

Peggy in Killing



Traveling

They done found me,
Lord! They done found me again!
I'm dead and they don't know it.
Sometimes I don't either.

Except the Spirit come
creepin' in my body
like hot fire
and I burn and burn
all inside
turn to dust
blow away out over
they heads when they
finds me cryin' in a sack.

I listens
and listens:
I'm travelin' in my bones
and the Spirit swooshes out
before I gets a chance to say
Amen.

Oh, the wind! the sea!
I'm dead on this boat.

Go 'way. Go 'way, nigger! they says,
so I goes. Don't touch me yet!
Got to get home to my mother!
Ain't that what the Lord say
when He rise from the dead?
Goin' home to his mother?

Won't somebody row this boat
out of hell?

Visions

Cain't be no slave forever,
not me! and my children
all pretty and soft
all wet in they skin
moist like the sea air
they be buryin' me in.

Cain't be no slave forever,
make way, Lord, here I come!
Here I am!
This heah boat they put me on
with my children
'cause I tried to escape
from they dark breaths,
they glories, hallelujahs!
they fine houses and sweet fields,
they murders murders murders!
they coffins stenchin' in they smiles,
they *come heah Peggy,*
dress my little one,
then fix her somethin' to eat,

maybe some cake and milk,
and mine sittin' on the stairs
in the cold, in the dark,
waitin' to do some waitin' on
waitin' for the milk to sour
and the cake to crumble,
hearin' all this
without a word, a whimper,
eyes freezin' in they dreams,
hungers freezin' in they dark,
takin' they dreams to supper
like candles meltin',
after 'while no more light,
they walkin' softly
makin' sure they seen and not heard
and they dreams screamin'
in they bright, soft eyes.

My soft little ones!
My children!
My John and Mary and Lottie,
brown and golden-black,
listenin' in the dark,
bright in they Black!

But it be a gift, a gift!
Out of they misery
I become blacker than the skin
of a tree in the rain,
and I be rooted
in the rich black earth.
Out of me flies the swallow.

Lord, I'm here 'cause I went:
with my little ones; we're
all goin' to somethin' better.
They has to be somethin' better,
and my death give me a chance.

Capture

Cain't be no slave forever,
No, Lord!
I've got wisdom and hope
and I don't think about it,
don't believe it
don't not believe it
don't carry them around
in my misery
like sick animals.

Gotta let go! Gotta live inside death
in a wheelchair, if I must,
there be some energy left in that!

Caught me in Philadelphia,
put me in a boat
down, down in the hollows
of its ribs, in the hollerin'
of the sea
with my three little ones
cryin' to me:
no, I lies.
They be silent,
no tears, no murmers,
no moans, no sighs.

And I knew then
that death give me a chance,
a great salvation,
a fine, early night.

So I waits.

In the dark and dampness
I sat there 'till my skin broke
and I held my children close.

The Killing

But that boat wasn't meant
for nothin' but glory,
and when it crashed into the sea,
I entered that water
like I was being baptized,
saw my John's head
stretch among the waves
and near him Mary
and near her Lottie, laughin'.
Oh, Lord! what a sight!
Baptized to the death!

*I denounce you, Satan!
I denounce this unfree callin',
I denounce shackles, bondage,
escape, darkness,
the quiet of the pain
in my throat when I scream
for nothin', nothin' at all,
when I watch my children
sit on stairwells
in the dark
and ice forms
in they mouths,
I denounce the evil of rememberin',
I denounce pieces of property,
pounds of pain.*

Nothin' be free, but the misery.

My hands over they heads
was such a little matter,
'jes takin' them under
puttin' them there

for the water to purify
for they own bloomin'
under the sea.

Lottie, she kicked a bit,
but that be all.
It be over.

*They be flowers under the water now.
Yes!*

Lord, how cleansed I be!
When the water come rushin'
beatin' 'gainst my bosom
through me to them,
I feel like I be givin' suck
and the sea be my milk,
and my healthy babies be fed
and wholesome and warm forever.

The Last Vision

I'm here now
in this place
don't know it
but it moves,
and they be water about:
'nother boat.
I can see a tiny window,
but the light hurts
and wants the dark.
Now and then some peoples
come and look at me,
ask me if I wants to eat,
leave me some cornbread
and cold tea.

They be crates and trunks here,
like the other boat,
and I think we be movin'.
They found me in the water,
I reckon, brought me again
in a backward time.

I'm dead.
I know it 'cause I'm happy.
The children are flowers now,
baptized in joy and hope;
I shiver when I think
of they beauty.
Cain't cry, 'cause I be dead,
this old tarp 'round me,
my flesh rottin', my bones
dryin' out, my eyes movin'
through some kind of cheesecloth,
like a fog.

I'm goin' to reach out now,
soon,
so my death
will stay away from my babies:
cain't upset them now!
They's pure.
And these ghosts that come
and watch me in the night?
I'll sing to them,
like a star.