  
transforming emotion into music  
and for a moment  
it was like joy  
was a tangible thing  
like you could touch it  
like for the first time  
we could watch love and  
hate dance together  
in a waltz of such precision and beauty  
that we finally understood  
the history wasn't important  
to know the man  
all we ever had to do was

Listen.

# And the Ghosts

By Graham Froust

they own everything

# *Your Laughter*

*By Pablo Naruda*

*Take bread away from me, if you wish,  
take air away, but  
do not take from me your laughter.*

*Do not take away the rose,  
the lance flower that you pluck,  
the water that suddenly  
bursts forth in joy,  
the sudden wave  
of silver born in you.*

*My struggle is harsh and I come back  
with eyes tired  
at times from having seen  
the unchanging earth,  
but when your laughter enters  
it rises to the sky seeking me  
and it opens for me all  
the doors of life.*

*My love, in the darkest  
hour your laughter  
opens, and if suddenly  
you see my blood staining  
the stones of the street*

*laugh, because your laughter*

*will be for my hands  
like a fresh sword.*

*Next to the sea in the autumn,  
your laughter must raise  
its foamy cascade,  
and in the spring, love,  
I want your laughter like  
the flower I was waiting for,  
the blue flower, the rose  
of my echoing country.*

*Laugh at the night,  
at the day, at the moon,  
laugh at the twisted  
streets of the island,  
laugh at this clumsy  
boy who loves you,  
but when I open  
my eyes and close them,  
when my steps go,  
when my steps return,  
deny me bread, air,  
light, spring,  
but never your laughter  
for I would die.*

# *Nothing Gold Can Stay*

*By Robert Frost*

*Nature's first green is gold,*

*Her hardest hue to hold.*

*Her early leaf's a flower; But only so an hour.*

*Then leaf subsides to leaf,*

*So Eden sank to grief,*

*So dawn goes down to day*

*Nothing gold can stay.*

# *Caged Bird*

*By Maya Angelou*

*A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.*

*But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.*

*The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own*

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.*

# If

ee cummings

If freckles were lovely, and day was night,  
And measles were nice and a lie warn't a lie,  
Life would be delight,—  
But things couldn't go right  
For in such a sad plight  
I wouldn't be I.

If earth was heaven and now was hence,  
And past was present, and false was true,  
There might be some sense  
But I'd be in suspense  
For on such a pretense  
You wouldn't be you.

If fear was plucky, and globes were square,  
And dirt was cleanly and tears were glee  
Things would seem fair,—  
Yet they'd all despair,  
For if here was there  
We wouldn't be we.

# The Sun Never Says

By Hafiz

Even  
After  
All this time  
The sun never says to the earth,

"You owe  
Me."

Look  
What happens  
With a love like that,  
It lights the  
Whole Sky.

i don't know what living a balanced life feels like  
when i am sad  
i don't cry, i pour  
when i am happy  
i don't smile, i beam  
when i am angry  
i don't yell, i burn  
the good thing about  
feeling in extremes  
is when i love  
i give them wings  
but perhaps  
that isn't  
such a good thing  
cause they always  
tend to leave and  
you should see me  
when my heart is broken  
i don't grieve  
i shatter.

– *rupi kaur*