

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. 10

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted 15
In a great need.
I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you. 20

1949

Theme for English B

The instructor said,

*Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.* 5

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.¹
I am the only colored student in my class. 10
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page: 15

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page. 20
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.²
I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like 25

1. The City College of the City University of New York. Winston-Salem and Durham are cities in North Carolina.

2. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German

composer of the Baroque era. Bessie Smith (1894–1937), noted blues singer. "Bop": jazz form developed in Harlem during World War II.