

## Sympathy

by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

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!

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The above poem was published in *Lyrics of the Hearthside* by Dodd, Mead and Company in 1899. It was this poem that inspired the title to Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*.

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