Langston Hughes  
(1902-1967)

**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.

**Dream Deferred**

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?
The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Countee Cullen Poems
(1903-1946)

The Wise

Dead men are wisest, for they know
How far the roots of flowers go,
How long a seed must rot to grow.

Dead men alone bear frost and rain
On throbbles heart and heatless brain,
And feel no stir of joy or pain.

Dead men alone are satiate;
They sleep and dream and have no weight,
To curb their rest, of love or hate.

Strange, men should flee their company,
Or think me strange who long to be
Wrapped in their cool immunity.
Saturday's Child

Some are teething on a silver spoon,
With the stars strung for a rattle;
I cut my teeth as the black raccoon—
For implements of battle.

Some are swaddled in silk and down,
And heralded by a star;
They swathed my limbs in a sackcloth gown
On a night that was black as tar.

For some, godfather and goddame
The opulent fairies be;
Dame Poverty gave me my name,
And Pain godfathered me.

For I was born on Saturday—
"Bad time for planting a seed,"
Was all my father had to say,
And, "One mouth more to feed."

Death cut the strings that gave me life,
And handed me to Sorrow,
The only kind of middle wife
My folks could beg or borrow.

Incident

Once riding in old Baltimore,
   Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
   Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
   And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
   His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
   From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
   That's all that I remember.
Song In Spite Of Myself -

Never love with all your heart,
It only ends in aching;
And bit by bit to the smallest part
That organ will be breaking.

Never love with all your mind,
It only ends in fretting;
In musing on sweet joys behind,
too poignant for forgetting.

Never love with all your soul,
for such there is no ending;
though a mind that frets may find control,
and a shattered heart find mending.

Give but a grain of the heart's rich seed,
Confine some undercover,
And when love goes, bid him God-speed,
and find another lover.

Claude McKay
(1889 – 1948)

If We Must Die

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—oh, 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!
Oh, 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!
William Waring Cuney

No Images

She does not know
her beauty,
she thinks her brown body
has no glory.

If she could dance
naked
under palm trees
and see her image in the river,
she would know.

But there are no palm trees
on the street,
and dish water gives back
no images.

Joseph Seamon Cotter Jr

Supplication

I AM so tired and weary,
So tired of the endless fight,
So weary of waiting the dawn
And finding endless night.

That I ask but rest and quiet--
Rest for days that are gone,
And quiet for the little space
That I must journey on.