

## Poem

Little brown boy,  
Slim, dark, big-eyed,  
Crooning love songs to your banjo  
Down at the Lafayette<sup>1</sup>  
Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,  
High sort of and a bit to one side,  
Like a prince, a jazz prince. And I love  
Your eyes flashing, and your hands,  
And your patent-leathered feet,

And your shoulders jerking the jig-wa.<sup>2</sup>  
And I love your teeth flashing,  
And the way your hair shines in the spotlight  
Like it was the real stuff.  
Gee, brown boy, I loves you all over.  
I'm glad I'm a jig.<sup>3</sup> I'm glad I can  
Understand your dancin' and your  
Singin', and feel all the happiness  
And joy and don't-care in you,  
Gee, boy, when you sing, I can close my ears  
And hear tomtoms just as plain.  
Listen to me, will you, what do I know  
About tomtoms? But I like the word, sort of,  
Don't you? It belongs to us.  
Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,  
And the way you sing and dance,  
And everything.  
Say, I think you're wonderful. You're  
All right with me,  
You are.

<sup>1</sup>Lafayette Theatre on 132nd Street and Seventh Avenue in New York.

<sup>2</sup>A dance.

<sup>3</sup>A black person.

HELENE JOHNSON

## Africa

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,  
The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;  
When all the world was young in pregnant night  
Thy slaves toiled at thy monumental best.  
Thou ancient treasure-land, thou modern prize,  
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!  
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes  
Watches the mad world with immobile lids.  
The Hebrews humbled them<sup>1</sup> at Pharaoh's name.  
Cradle of Power! Yet all things were in vain!  
Honor and Glory, Arrogance and Fame!  
They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.  
Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,  
Of all the mighty nations of the sun.

## America

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,  
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth;  
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess  
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!  
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,  
Giving me strength erect against her hate.  
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.  
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,  
I stand within her walls with not a shred  
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.  
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,  
And see her might and granite wonders there,

CLAUDE MCKAY

## If We Must Die<sup>1</sup>

If we must die, let it not be like hogs,  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

## To the White Fiends

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?  
Think you I could not arm me with a gun  
And shoot down ten of you for every one  
Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?  
Be not deceived, for every deed you do  
I could match—out-match: am I not Afric's son,  
Black of that black land where black deeds are done?  
But the Almighty from the darkness drew  
My soul and said: Even thou shalt be a light  
Awhile to burn on the benighted earth,  
Thy dusky face I set among the white  
For thee to prove thyself of higher worth;  
Before the world is swallowed up in night,  
To show thy little lamp: go forth, go forth!

### Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem

You are disdainful and magnificent—  
Your perfect body and your pompous gait,  
Your dark eyes flashing solemnly with hate,  
Small wonder that you are incompetent  
To imitate those whom you so despise—  
Your shoulders towering high above the throng,  
Your head thrown back in rich, barbaric song,  
Palm trees and mangoes stretched before your eyes.  
Let others toil and sweat for labor's sake  
And wring from grasping hands their meed<sup>1</sup> of gold.  
Why urge ahead your supercilious feet?  
Scorn will efface each footprint that you make.  
I love your laughter arrogant and bold.  
You are too splendid for this city street.

HELENE  
JOHNSON

### I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

LANGSTON  
HUGHES

### The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
I heard a Negro play.  
Down on Lenox Avenue<sup>1</sup> the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
He did a lazy sway. . . .  
He did a lazy sway. . . .  
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
O Blues!  
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
Sweet Blues!  
Coming from a black man's soul.  
O Blues!  
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—  
"Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
Ain't got nobody but ma self.  
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
And put ma troubles on the shelf."  
Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more—  
"I got the Weary Blues  
And I can't be satisfied.  
Got the Weary Blues  
And can't be satisfied—  
I ain't happy no mo'  
And I wish that I had died."  
And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

LANGSTON  
HUGHES