

“ON THE SEA WALL”

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

I sit upon the old sea wall,
And watch the shimmering sea,
Where soft and white the moonbeams fall,
Till, in a fantasy,
Some pure white maiden's funeral pall
The strange light seems to me.

The waters break upon the shore
And shiver at my feet,
While I dream old dreams o'er and o'er,
And dim old scenes repeat;
Tho' all have dreamed the same before,
They still seem new and sweet.

The waves still sing the same old song
That knew an elder time;
The breakers' beat is not more strong,
Their music more sublime;

And poets thro' the ages long
Have set these notes to rhyme.

But this shall not deter my lyre,
Nor check my simple strain;
If I have not the old-time fire,
I know the ancient pain:
The hurt of unfulfilled desire,—
The ember quenched by rain.

I know the softly shining sea
That rolls this gentle swell
Has snarled and licked its tongues at me
And bared its fangs as well;
That 'neath its smile so heavenly,
There lurks the scowl of hell!

But what of that? I strike my string
(For songs in youth are sweet);
I 'll wait and hear the waters bring
Their loud resounding beat;
Then, in her own bold numbers sing
The Ocean's dear deceit!