

LANGSTON HUGHES

SETTING—*Night. A tenement room, bare, ugly, dirty. An unshaded electric-light bulb. In the middle of the room a cot on which the body of a Negro youth is lying. His hands are folded across his chest. There are pennies on his eyes. He is a soul gone home.*

AS THE CURTAIN RISES, *his mother, a large middle-aged woman in a red sweater, kneels weeping beside the cot.*

MOTHER (*Loudly*) Oh, Gawd! Oh, Lawd! Why did you take my son from me? Oh, Gawd, why did you do it? He was all I had! Oh, Lawd, what am I gonna do? (*Looking at the dead boy and stroking his head.*) Oh, son! Oh, Rannie! Oh, my boy, speak to me! Rannie, say something to me! Son, why don't you talk to your mother? Can't you see she's bowed down in sorrow? Son, speak to me, just a word! Come back from the spirit-world and speak to me! Rannie, come back from the dead and speak to your mother!

SON (*Lying there dead as a door-nail. Speaking loudly.*) I wish I wasn't dead, so I *could* speak to you. You been a hell of a mama!

MOTHER (*Falling back from the cot in astonishment, but still on her knees.*) Rannie! Rannie! What's that you say? What you sayin' to your mother? (*Wild-eyed.*) Is you done opened your mouth and spoke to me? What you said?

SON I said you a hell of a mama!

MOTHER (*Rising suddenly and backing away, screaming loudly.*) Awo-oooo-o! Rannie, that ain't you talkin'!

SON Yes, it is me talkin', too! I say you been a no-good mama.

MOTHER What for you talkin' to me like that, Rannie? You ain't never said nothin' like that to me before.

SON I know it, but I'm dead now — and I can say what I want to say. (*Stirring.*) You done called on me to talk, ain't you? Lemme take these pennies off my eyes so I can see. (*He takes the coins off his eyes, throws them across the room, and sits up in bed. He is a very dark boy in a torn white shirt. He looks hard at his mother.*) Mama, you know you ain't done me right.

MOTHER What you mean, I ain't done you right? (*She is rooted in horror.*) What you mean, huh?

SOUL GONE HOME

SON You know what I mean.

MOTHER No, I don't neither. (*Trembling violently.*) What you mean comin' back to hant your poor old mother? Rannie, what does you mean?

SON (*Leaning forward.*) I'll tell you just what I mean! You been a bad mother to me.

MOTHER Shame! Shame! Shame, talkin' to your mama that away. Damn it! Shame! I'll slap your face. (*She starts toward him, but he rolls his big white eyes at her, and she backs away.*) Me, what bored you! Me, what suffered the pains o' death to bring you into this world! Me, what raised you up, what washed your dirty didies. (*Sorrowfully.*) And now I'm left here mighty nigh prostrate 'cause you gone from me! Rannie, what you mean talkin' to *me* like that — what brought you into this world?

SON You never did feed me good, that's what I mean! Who wants to come into the world hongry, and go out the same way?

MOTHER What you mean hongry? When I had money, ain't I fed you?

SON (*Sullenly.*) Most the time you ain't had no money.

MOTHER 'Twarn't my fault then.

SON 'Twarn't *my* fault neither.

MOTHER (*Defensively.*) You always was so weak and sickly, you couldn't earn nothin' sellin' papers.

SON I know it.

MOTHER You never was no use to me.

SON So you just lemme grow up in the street, and I ain't had no manners nor morals, neither.

MOTHER Manners and morals? Rannie, where'd you learn all them big words?

SON I learnt 'em just now in the spirit-world.

MOTHER (*Coming nearer.*) But you ain't been dead no more'n an hour.

SON That's long enough to learn a lot.

MOTHER Well, what else did you find out?

SON I found out you was a hell of a mama puttin' me out in the cold to sell papers soon as I could even walk.

MOTHER What? You little liar!