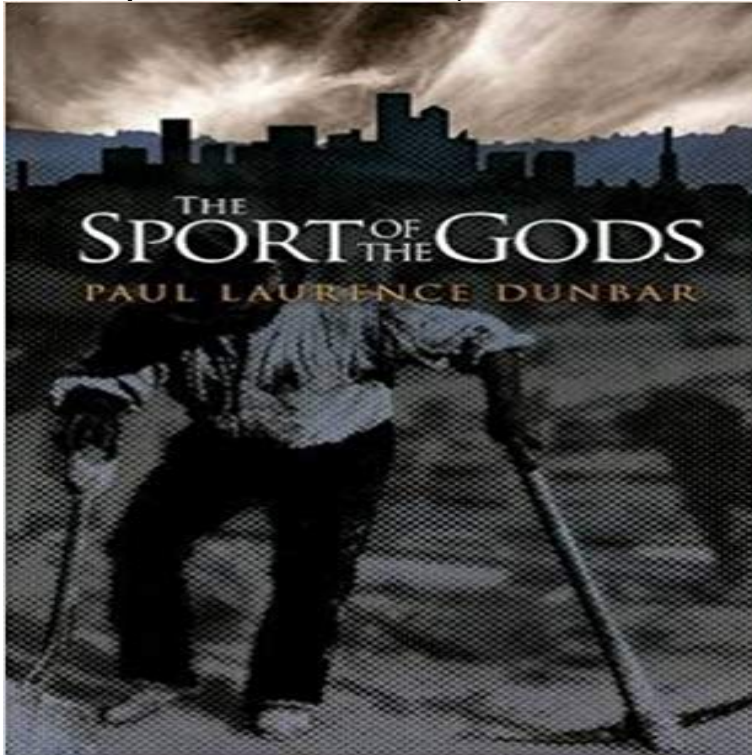


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A landmark in African-American literature, this powerful turn-of-the-century novel was among the first realistic depictions of ghetto life and language. Written by a renowned poet, essayist, and lecturer who was the son of former slaves, its fictional portrayal of social and political issues within an early-twentieth-century black community foreshadowed the later works of such luminaries as James Baldwin and Richard Wright. As the story opens in the post-Civil War South, Berry Hamilton, his wife, and children are living happily in a cottage on Maurice Oakleys prosperous plantation. Employed there for thirty years, the black couple has been loyal and enjoyed a comfortable life before and after emancipation. But their good fortune changes abruptly when money is discovered missing from Oakleys mansion. Berry is wrongfully accused of theft and sentenced to ten years of hard labor. Evicted from the plantation, the rest of the family flees to New Yorks Harlem to start anew. But the lure of the citys vices is more than they can handle. Without their patriarchs guiding hand, they fall victim to its temptations with serious consequences for each of them. Hailed by Booker T. Washington as the Poet Laureate of the Negro Race, Paul Laurence Dunbar broke new ground with this poignant novel, entertaining readers with lively dialogue and dialect, as he influenced a nations social conscience.

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