# Sympathy

## By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/paul-laurence-dunbar)

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!

## Paul Laurence. Dunbar, "“Sympathy.”" from The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, )

## Source: *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2004)