“The Lily of the Valley”

By

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Sweetest of the flowers a–blooming
In the fragrant vernal days
Is the Lily of the Valley
With its soft, retiring ways.

Well, you chose this humble blossom
As the nurse’s emblem flower,
Who grows more like her ideal
Every day and every hour.

Like the Lily of the Valley
In her honesty and worth,
Ah, she blooms in truth and virtue
In the quiet nooks of earth.
Tho’ she stands erect in honor
When the heart of mankind bleeds,
Still she hides her own deserving
In the beauty of her deeds.

In the silence of the darkness
Where no eye may see and know,
There her footsteps shod with mercy,
And fleet kindness come and go.

Not amid the sounds of plaudits,
Nor before the garish day,
Does she shed her soul’s sweet perfume,
Does she take her gentle way.

But alike her ideal flower,
With its honey–laden breath,
Still her heart blooms forth its beauty
In the valley shades of death.