

“Night in State Street”

Monroe, Harriet, 1860-1936

Art thou he?—

*The seer and sage, the hero and lover—yea,
The man of men, then away from the haughty
day*

Come with me!

Ho—ho! to the night—

The spangled night that would the noon outstare.
Her skirts are fringed with light,
She is girdled and crowned with gems of fire that flare.
The city is dizzy with the thrill of her—
Her shining eyes and shadowy floating hair;
And curious winds her nebulous garments blur,
Blowing her moon-white limbs and bosom bare.

She beckons me—

Down the deep street she goes to keep her tryst.

Come—come—oh follow! oh see

The many-windowed walls uprear so high
They dim and quiver and float away in mist
Tangling the earth and sky.

And the pale stars go by

Like spirits masterful and still and strong,

Dragging the heavy nets of life along.

Down in the deep

Lightly the nets enmesh us with the swarm
Of huddled human things that, soft and warm,
Beat out so close the pulses of their lives.

We crowd and creep,

We jostle and push out of our halls and hives,

We chatter and laugh and weep.

Ah, do you hear

The choral of voices, each the secret hiding?

Do you see the warren of souls, each one abid-
ing

In separate solitude, remote, austere?

Here in the glare of the street we cling to-
gether

Against the warning darkness, the still height

Of the awful night.

We blow like a feather
From hope to hope along the winds of fate
Importunate.

The lettered lights that twinkle in and out
Lure us and laugh at us, beckon and flout,
Flashing their slangy symbols in our eyes,
Blurting their gaudy lies.

The bold shop-windows flaunt their empty
wares— Jewelled or tinselled shows of things, The fripperies and furnishings
Wherein stark life will stifle
her shiverings Ere forth in the dawn she fares.

Ah, tyranny perilous! Vain shows that master us! See the gay girls fluttering wistfully,
Where waxen
dummies grin in gowns of lace. Watch yonder woman in black, whose dimmed
eyes see Soft baby things folded with tender grace. And look at the children crowding and shouting there
Where dancing dolls jiggle and jerk and stare.

They hover and cling
Possessed by signs and shadows of the thing.

They moor their bark
Close to the shore and fathom not the dark—
The dark that glooms afar

Beyond the invisible star,
Beyond faith's boundaries,
The plausible was and is.

Come, ye adventurous,
Open your hearts to us!
You tiny newsboy, calling extras there,
Pitiful burden-bearer, pale with blight,
What of the night?—
The sullen night that brings you, little one,
So heavy a load of care,
While happier children sleep from sun to sun?
And you, wan youth, haggard and spent,
By mad thirst driven and rent—
Thirst of the body, thirst of the soul—
To what dark goal
Does reeling night lead you, her listless prey,
To gorge you and slay,
And hide forever from the searching day?
And you, furtive and flaunting girl,
Whose heavy-lidded eyes unfurl
Red signal fires, the while, demure,
Your brooding lips deny their lure—

Ah, does the lewd night lash you to her cave,
And will you never her ribald rage out-brave,
And rise no more forlorn
To greet the morn?

The street grows insolent.
With cries of dark delight
And gestures impudent
It rends the robe of night.
Up to the silent sky
It shouts the human cry.
The crowds push in and out
By all the open ways,
Eager to stare and shout
At vaudeville waifs of plays.
They drop their coins and laugh
At the wheezy phonograph,
They hush for the noisy drone
Of the croaking megaphone.
At every flippant show
That litters life with jest
They pause that they may not go
On life's eternal quest.
They stifle truth with speech,
They mimic love with lust,
For the glitter of gilt they reach
And cover the gold with dust.
They stoop to the din and glare
Who have the lofty night for comrade rare.
They grope along the ground
Whose stature like the night with stars is
crowned.

Oh piteous!
Oh struggle vain!
Of puppets emulous,
We strive and strain
To forge for our limbs a chain.
Come, thou deep-hearted Night, so dark and bright!
Come, holy Night, come, lawless, dissolute Night!
Come, human Night, hushing thy dreams divine!
Give me thy dreams, O Night—they shall be
mine!—. Mine and this beggar's, though we lie to thee! Mine and this harlot's, though from thee we
flee! Mine and this worldling's, though with might
and right
We hide them from our sight.

Thy shadowed eyes the truth behold, and we—
We too shall know the truth, and so be free!
Even now—yea, now
Through lies and vanities we pry and peer.
Even now we bow
At little shrines where pale fires flicker and
 flee.
Hark! in the echoing street
The drums that bang and beat,
Where the curb-stone preachers tell
The way to heaven and hell.
Look! in yon window there
A man through a glass astare
At atoms and embryos,
The source whence all life flows.
So you and I, O friend,

Search the beginning and end.
We may not choose but follow—
Yes, you and I and these—
The fume of the noisome hollow,
The gleam of the Pleiades.
Wherever one goes in quest
With his quest we are cursed or blest.
And the street, with its blazing mockery of
noon, Leads on to the quiet stars, to the lofty moon.
The little lights go out now row on row, The dim crowds glide away. The shadowed
street Pillars the vaulted sky. And Night, proud
 Night, Rapt in her dreams, with stately tread and slow Patrols the drowsy world. O friend complete,
How may we read her deep delight aright?
*Art thou he— The seer and sage, the hero and lover—yea, The man of men, then even to the gates of day
Lead thou me!*
<http://books.google.com/books?pg=PA17&lpg=PR7&dq=harriet+monroe+night+in+state+street&id=5DALAAAAIAAJ&ots=TqCUvIeAcG#v=onepage&q&f=false>