

# 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  
 To bend and barter at desire's call.  
 5 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  
 10 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,  
 15 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.

## Textual Note

This poem also appeared in:

- *Pearson's Magazine* (September, 1918)
- *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920)

In *Pearson's Magazine*, this poem (along with "To the White Fiends," "The Conqueror," "The Park in Spring," and "Is it Worth While?") was prefaced by a statement by McKay, "Claude McKay Describes His Own Life: A Negro Poet".

4 To bend and barter at desire's call. ] Eager to heed  
 desire's insistent call: , *Spr.*  
 5 girls ] , *add.* ,  
 6 ! ] . , *Spr.*

8 ; ] , , *Spr.*  
 14 dishonor ] dishonour *Spr.*  
 14 , ] *om.*  
 15 , ] . *Spr.*