**Sympathy**

By Paul Laurence Dunbar (1899)

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!