

# The Children of the Poor

By Gwendolyn Brooks

1

People who have no children can be hard:  
Attain a mail of ice and insolence:  
Need not pause in the fire, and in no sense  
Hesitate in the hurricane to guard.  
And when wide world is bitten and bewarred  
They perish purely, waving their spirits hence  
Without a trace of grace or of offense  
To laugh or fail, diffident, wonder-starred.  
While through a throttling dark we others hear  
The little lifting helplessness, the queer  
Whimper-whine; whose unridiculous  
Lost softness softly makes a trap for us.  
And makes a curse. And makes a sugar of  
The malocclusions, the inconditions of love.

2

What shall I give my children? who are poor,  
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,  
Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand  
No velvet and no velvety velour;  
But who have begged me for a brisk contour,  
Crying that they are quasi, contraband  
Because unfinished, graven by a hand  
Less than angelic, admirable or sure.  
My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device.  
But I lack access to my proper stone.  
And plenitude of plan shall not suffice  
Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone  
To ratify my little halves who bear  
Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

3

And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?  
Mites, come invade most frugal vestibules  
Spectered with crusts of penitents' renewals  
And all hysterics arrogant for a day.  
Instruct yourselves here is no devil to pay.  
Children, confine your lights in jellied rules;  
Resemble graves; be metaphysical mules.  
Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray.  
Behind the scurryings of your neat motif  
I shall wait, if you wish: revise the psalm  
If that should frighten you: sew up belief  
If that should tear: turn, singularly calm  
At forehead and at fingers rather wise,  
Holding the bandage ready for your eyes.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Children of the Poor" from *Annie Allen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949).  
Collected in *Blacks* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991).

Source: Blacks (Third World Press, 1991)