
CANE

JEAN TOOMER

CANE

AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

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AFTERWORD

Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

“Song of the Son”: The Emergence and Passing of Jean Toomer

TO MY GRANDMOTHER...

Karintha

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,

O cant you see it, O cant you see it,

Her skin is like dusk on the Cane (New Edition) eastern horizon

...When the sun goes down.

Men had always wanted her, this Karintha, even as a child, Karintha carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. Old men rode her hobby-horse Cane (New Edition) upon their knees. Young men danced with her at frolics when they should have been dancing with their grown-up girls. God grant us youth, secretly prayed the Cane (New Edition) old men. The young fellows counted the time to pass before she would be old enough to mate with them. This interest of the male, who wishes to ripen a growing thing too soon, could mean no good to her.

Karintha, at twelve, was a wild flash that told the other folks just what it was to live. At sunset, when there was no wind, and the pine-smoke from over by Cane (New Edition) the sawmill hugged the earth, and you couldnt see more than a few feet Cane (New Edition) in front, her sudden darting past you was a bit of vivid color, like a black bird that flashes in light. With the other children one could hear, some distance off, their feet flopping in the two-inch dust. Karintha's running was Cane (New Edition) a whirl. It had the sound of the red dust that sometimes makes a spiral in the road. At dusk, during the hush just after the sawmill had closed down, and before any of the women had started their supper-getting-ready songs, her voice, high-pitched, shrill, would put one's ears to Cane (New Edition) itching. But no one ever thought to make her stop because of it. She stoned Cane (New Edition) the cows, and beat her dog, and fought the other children...Even the preacher, who caught her at mischief, told himself that she was as innocently lovely as a November cotton flower. Already, rumors were out about her. Homes in Georgia are most often built on the two-room plan. In one, you cook and eat, in the other you sleep, and there love goes on. Karintha had seen or heard, perhaps Cane (New Edition) she had felt her parents loving. One could but imitate one's parents, for to follow them was the way of God. She played "home" with a small boy who was not afraid to do her bidding. That started the whole thing. Old men could no longer ride her hobby-horse upon their knees. But young men counted faster.

Her skin is Cane (New Edition) like dusk,

O cant you see it,

Her skin is like dusk,

When the sun goes down.

Karintha is a woman. She who carries beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. She has been married many Cane (New Edition) times. Old men remind her that a few years back they rode her hobby-horse upon their knees. Karintha smiles, and indulges them when she is in the mood for it. She has contempt for them. Karintha is a woman. Young men run stills to make her money. Young men go to the big cities and run on the road. Young men go away to college. They all want to bring her money. These are the young men who thought that all they had to do was to count time. But Karintha is a woman, and she has had a child. A child fell out of her womb onto a bed of pine-needles in the forest. Pine-needles are smooth and sweet. They are elastic to the feet of rabbits...A sawmill was nearby. Its pyramidal sawdust pile smouldered. It is a year before one completely burns. Meanwhile, the smoke curls up and hangs Cane (New Edition) in odd wraiths about Cane (New Edition) the trees, curls up, and spreads itself out over the valley...Weeks after Karintha returned home the smoke was so heavy you tasted it in water. Some one made a song:

Smoke is on the hills. Rise up.

Smoke is on the hills,

O rise And take my soul to Jesus.

Karintha is a woman. Men do not know that Cane (New Edition) the soul of her was a growing thing ripened too soon. Cane (New Edition) They will bring their money; they will die Cane (New Edition) not having found it out...Karintha at twenty, carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. Karintha...

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,

O cant you see it, O cant you see it,

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon

...When the sun goes down.

Goes down...

Cane (New Edition)

Reapers

Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones

Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones

In their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,

And start their silent swinging, one by one.

Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,

And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,

His belly close to ground. I see the blade,

Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.

Cane New Edition

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