

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

**Sympathy**

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!  
    When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
    When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,  
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals —  
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing  
    Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;  
    And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
And they pulse again with a keener sting —  
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
    When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
    But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings —  
I know why the caged bird sings!