
A SONG IN THE FRONT YARD

Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks has always been deeply involved with Chicago's African-American community and has written extensively about the experience of being black in the United States. Her writing includes numerous books of poetry, a novelette titled Maud Martha, and children's books. In this poem, a young girl peeks over a border into a way of life very different from her own.

I'VE STAYED IN THE FRONT YARD ALL MY LIFE.
I want a peek at the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed
grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now
And maybe down the alley,
To where the charity children play.
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun.
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
Will grow up to be a bad woman.
That George'll be taken to jail soon or late.
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate.)

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

1. Describe in detail what you imagine the speaker's life to be like.
2. What does "front yard" mean in this poem? What does "back yard" mean? Can you think of any places that would fit these descriptions of "front yard" and "back yard"?
3. Would you prefer to live in the "front yard" or the "back yard," or would you like to move freely between both? Explain.

DOORS

Chitra Divakaruni

When patterns of different cultures exist within one family, the situation can become dramatic. In this story, a conflict simmers between a husband and wife about the fundamental issue of how much privacy is appropriate in the home. Chitra Divakaruni, who came to the United States from India to attend the University of California, now lives in the United States and is a writer as well as a college teacher of English and Yoga.

IT ALL STARTED WHEN RAJ CAME TO LIVE WITH THEM. Not that there hadn't been signs earlier. Asha's mother, for one, had warned of it right at the time of the wedding.

"It'll never work, I tell you. Here you are, living in the U.S. since you were twelve. And Deepak—he's straight out of India. Just because you took a few classes together at the University, and you liked how he talks, doesn't mean that you can live with him. What do you *really* know about how Indian men think? About what they expect from their women?"

"Now, Ma, don't start on that again. He's not like the others," Asha had protested. "And besides, I can adjust, too."

On the whole Asha had been right. She and Deepak had lived together happily enough for the last three years. In all matters, as their friends often commented enviously, they were a well-adjusted couple. In all, that is, except the matter of doors.