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Lola Ridge

Freedom

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1911

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1911

Let men be free!
All violence is but the agony
Of caged things fighting blindly for the right
To be and breathe and burn their little hour.
Bare spirits—not debight
In smooth-set garments of philosophy;
But near earth forces, elemental, crude,
Scarce knowing their invincible, rude power;
Within the close of their primeval servitude
Half comatose.

Who, ravening for their depleted dower
Of so much sun and air and warmth and food,
And the same right to procreate and love
As the beasts have and the birds,
Strike wild—not having words
To parry with—at the cold force above.

Let men be free!
Hate is the price
Of servitude, paid covertly; and vice
But the unclean recoil of tortured flesh
Whipped through the centuries within a mesh
Spun out of priestly art.
Oh men, arise, be free!—Who breaks one bar
Of tyranny in this so bitter star
Has cleansed its bitterness in part.