

MOTHER TO SON

Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor-
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now-
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

IT COULDN'T BE DONE

Edgar A. Guest

Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
But he with a chuckle replied
That maybe it couldn't, but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

Somebody scoffed: "Oh you'll never do that.
At least no one ever has done it";
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,
And the first thing we knew he'd done begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure;
There are thousands to point out to you, one by one,
The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

IF

Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

MYSELF

Edgar A. Guest

I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know,
I want to be able, as days go by,
Always to look myself straight in the eye;
I don't want to stand, with the setting sun,
And hate myself for things I have done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself
And fool myself, as I come and go,
Into thinking that nobody else will know
The kind of a man I really am;
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.

I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and self
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to look at myself and know
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.

I can never hide myself from me;
I see what others may never see;
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself, and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.

THE FOOL'S PRAYER

Edward Rowland Sill (1841-1887)

The royal feast was done; the King
Sought some new sport to banish care,
And to his jester cried: "Sir Fool,
Kneel now, and make for us a prayer!"

The jester doffed his cap and bells,
And stood the mocking court before;
They could not see the bitter smile
Behind the painted grin he wore.

He bowed his head, and bent his knee
Upon the Monarch's silken stool;
His pleading voice arose: "O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

"No pity, Lord, could change the heart
From red with wrong to white as wool;
The rod must heal the sin: but Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

"'Tis not by guilt the onward sweep
Of truth and right, O Lord, we stay;
'Tis by our follies that so long
We hold the earth from heaven away.

"These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
Go crushing blossoms without end;
These hard, well-meaning hands we
thrust
Among the heart-strings of a friend.

"The ill-timed truth we might have
kept--
Who knows how sharp it pierced and
stung?

The word we had not sense to say--
Who knows how grandly it had rung!

"Our faults no tenderness should
ask.

The chastening stripes must cleanse
them all;

But for our blunders -- oh, in shame
Before the eyes of heaven we fall.

"Earth bears no balsam for mistakes;
Men crown the knave, and scourge
the tool
That did his will; but Thou, O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

The room was hushed; in silence
rose

The King, and sought his gardens
cool,

And walked apart, and murmured
low,

"Be merciful to me, a fool!"

CASEY AT THE BAT

by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest
Clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a whack at that—
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat.

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
And the former was a hoodoo, while the latter was a cake;
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun sphere flew;
But Casey still ignored it and the umpire said, "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate,
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

THE MASTER'S HAND

originally remained Anonymous, known to have been as Myra Brooks Welch.)

Well it was battered and scarred and the auctioneer felt,
It was hardly worth his while,
To waste much time with the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile,

"It sure ain't much, but it's all we've got left,
I guess we oughta sell it too,
Now what is my bid for this old violin?
Just one more and we'll be through.

And then he cried: One, give me one dollar,
who'll make it two,
Only two dollars. Who'll make it three?
Three dollars twice now that's a good price,
But who's got a bid for me?
Raise up your hands and don't wait any longer,
The auction's about to end,
Who's got four, just one dollar more,
To bid on this old violin?

Well the air was hot and the people stood around,
As the sun was settin' low,
From the back of the room a grey-haired man came forward,
And picked up the bow,
He wiped the dust from the old violin,
And he tightened up the strings,
Then he played out a melody pure and sweet,
As sweet as the angels sing.

And then the music stopped,
And the auctioneer, with a voice that was tired and low,
Said what is my bid for this old violin,
Then he held it up with the bow..

And then he cried: One, give me one thousand,
who'll make it two,
Only two thousand. Who'll make it three?
Three thousand twice now that's a good price,
But who's got a bid for me?
The people called out 'What made the change?
We don't understand.'
And the auctioneer stopped,
And he said with a smile,
'It was the touch of The Master's hand.'



GRANDFATHER'S CLOCK

by Henry Clay Work

Oh my grandfather's clock was too tall for the shelf
so it stood ninety years on the floor.
It was taller by half than the old man himself
though it weighed not a pennyweight more.
It was bought on the morn of the day that he was born.
It was always his pleasure and his pride.

Then it stopped short, never to go again when the old man died.
Ninety years without slumbering tick tock tick tock
His life seconds numbering tick tock tick ---
Then it stopped short, never to go again when the old man died.

In watching its pendulum swing to and fro
many hours did he spend while a boy,
And in childhood and manhood the clock seemed to know
and to share both his grief and his joy.
For it struck twenty-four
as he entered at the door
with a blooming and beautiful bride.

My grandfather said that of those he could hire
not a servant so faithful he found.
For it wasted no time and had but one desire:
at the close of each week to be wound.
And it stayed in its place
not a frown upon its face,
and its hands never hung by its side.

Then it rang an alarm in the dead of the night,
an alarm that for years had been numb.
And we knew that his spirit was pluming its flight,
that his hour of departure had come.
Still the clock kept the time
with a soft and muffled chime
as we silently stood by his side.

