

Brown Paper Bag

Louisiana 1850



The overseer grabbed my hair
Held the bag up to my face
A simple brown paper bag
Would decide my fate
Would I work the plantation?
Eyes closed I held my breath
Light skin meant a house slave
Dark skin meant certain death.

Louisiana 1960



The bag was nailed at head height
To the church's wooden door
I didn't have to ask
I knew what it was for.
I stood with face beside the bag
I was too dark in hue
"You're darker than the paper bag.
There's no place here for you".

Margaret Hardy
January 2022