

# “IONE”

BY

**PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR**

Ah, yes, ‘t is sweet still to remember,  
Though ‘twere less painful to forget;  
For while my heart glows like an ember,  
Mine eyes with sorrow’s drops are wet,  
And, oh, my heart is aching yet.

It is a law of mortal pain  
That old wounds, long accounted well,  
Beneath the memory’s potent spell,  
Will wake to life and bleed again.

So ‘t is with me; it might be better  
If I should turn no look behind,—  
If I could curb my heart, and fetter  
From reminiscent gaze my mind,  
Or let my soul go blind—go blind!  
But would I do it if I could?  
Nay! ease at such a price were spurned;  
For, since my love was once returned,  
All that I suffer seemeth good.

I know, I know it is the fashion,  
When love has left some heart distressed,  
To weight the air with wordful passion;  
But I am glad that in my breast  
I ever held so dear a guest.  
Love does not come at every nod,  
Or every voice that calleth "hasten;"  
He seeketh out some heart to chasten,  
And whips it, wailing, up to God!

Love is no random road wayfarer  
Who where he may must sip his glass.  
Love is the King, the Purple–Wearer,  
Whose guard recks not of tree or grass  
To blaze the way that he may pass.  
What if my heart be in the blast  
That heralds his triumphant way;  
Shall I repine, shall I not say:  
"Rejoice, my heart, the King has passed!"

In life, each heart holds some sad story—  
The saddest ones are never told.  
I, too, have dreamed of fame and glory,

And viewed the future bright with gold;  
    But that is as a tale long told.  
Mine eyes have lost their youthful flash,  
    My cunning hand has lost its art;  
    I am not old, but in my heart  
    The ember lies beneath the ash.

I loved! Why not? My heart was youthful,  
My mind was filled with healthy thought.  
He doubts not whose own self is truthful,  
    Doubt by dishonesty is taught;  
    So loved I boldly, fearing naught.  
    I did not walk this lowly earth;  
    Mine was a newer, higher sphere,  
Where youth was long and life was dear,  
    And all save love was little worth.

Her likeness! Would that I might limn it,  
    As Love did, with enduring art;  
Nor dust of days nor death may dim it,  
    Where it lies graven on my heart,  
    Of this sad fabric of my life a part.  
I would that I might paint her now  
    As I beheld her in that day,

Ere her first bloom had passed away,  
And left the lines upon her brow.

A face serene that, beaming brightly,  
Disarmed the hot sun's glances bold.  
A foot that kissed the ground so lightly,  
He frowned in wrath and deemed her cold,  
But loved her still though he was old.  
A form where every maiden grace  
Bloomed to perfection's richest flower,—  
The statted pose of conscious power,  
Like lithe-limbed Dian's of the chase.

Beneath a brow too fair for frowning,  
Like moon-lit deeps that glass the skies  
Till all the hosts above seem drowning,  
Looked forth her steadfast hazel eyes,  
With gaze serene and purely wise.  
And over all, her tresses rare,  
Which, when, with his desire grown weak,  
The Night bent down to kiss her cheek,  
Entrapped and held him captive there.

This was Ione; a spirit finer  
Ne'er burned to ash its house of clay;  
A soul instinct with fire diviner  
Ne'er fled athwart the face of day,  
And tempted Time with earthly stay.  
Her loveliness was not alone  
Of face and form and tresses' hue:  
For aye a pure, high soul shone through  
Her every act: this was Ione.

## II

'T was in the radiant summer weather,  
When God looked, smiling, from the sky;  
And we went wand'ring much together  
By wood and lane, Ione and I,  
Attracted by the subtle tie  
Of common thoughts and common tastes,  
Of eyes whose vision saw the same,  
And freely granted beauty's claim  
Where others found but worthless wastes.

We paused to hear the far bells ringing  
Across the distance, sweet and clear.  
We listened to the wild bird's singing  
The song he meant for his mate's ear,  
And deemed our chance to do so dear.  
We loved to watch the warrior Sun,  
With flaming shield and flaunting crest,  
Go striding down the gory West,  
When Day's long fight was fought and won.

And life became a different story;  
Where'er I looked, I saw new light.  
Earth's self assumed a greater glory,  
Mine eyes were cleared to fuller sight.  
Then first I saw the need and might  
Of that fair band, the singing throng,  
Who, gifted with the skill divine,  
Take up the threads of life, spun fine,  
And weave them into soulful song.

They sung for me, whose passion pressing  
My soul, found vent in song nor line.  
They bore the burden of expressing  
All that I felt, with art's design,  
And every word of theirs was mine.

I read them to Ione, ofttimes,  
By hill and shore, beneath fair skies,  
And she looked deeply in mine eyes,  
And knew my love spoke through their rhymes.

Her life was like the stream that floweth,  
And mine was like the waiting sea;  
Her love was like the flower that bloweth,  
And mine was like the searching bee—  
I found her sweetness all for me.  
God plied him in the mint of time,  
And coined for us a golden day,  
And rolled it ringing down life's way  
With love's sweet music in its chime.

And God unclasped the Book of Ages,  
And laid it open to our sight;  
Upon the dimness of its pages,  
So long consigned to rayless night,  
He shed the glory of his light.  
We read them well, we read them long,  
And ever thrilling did we see  
That love ruled all humanity,—  
The master passion, pure and strong.

### III

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### III

To-day my skies are bare and ashen,  
And bend on me without a beam.  
Since love is held the master-passion,

Its loss must be the pain supreme —  
And grinning Fate has wrecked my dream.  
But pardon, dear departed Guest,  
I will not rant, I will not rail;  
For good the grain must feel the flail;  
There are whom love has never blessed.

I had and have a younger brother,  
One whom I loved and love to-day  
As never fond and doting mother  
Adored the babe who found its way  
From heavenly scenes into her day.  
Oh, he was full of youth's new wine,—  
A man on life's ascending slope,  
Flushed with ambition, full of hope;  
And every wish of his was mine.

A kingly youth; the way before him  
Was thronged with victories to be won;  
So joyous, too, the heavens o'er him  
Were bright with an unchanging sun,—  
His days with rhyme were overrun.  
Toil had not taught him Nature's prose,  
Tears had not dimmed his brilliant eyes,

And sorrow had not made him wise;  
His life was in the budding rose.

I know not how I came to waken,  
Some instinct pricked my soul to sight;  
My heart by some vague thrill was shaken,—  
A thrill so true and yet so slight,  
I hardly deemed I read aright.  
As when a sleeper, ign'rant why,  
Not knowing what mysterious hand  
Has called him out of slumberland,  
Starts up to find some danger nigh.

Love is a guest that comes, unbidden,  
But, having come, asserts his right;  
He will not be repressed nor hidden.  
And so my brother's dawning plight  
Became uncovered to my sight.  
Some sound—mote in his passing tone  
Caught in the meshes of my ear;  
Some little glance, a shade too dear,  
Betrayed the love he bore Ione.

What could I do? He was my brother,  
And young, and full of hope and trust;  
I could not, dared not try to smother  
His flame, and turn his heart to dust.  
I knew how oft life gives a crust  
To starving men who cry for bread;  
But he was young, so few his days,  
He had not learned the great world's ways,  
Nor Disappointment's volumes read.

However fair and rich the booty,  
I could not make his loss my gain.  
For love is dear, but dearer duty,  
And here my way was clear and plain.  
I saw how I could save him pain.  
And so, with all my day grown dim,  
That this loved brother's sun might shine,  
I joined his suit, gave over mine,  
And sought Ione, to plead for him.

I found her in an eastern bower,  
Where all day long the am'rous sun  
Lay by to woo a timid flower.  
This day his course was well-nigh run,  
But still with lingering art he spun

Gold fancies on the shadowed wall.  
The vines waved soft and green above,  
And there where one might tell his love,  
I told my griefs—I told her all!

I told her all, and as she hearkened,  
A tear-drop fell upon her dress.  
With grief her flushing brow was darkened;  
One sob that she could not repress  
Betrayed the depths of her distress.  
Upon her grief my sorrow fed,  
And I was bowed with unlived years,  
My heart swelled with a sea of tears,  
The tears my manhood could not shed.

The world is Rome, and Fate is Nero,  
Disporting in the hour of doom.  
God made us men; times make the hero—  
But in that awful space of gloom  
I gave no thought but sorrow's room.  
All—all was dim within that bower,  
What time the sun divorced the day;  
And all the shadows, glooming gray,  
Proclaimed the sadness of the hour.

She could not speak—no word was needed;  
Her look, half strength and half despair,  
    Told me I had not vainly pleaded,  
That she would not ignore my prayer.  
And so she turned and left me there,  
And as she went, so passed my bliss;  
She loved me, I could not mistake—  
But for her own and my love's sake,  
Her womanhood could rise to this!

My wounded heart fled swift to cover,  
And life at times seemed very drear.  
My brother proved an ardent lover—  
    What had so young a man to fear?  
    He wed Ione within the year.  
No shadow clouds her tranquil brow,  
Men speak her husband's name with pride,  
While she sits honored at his side—  
    She is—she must be happy now!

I doubt the course I took no longer,  
    Since those I love seem satisfied.  
The bond between them will grow stronger

As they go forward side by side;  
Then will my pains be justified.  
Their joy is mine, and that is best—  
I am not totally bereft;  
For I have still the mem'ry left—  
Love stopped with me—a Royal Guest!