

people filling the cabarets and taverns and other people's pockets needing bread and shoes and milk and land and money and something—something all our own;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied and shackled and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in the dark of churches and schools and clubs and societies, associations and councils and committees and conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches, preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by false prophet and holy believer;

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding, trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people, all the faces, all the adams and eves and their countless generations;

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control.

## DARK BLOOD

There were bizarre beginnings in old lands for the making of me. There were sugar sands and islands of fern and pearl, palm jungles and stretches of a never-ending sea.

There were the wooing nights of tropical lands and the cool discretion of flowering plains between two stalwart hills. They nurtured my coming with wanderlust. I sucked fevers of adventure through my veins with my mother's milk.

Someday I shall go to the tropical lands of my birth, to the coasts of continents and the tiny wharves of island shores. I shall roam the Balkans and the hot lanes of Africa and Asia. I shall stand on mountain tops and gaze on fertile homes below.

And when I return to Mobile I shall go by the way of Panama and Bocas del Toro to the littered streets and the one-room shacks of my old poverty, and blazing suns of other lands may struggle then to reconcile the pride and pain in me.

## SOUTHERN SONG

I want my body bathed again by southern suns, my soul reclaimed again from southern land. I want to rest again in southern fields, in grass and hay and clover bloom; to lay my hand again upon the clay baked by a southern sun, to touch the rain-soaked earth and smell the smell of soil.

I want my rest unbroken in the fields of southern earth; freedom to watch the corn wave silver in the sun and mark the splashing of a brook, a pond with ducks and frogs and count the clouds.

I want no mobs to wrench me from my southern rest; no forms to take me in the night and burn my shack and make for me a nightmare full of oil and flame.

I want my careless song to strike no minor key; no fiend to stand between my body's southern song—the fusion of the South, my body's song and me.

## SORROW HOME

My roots are deep in southern life; deeper than John Brown or Nat Turner or Robert Lee. I was sired and weaned in a tropic world. The palm tree and banana leaf, mango and cocoanut, breadfruit and rubber trees know me.

Warm skies and gulf blue streams are in my blood. I belong with the smell of fresh pine, with the trail of coon, and the spring growth of wild onion.

I am no hot-house bulb to be reared in steam-heated flats with the music of "L" and subway in my ears, walled in by steel and wood and brick far from the sky.

I want the cotton fields, tobacco and the cane. I want to walk along with sacks of seed to drop in fallow ground. Restless music is in my heart and I am eager to be gone.

O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and blood! How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds and the chain gangs keep me from my own?

## DELTA

### I

I am a child of the valley.  
Mud and muck and misery of lowlands  
are on thin tracks of my feet.  
Damp draughts of mist and fog hovering over valleys  
are on my feverish breath.  
Red clay from feet of beasts colors my mouth  
and there is blood on my tongue.

I go up and down and through this valley  
and my heart bleeds with my blood here in the valley.  
My heart bleeds for our fate.  
I turn to each stick and stone, marking them for my own;  
here where muddy water flows at our shanty door  
and levees stand like a swollen bump on our backyard.

I watch rivulets flow  
trickling into one great river  
running through little towns  
through swampy thickets and smoky cities  
through fields of rice and marshes  
where the marsh hen comes to stand  
and buzzards draw thin blue streaks against evening sky.  
I listen to crooning of familiar lullabies;  
the honky-tonks are open and the blues are ringing far.  
In cities a thousand red lamps glow,  
but the lights fail to stir me  
and the music cannot lift me  
and my despair only deepens with the wailing  
of a million voices strong.

O valley of my moaning brothers!  
Valley of my sorrowing sisters!  
Valley of lost forgotten men.

O hunted desperate people  
stricken and silently submissive  
seeking yet sullen ones!  
If only from this valley we might rise with song!  
With singing that is ours.

### II

Here in this valley of cotton and cane and banana wharves  
we labor.  
Our mothers and fathers labored before us  
here in this low valley.

High above us and round about us stand high mountains  
rise the towering snow-capped mountains  
while we are beaten and broken and bowed  
here in this dark valley.

The river passes us by.  
Boats slip by on the edge of horizons.  
Daily we fill boats with cargoes of our need  
and send them out to sea.

Orange and plantain and cotton grow  
here in this wide valley.  
Wood fern and sour grass and wild onion grow  
here in this sweet valley.

We tend the crop and gather the harvest  
but not for ourselves do we labor,  
not for ourselves do we sweat and starve and spend  
under these mountains we dare not claim,  
here on this earth we dare not claim,  
here by this river we dare not claim.  
Yet we are an age of years in this valley;  
yet we are bound till death to this valley.

Nights in the valley are full of haunting murmurings  
of our musical prayers  
of our rhythmical loving  
of our fumbling thinking aloud.  
Nights in the houses of our miserable poor  
are wakeful and tormenting,  
for out of a deep slumber we are 'roused  
to our brother who is ill  
and our sister who is ravished  
and our mother who is starving.  
Out of a deep slumber truth rides upon us  
and we wonder why we are helpless  
and we wonder why we are dumb.  
Out of a deep slumber truth rides upon us  
and makes us restless and wakeful  
and full of a hundred unfulfilled dreams of today;  
our blood eats through our veins with the terrible destruction  
of radium in our bones and rebellion in our brains  
and we wish no longer to rest.

### III

Now burst the dams of years  
and winter snows melt with an onrush of a turbulent spring.  
Now rises sap in slumbering elms  
and floods overwhelm us  
here in this low valley.  
Here there is a thundering sound in our ears.  
All the day we are disturbed;  
nothing ever moved our valley more.  
The cannons boom in our brains  
and there is a dawning understanding  
in the valleys of our spirits;  
there is a crystalline hope  
there is a new way to be worn and a path to be broken  
from the past.

Into our troubled living flows the valley  
flooding our lives with a passion for freedom.  
Our silence is broken in twain  
even as brush is broken before terrible rain  
even as pines rush in paths of hurricanes.  
Our blood rises and bursts in great heart spasms  
hungering down through valleys in pain  
and the storm begins.  
We are dazed in wonder and caught in the downpour.  
Danger and death stalk the valley.  
Robbers and murderers rape the valley  
taking cabins and children from us  
killing wives and sweethearts before us  
seeking to threaten us out of this valley.

Then with a longing dearer than breathing  
love for the valley arises within us  
love to possess and thrive in this valley  
love to possess our vineyards and pastures  
our orchards and cattle  
our harvest of cotton, tobacco, and cane.  
Love overwhelms our living with longing  
strengthening flesh and blood within us  
banding the iron of our muscles with anger  
making us men in the fields we have tended  
standing defending the land we have rendered  
rich and abiding and heavy with plenty.

We with our blood have watered these fields  
and they belong to us.  
Valleys and dust of our bodies are blood brothers  
and they belong to us:  
the long golden grain for bread  
and the ripe purple fruit for wine  
the hills beyond for peace  
and the grass beneath for rest

the music in the wind for us  
the nights for loving  
the days for living  
and the circling lines in the sky  
for dreams.

We are like the sensitive Spring  
walking valleys like a slim young girl  
full breasted and precious limbed  
and carrying on our lips the kiss of the world.  
Only the naked arm of Time  
can measure the ground we know  
and thresh the air we breathe.  
Neither earth nor star nor water's host  
can sever us from our life to be  
for we are beyond your reach O mighty winnowing flail!  
infinite and free!

## *LINEAGE*

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?