



Violets And Other Tales

Alice Ruth Moore

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Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar Nelson was born Alice Ruth Moore on 19th July, 1875 in New Orleans, Louisiana to a seamstress mother who had been a former slave and merchant marine father. Her ancestry of mixed white, black and Indian from her Creole forebears gave rise to her strawberry blonde curly hair and fair skin who occasionally passed for white, which allowed her to participate in the cultural life of New Orleans at a time where darker skins were often excluded. Alice was among the first generation of black people to be born free in the South and so benefitted from a good education. This allowed her to be part of a small minority of African Americans that continued to University. After graduation she became a teacher in her native New Orleans and published her first book of poetry and prose in 1895. A courtship correspondence with poet Paul Laurence Dunbar led to a secret marriage in New York in 1898. Their marriage ended allegedly after he nearly beat her to death citing that he could not tolerate her lesbian affairs. Depression and alcoholism killed him a few years later. Alice moved to Wilmington, Delaware where she continued to write whilst working at Howard High School. Here she met and married physician and professor Henry Arthur Callis though this too was to end in divorce a few years later. However this period saw her engage in political activism and a fight for social justice for black people, particularly women. She married the poet and civil rights activist Robert Nelson (who she stayed with until her death) and became a journalist, co-editing a progressive black newspaper and being a field organiser for the women's suffrage movement. Alice continued to write poetry and prose but with her other work, that included lectures and the campaign for the Dyer Anti Lynching Bill to become law, her time for creative writing was limited. In her time she received little recognition but has steadily gained an influence and authority that places her at the heart of American writing. Alice died in Philadelphia from heart problems on 18th September 1935.

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