

“Harlem Shadows”

Claude McKay

I HEAR the halting footsteps of a lass
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
Eager to heed desire's insistent call:
Ah, little dark girls, who in slippered feet
Go prowling through the night from street to street.

Through the long night until the silver break
Of day the little gray feet know no rest,
Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay.
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.