

“THE MONK’S WALK”

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

In this sombre garden close
What has come and passed, who knows?
What red passion, what white pain
Haunted this dim walk in vain?

Underneath the ivied wall,
Where the silent shadows fall,
Lies the pathway chill and damp
Where the world–quit dreamers tramp.

Just across, where sunlight burns,
Smiling at the mourning ferns,
Stand the roses, side by side,
Nodding in their useless pride.

Ferns and roses, who shall say
What you witness day by day?

Covert smile or dropping eye,
As the monks go pacing by.

Has the novice come to-day
Here beneath the wall to pray?
Has the young monk, lately chidden,
Sung his lyric, sweet, forbidden?

Tell me, roses, did you note
That pale father's throbbing throat?
Did you hear him murmur, "Love!"
As he kissed a faded glove?

Mourning ferns, pray tell me why
Shook you with that passing sigh?
Is it that you chanced to spy
Something in the Abbot's eye?

Here no dream, nor thought of sin,
Where no worlding enters in;
Here no longing, no desire,
Heat nor flame of earthly fire.

Branches waving green above,
Whisper naught of life nor love;
Softened winds that seem a breath,
Perfumed, bring no fear of death.

Is it living thus to live?
Has life nothing more to give?
Ah, no more of smile or sigh—
Life, the world, and love, good-bye.

Gray, and passionless, and dim,
Echoing of the solemn hymn,
Lies the walk, 'twixt fern and rose,
Here within the garden close.