



## The Darktown Strutters' Ball

by Daniel J. McBain

Again this long night I see your faces,  
Wan and sickly in the flickering dark.  
I've used my last tricks playing to you Shades;  
Now I know—that's not it. For what are you  
waiting?  
Were you drawn by the music or the night?  
Are you the black-eyed moths who cringe from  
light?  
You follow me here, parasites, and light  
Until the morning, sheltering featureless faces  
From candle-flame and feeding on the night.  
You came—half-weeping, some of you—your  
dark  
Purpose in your eyes. Now, all of you waiting,  
Drawing hungrily from me a few more shades  
Of life, milking the tones' more lurid shades  
While I, always in vain, try to spark light  
From patterns of black and white notes, waiting,  
A naked fool. I see now, your faces  
Tell me. I thought you were hiding from the  
dark—  
A fool—I thought you hid here from the night.

How do you last the long, bright day? Each night  
In this feeble dimness, each of you shades  
His eyes. If you must cling to the night's dark  
Corners, what torture comes with morning light?  
What horrible and contorted faces  
Must be skulking as through limbo, waiting.

For the long, blurring shadows of sunset, awaiting  
The warm, moist breath of thick, enclosing Night.  
Again wrapped in its black bosom your faces  
Glow, your waxy skin taking eerie shades  
Of orange, cheeks flushed, eyes no longer dark  
But glinting, as though reflecting firelight

From some source—I think I know it. The light  
Of dawn is coming. Am I still waiting?  
Or am I with them, lurking in the dark,  
Lusting to be swallowed by the night?  
I came here, a first, anyway with shades  
Of hope of putting life in these faces—

Could it be Light has cast me *to* these Shades  
To stand in the dark among grinning faces,  
Awaiting the pungent, borrowed blood of Night?

