



***LOLA  
RIDGE***

***THE GHETTO,  
AND OTHER  
POEMS***



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**Lola Ridge**

# **The Ghetto, and Other Poems**

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# THE GHETTO

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I

Cool, inaccessible air  
Is floating in velvety blackness shot with steel-blue lights,  
But no breath stirs the heat  
Leaning its ponderous bulk upon the Ghetto  
And most on Hester street...

The heat...  
Nosing in the body's overflow,  
Like a beast pressing its great steaming belly close,  
Covering all avenues of air...

The heat in Hester street,  
Heaped like a dray  
With the garbage of the world.

Bodies dangle from the fire escapes  
Or sprawl over the stoops...  
Upturned faces glimmer pallidly—  
Herring-yellow faces, spotted as with a mold,  
And moist faces of girls  
Like dank white lilies,  
And infants' faces with open parched mouths that suck at  
the air  
as at empty teats.

Young women pass in groups,  
Converging to the forums and meeting halls,

Surging indomitable, slow  
Through the gross underbrush of heat.  
Their heads are uncovered to the stars,  
And they call to the young men and to one another  
With a free camaraderie.  
Only their eyes are ancient and alone...

The street crawls undulant,  
Like a river addled  
With its hot tide of flesh  
That ever thickens.  
Heavy surges of flesh  
Break over the pavements,  
Clavering like a surf—  
Flesh of this abiding  
Brood of those ancient mothers who saw the dawn break  
over Egypt...  
And turned their cakes upon the dry hot stones  
And went on  
Till the gold of the Egyptians fell down off their arms...  
Fasting and athirst...  
And yet on...

Did they vision—with those eyes darkly clear,  
That looked the sun in the face and were not blinded—  
Across the centuries  
The march of their enduring flesh?  
Did they hear—  
Under the molten silence  
Of the desert like a stopped wheel—  
(And the scorpions tick-ticking on the sand...)  
The infinite procession of those feet?