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The Lovers of the Poor ▶

BY [GWENDOLYN BROOKS](#)

arrive. The Ladies from the Ladies' Betterment League
 Arrive in the afternoon, the late light slanting
 In diluted gold bars across the boulevard brag
 Of proud, seamed faces with mercy and murder hinting
 Here, there, interrupting, all deep and debonair,
 The pink paint on the innocence of fear;
 Walk in a gingerly manner up the hall.
 Cutting with knives served by their softest care,
 Served by their love, so barbarously fair.
 Whose mothers taught: You'd better not be cruel!
 You had better not throw stones upon the wrens!
 Herein they kiss and cuddle and assault
 Anew and dearly in the innocence
 With which they baffle nature. Who are full,
 Sleek, tender-clad, fit, fiftyish, a-glow, all
 Sweetly abortive, hinting at fat fruit,
 Judge it high time that fiftyish fingers felt
 Beneath the lovelier planes of enterprise.
 To resurrect. To moisten with milky chill.
 To be a random hitching-post or plush.
 To be, for wet eyes, random and handy hem.

Their guild is giving money to the poor.
 The worthy poor. The very very worthy
 And beautiful poor. Perhaps just not too swarthy?
 perhaps just not too dirty nor too dim
 Nor—passionate. In truth, what they could wish
 Is—something less than derelict or dull.
 Not staunch enough to stab, though, gaze for gaze!
 God shield them sharply from the beggar-bold!
 The noxious needy ones whose battle's bald
 Nonetheless for being voiceless, hits one down.

But it's all so bad! and entirely too much for them.

The stench; the urine, cabbage, and dead beans,
 Dead porridges of assorted dusty grains,
 The old smoke, *heavy* diapers, and, they're told,
 Something called chitterlings. The darkness. Drawn
 Darkness, or dirty light. The soil that stirs.
 The soil that looks the soil of centuries.
 And for that matter the *general* oldness. Old
 Wood. Old marble. Old tile. Old old old.
 Not homekind Oldness! Not Lake Forest, Glencoe.
 Nothing is sturdy, nothing is majestic,
 There is no quiet drama, no rubbed glaze, no
 Unkillable infirmity of such
 A tasteful turn as lately they have left,
 Glencoe, Lake Forest, and to which their cars
 Must presently restore them. When they're done
 With dullards and distortions of this fistic
 Patience of the poor and put-upon.

They've never seen such a make-do-ness as
 Newspaper rugs before! In this, this "flat,"
 Their hostess is gathering up the oozed, the rich
 Rugs of the morning (tattered! the bespattered. . . .)
 Readies to spread clean rugs for afternoon.
 Here is a scene for you. The Ladies look,
 In horror, behind a substantial citizeness
 Whose trains clank out across her swollen heart.
 Who, arms akimbo, almost fills a door.
 All tumbling children, quilts dragged to the floor
 And tortured thereover, potato peelings, soft-
 Eyed kitten, hunched-up, haggard, to-be-hurt.

Their League is allotting largesse to the Lost.

But to put their clean, their pretty money, to put
 Their money collected from delicate rose-fingers
 Tipped with their hundred flawless rose-nails seems . . .

They own Spode, Lowestoft, candelabra,
 Mantels, and hostess gowns, and sunburst clocks,
 Turtle soup, Chippendale, red satin "hangings,"
 Aubussons and Hattie Carnegie. They Winter
 In Palm Beach; cross the Water in June; attend,
 When suitable, the nice Art Institute;
 Buy the right books in the best bindings; saunter
 On Michigan, Easter mornings, in sun or wind.
 Oh Squalor! This sick four-story hulk, this fibre
 With fissures everywhere! Why, what are bringings
 Of loathe-love largesse? What shall peril hungers
 So old old, what shall flatter the desolate?
 Tin can, blocked fire escape and chitterling
 And swaggering seeking youth and the puzzled wreckage
 Of the middle passage, and urine and stale shames
 And, again, the porridges of the underslung
 And children children children. Heavens! That
 Was a rat, surely, off there, in the shadows? Long
 And long-tailed? Gray? The Ladies from the Ladies'
 Betterment League agree it will be better
 To achieve the outer air that rights and steadies,
 To hie to a house that does not holler, to ring
 Bells elsetime, better presently to cater
 To no more Possibilities, to get
 Away. Perhaps the money can be posted.
 Perhaps they two may choose another Slum!
 Some serious sooty half-unhappy home!—
 Where loathe-love likelier may be invested.

Keeping their scented bodies in the center
 Of the hall as they walk down the hysterical hall,
 They allow their lovely skirts to graze no wall,
 Are off at what they manage of a canter,
 And, resuming all the clues of what they were,
 Try to avoid inhaling the laden air.

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Source: *Selected Poems* (1963)

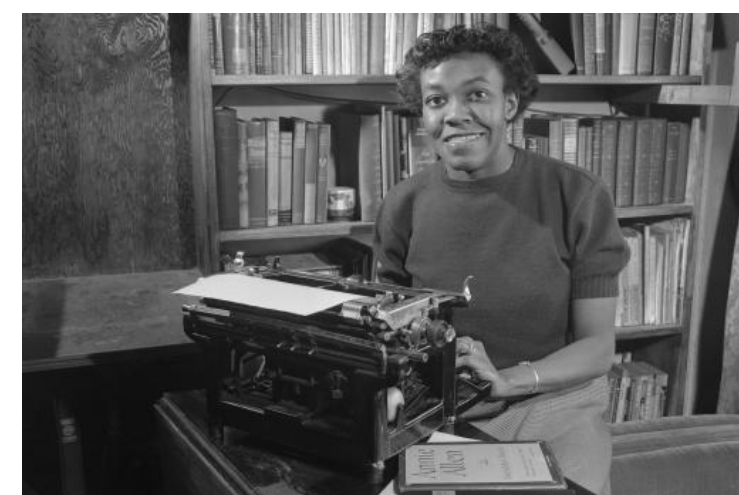


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The Lovers of the Poor

BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS

ABOUT THIS POET



Gwendolyn Brooks is one of the most highly regarded, influential, and widely read poets of 20th-century American poetry. She was a much-honored poet, even in her lifetime, with the distinction of being the first Black author to win the Pulitzer Prize. She also was poetry...

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