

# November Cotton Flower

By Jean Toomer

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,  
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,  
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,  
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,  
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;  
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take  
All water from the streams; dead birds were found  
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—  
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.  
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed  
Significance. Superstition saw  
Something it had never seen before:  
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,  
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

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Source: *Cane* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1923)



An important figure in the Harlem Renaissance, Jean Toomer was born in Washington, DC, the grandson of the first governor of African-American descent in the United States. A descendent of both white and black heritage, Toomer attended both all-white and all-black segregated schools, and from early on in his life he resisted being classified by race, preferring to call himself simply American. In 1922, he began writing heavily about the African-American experience, eventually culminating with the publication of his most famous work, *Cane* (1923), an experimental collection of stories and poems. It was hailed by critics and is seen as an important part of the Harlem Renaissance.

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