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# CHICAGO POEMS

By  
CARL SANDBURG



NEW YORK  
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1916

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—  
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To  
MY WIFE AND PAL  
LILLIAN STEICHEN SANDBURG



## PREFATORY NOTE

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CHICAGO POEMS



## CHICAGO

HOG Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight  
Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders :

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I  
have seen your painted women under the gas lamps  
luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it  
is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to  
kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is : On the  
faces of women and children I have seen the marks  
of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who  
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer  
and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing  
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on  
job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the  
little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning  
as a savage pitted against the wilderness,  
Bareheaded,  
Shoveling,  
Wrecking,  
Planning,  
Building, breaking, rebuilding,  
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with  
white teeth,  
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young  
man laughs,  
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has  
never lost a battle,  
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,  
and under his ribs the heart of the people,  
Laughing!  
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of  
Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog  
Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with  
Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

## SKETCH

THE shadows of the ships  
Rock on the crest  
In the low blue lustre  
Of the tardy and the soft inrolling tide.

A long brown bar at the dip of the sky  
Puts an arm of sand in the span of salt.

The lucid and endless wrinkles  
Draw in, lapse and withdraw.  
Wavelets crumble and white spent bubbles  
Wash on the floor of the beach.

Rocking on the crest  
In the low blue lustre  
Are the shadows of the ships.

## MASSES

AMONG the mountains I wandered and saw bine haze and  
red crag and was amazed ;  
On the beach where the long push under the endless tide  
maneuvers, I stood silent;  
Under the stars on the prairie watching the Dipper slant  
over the horizon's grass, I was full of thoughts.  
Great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and work-  
ers, mothers lifting their children—these all I  
touched, and felt the solemn thrill of them.  
And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions  
of the Poor, patient and toiling; more patient than  
crag, tides, and stars; innumerable, patient as the  
darkness of night—and all broken, humble ruins of  
nations.

## LOST

DESOLATE **and lone**  
All night long on the lake  
Where fog trails and mist creeps,  
The whistle of a boat  
Calls and cries unendingly,  
Like some lost child  
In tears and trouble  
Hunting the harbor's breast  
And the harbor's eyes.

## THE HARBOR

PASSING through huddled and ugly walls  
By doorways where women  
Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,  
Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,  
Out from the huddled and ugly walls,  
I came sudden, at the city's edge,  
On a blue burst of lake,  
Long lake waves breaking under the sun  
On a spray-flung curve of shore;  
And a fluttering storm of gulls,  
Masses of great gray wings  
And flying white bellies  
Veering and wheeling free in the open.

## THEY WILL SAY

OF my city the worst that men will ever say is this:  
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,  
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the  
    great sky,  
And the reckless rain; you put them between walls  
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,  
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted  
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights.

## MILL-DOORS

You never come back.  
I say good-by when I see you going in the doors,  
The hopeless open doors that call and wait  
And take you then for—how many cents a day?  
How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers ?

I say good-by because I know they tap your wrists,  
In the dark, in the silence, day by day,  
And all the blood of you drop by drop,  
And you are old before you are young.  
    You never come back.

## HALSTED STREET CAR

COME you, cartoonists,  
Hang on a strap with me here  
At seven o'clock in the morning  
On a Halsted street car.

Take your pencils  
And draw these faces.

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces,  
That pig-sticker in one corner—his mouth—  
That overall factory girl—her loose cheeks.

Find for your pencils  
A way to mark your memory  
Of tired empty faces.

After their night's sleep,  
In the moist dawn  
And cool daybreak,  
Faces  
Tired of wishes,  
Empty of dreams.

## CLARK STREET BRIDGE

DUST of the feet  
And dust of the wheels,  
Wagons and people going,  
All day feet and wheels.

Now. . .  
. . . Only stars and mist  
A lonely policeman,  
Two cabaret dancers,  
Stars and mist again,  
No more feet or wheels,  
No more dust and wagons.

Voices of dollars  
And drops of blood  
. . . .  
Voices of broken hearts,  
. . . Voices singing, singing,  
. . . Silver voices, singing,  
Softer than the stars,  
Softer than the mist.

## PASSERS-BY

PASSERS-BY,  
Out of your many faces  
Flash memories to me  
Now at the day end  
Away from the sidewalks  
Where your shoe soles traveled  
And your voices rose and blent  
To form the city's afternoon roar  
Hindering an old silence.

Passers-by,  
I remember lean ones among you,  
Throats in the clutch of a hope,  
Lips written over with strivings,  
Mouths that kiss only for love,  
Records of great wishes slept with,  
Held long  
And prayed and toiled for:

Yes,  
Written on  
Your mouths  
And your throats  
I read them  
When you passed by.

## THE WALKING MAN OF RODIN

LEGS hold a torso away from the earth.  
And a regular high poem of legs is here.  
Powers of bone and cord raise a belly and lungs  
Out of ooze and over the loam where eyes look and ears  
hear  
And arms have a chance to hammer and shoot and run  
motors.  
    You make us  
    Proud of our legs, old man.

And you left off the head here,  
The skull found always crumbling neighbor of the  
ankles.

## SUBWAY

DOWN between the walls of shadow  
Where the iron laws insist,  
    The hunger voices mock.

The worn wayfaring men  
With the hunched and humble shoulders,  
    Throw their laughter into toil.

## THE SHOVEL MAN

ON the street  
Slung on his shoulder is a handle half way across,  
Tied in a big knot on the scoop of cast iron  
Are the overalls faded from sun and rain in the ditches;  
Spatter of dry clay sticking yellow on his left sleeve  
    And a flimsy shirt open at the throat,  
    I know him for a shovel man,  
    A dago working for a dollar six bits a day  
And a dark-eyed woman in the old country dreams of  
    him for one of the world's ready men with a pair  
    of fresh lips and a kiss better than all the wild  
    grapes that ever grew in Tuscany.

## A TEAMSTER'S FAREWELL

### *Sobs En Route to a Penitentiary*

GOOD-BY now to the streets and the clash of wheels and  
locking hubs,  
The sun coming on the brass buckles and harness knobs,  
The muscles of the horses sliding under their heavy  
haunches,  
Good-by now to the traffic policeman and his whistle,  
The smash of the iron hoof on the stones,  
All the crazy wonderful slamming roar of the street—  
O God, there's noises I'm going to be hungry for.

## FISH CRIER

I KNOW a Jew fish crier down on Maxwell Street with a voice like a north wind blowing over corn stubble in January.

He dangles herring before prospective customers evincing a joy identical with that of Pavlowa dancing.

His face is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, terribly glad that God made fish, and customers to whom he may call his wares from a pushcart.

## PICNIC BOAT

SUNDAY night and the park policemen tell each other it is dark as a stack of black cats on Lake Michigan.

A big picnic boat comes home to Chicago from the peach farms of Saugatuck.

Hundreds of electric bulbs break the night's darkness, a flock of red and yellow birds with wings at a standstill.

Running along the deck railings are festoons and leaping in curves are loops of light from prow and stern to the tall smokestacks.

Over the hoarse crunch of waves at my pier comes a hoarse answer in the rhythmic oompa of the brasses playing a Polish folk-song for the home-comers.

## HAPPINESS

I ASKED professors who teach the meaning of life to tell  
me what is happiness.

And I went to famous executives who boss the work of  
thousands of men.

They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though  
I was trying to fool with them.

And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along  
the Desplaines river

And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with  
their women and children and a keg of beer and an  
accordion.

## MUCKERS

TWENTY men stand watching the muckers.

    Stabbing the sides of the ditch

    Where clay gleams yellow,

    Driving the blades of their shovels

    Deeper and deeper for the new gas mains,

    Wiping sweat off their faces

        With red bandanas.

The muckers work on . . . pausing . . . to pull

Their boots out of suckholes where they slosh.

Of the twenty looking on

Ten murmur, "O, it's a hell of a job,"

Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job."

## BLACKLISTED

WHY shall I keep the old name?

What is a name anywhere anyway?

A name is a cheap thing all fathers and mothers leave  
each child:

A job is a job and I want to live, so

Why does God Almighty or anybody else care whether  
I take a new name to go by ?

## GRACELAND

TOMB of a millionaire,  
A multi-millionaire, ladies and gentlemen,  
Place of the dead where they spend every year  
The usury of twenty-five thousand dollars  
    For upkeep and flowers  
To keep fresh the memory of the dead.  
The merchant prince gone to dust  
Commanded in his written will  
Over the signed name of his last testament  
Twenty-five thousand dollars be set aside  
For roses, lilacs, hydrangeas, tulips,  
For perfume and color, sweetness of remembrance  
Around his last long home.

(A hundred cash girls want nickels to go to the movies  
to-night.

In the back stalls of a hundred saloons, women are at  
tables

Drinking with men or waiting for men jingling loose  
silver dollars in their pockets.

In a hundred furnished rooms is a girl who sells silk or  
dress goods or leather stuff for six dollars a week  
wages

And when she pulls on her stockings in the morning she  
is reckless about God and the newspapers and the  
police, the talk of her home town or the name  
people call her.)

## CHILD OF THE ROMANS

THE dago shovelman sits by the railroad track  
Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna.

A train whirls by, and men and women at tables  
Alive with red roses and yellow jonquils,  
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,  
Strawberries and cream, eclaires and coffee.

The dago shovelman finishes the dry bread and bologna,  
Washes it down with a dipper from the water-boy,  
And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's  
work

Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils  
Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases  
Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars.

## THE RIGHT TO GRIEF

### *To Certain Poets About to Die*

TAKE your fill of intimate remorse, perfumed sorrow,  
Over the dead child of a millionaire,  
And the pity of Death refusing any check on the hank  
Which the millionaire might order his secretary to  
scratch off  
And get cashed.

Very well,  
You for your grief and I for mine.  
Let me have a sorrow my own if I want to.

I shall cry over the dead child of a stockyards hunky.  
His job is sweeping blood off the floor.  
He gets a dollar seventy cents a day when he works  
And it's many tubs of blood he shoves out with a broom  
day by day.

Now his three year old daughter  
Is in a white coffin that cost him a week's wages.  
Every Saturday night he will pay the undertaker fifty  
cents till the debt is wiped out.

The hunky and his wife and the kids  
Cry over the pinched face almost at peace in the white  
box.

They remember it was scrawny and ran up high doctor bills.

They are glad it is gone for the rest of the family now will have more to eat and wear.

Yet before the majesty of Death they cry around the coffin

And wipe their eyes with red bandanas and sob when the priest says, " God have mercy on us all."

I have a right to feel my throat choke about this.

You take your grief and I mine—see?

To-morrow there is no funeral and the hunky goes back to his job sweeping blood off the floor at a dollar seventy cents a day.

All he does all day long is keep on shoving hog blood ahead of him with a broom.

## MAG

I WISH to God I never saw you, Mag.  
I wish you never quit your job and came along with me.  
I wish we never bought a license and a white dress  
For you to get married in the day we ran off to a minister  
And told him we would love each other and take care of  
each other  
Always and always long as the sun and the rain lasts anywhere.  
Yes, I'm wishing now you lived somewhere away from  
here  
And I was a bum on the bumpers a thousand miles away  
dead broke.  
I wish the kids had never come  
And rent and coal and clothes to pay for  
And a grocery man calling for cash,  
Every day cash for beans and prunes.  
I wish to God I never saw you, Mag.  
I wish to God the kids had never come.

## ONION DAYS

MRS. GABRIELLE GIOVANNITTI comes along Peoria Street every morning at nine o'clock

With kindling wood piled on top of her head, her eyes looking straight ahead to find the way for her old feet.

Her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti, whose husband was killed in a tunnel explosion through the negligence of a fellow-servant,

Works ten hours a day, sometimes twelve, picking onions for Jasper on the Bowmanville road.

She takes a street car at half-past five in the morning, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti does,

And gets back from Jasper's with cash for her day's work, between nine and ten o'clock at night.

Last week she got eight cents a box, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti, picking onions for Jasper,

But this week Jasper dropped the pay to six cents a box because so many women and girls were answering the ads in the *Daily News*.

Jasper belongs to an Episcopal church in Ravenswood and on certain Sundays

He enjoys chanting the Nicene creed with his daughters on each side of him joining their voices with his.

If the preacher repeats old sermons of a Sunday, Jasper's mind wanders to his 700-acre farm and how he can make it produce more efficiently

And sometimes he speculates on whether he could word an ad in the *Daily News* so it would bring more women and girls out to his farm and reduce operating costs.

Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti is far from desperate about life; her joy is in a child she knows will arrive to her in three months.

And now while these are the pictures for today there are other pictures of the Giovannitti people I could give you for to-morrow,

And how some of them go to the county agent on winter mornings with their baskets for beans and cornmeal and molasses.

I listen to fellows saying here's good stuff for a novel or it might be worked up into a good play.

I say there's no dramatist living can put old Mrs. Gabrielle Giovannitti into a play with that kindling wood piled on top of her head coming along Peoria Street nine o'clock in the morning.

## POPULATION DRIFTS

NEW-MOWN hay smell and wind of the plain made her  
a woman whose ribs had the power of the hills in  
them and her hands were tough for work and there  
was passion for life in her womb.

She and her man crossed the ocean and the years that  
marked their faces saw them haggling with landlords  
and grocers while six children played on the stones  
and prowled in the garbage cans.

One child coughed its lungs away, two more have ade-  
noids and can neither talk nor run like their mother,  
one is in jail, two have jobs in a box factory

And as they fold the pasteboard, they wonder what the  
wishing is and the wistful glory in them that flut-  
ters faintly when the glimmer of spring comes on  
the air or the green of summer turns brown:

They do not know it is the new-mown hay smell calling  
and the wind of the plain praying for them to come  
back and take hold of life again with tough hands  
and with passion.

## CRIPPLE

ONCE when I saw a cripple  
Gasping slowly his last days with the white plague,  
Looking from hollow eyes, calling for air,  
Desperately gesturing with wasted hands  
In the dark and dust of a house down in a slum,  
I said to myself  
I would rather have been a tall sunflower  
Living in a country garden  
Lifting a golden-brown face to the summer,  
Rain-washed and dew-misted,  
Mixed with the poppies and ranking hollyhocks,  
And wonderingly watching night after night  
The clear silent processions of stars.

## A FENCE

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished and the workmen are beginning the fence.

The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that can stab the life out of any man who falls on them.

As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble and all vagabonds and hungry men and all wandering children looking for a place to play.

Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go nothing except Death and the Rain and To-morrow.

## ANNA IMROTH

CROSS the hands over the breast—so.  
Straighten the legs a little more—so.  
And call for the wagon to come and take her home.  
Her mother will cry some and so will her sisters and  
brothers.  
But all of the others got down and they are safe and  
this is the only one of the factory girls who  
wasn't lucky in making the jump when the fire  
broke.  
It is the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes.

## WORKING GIRLS

THE working girls in the morning are going to work—  
long lines of them afoot amid the downtown stores  
and factories, thousands with little brick-shaped  
lunches wrapped in newspapers under their arms.

Each morning as I move through this river of young-  
woman life I feel a wonder about where it is all  
going, so many with a peach bloom of young years  
on them and laughter of red lips and memories in  
their eyes of dances the night before and plays and  
walks.

Green and gray streams run side by side in a river and  
so here are always the others, those who have been  
over the way, the women who know each one the  
end of life's gamble for her, the meaning and the  
clew, the how and the why of the dances and the  
arms that passed around their waists and the fingers  
that played in their hair.

Faces go by written over: " I know it all, I know where  
the bloom and the laughter go and I have memo-  
ries," and the feet of these move slower and they  
have wisdom where the others have beauty.

So the green and the gray move in the early morning  
on the downtown streets.

## MAMIE

MAMIE beat her head against the bars of a little Indiana town and dreamed of romance and big things off somewhere the way the railroad trains all ran.

She could see the smoke of the engines get lost down where the streaks of steel flashed in the sun and when the newspapers came in on the morning mail she knew there was a big Chicago far off, where all the trains ran.

She got tired of the barber shop boys and the post office chatter and the church gossip and the old pieces the band played on the Fourth of July and Decoration Day

And sobbed at her fate and beat her head against the bars and was going to kill herself

When the thought came to her that if she was going to die she might as well die struggling for a clutch of romance among the streets of Chicago.

She has a job now at six dollars a week in the basement of the Boston Store

And even now she beats her head against the bars in the same old way and wonders if there is a bigger place the railroads run to from Chicago where maybe there is

romance  
and big things  
and real dreams  
that never go smash.

## PERSONALITY

### *Musings of a Police Reporter in the Identification Bureau*

You have loved forty women, but you have only one thumb.

You have led a hundred secret lives, but you mark only one thumb.

You go round the world and fight in a thousand wars and win all the world's honors, but when you come back home the print of the one thumb your mother gave you is the same print of thumb you had in the old home when your mother kissed you and said good-by.

Out of the whirling womb of time come millions of men and their feet crowd the earth and they cut one another's throats for room to stand and among them all are not two thumbs alike.

Somewhere is a Great God of Thumbs who can tell the inside story of this.

## CUMULATIVES

STORMS have beaten on this point of land  
And ships gone to wreck here  
    and the passers-by remember it  
    with talk on the deck at night  
    as they near it.

Fists have beaten on the face of this old prize-fighter  
And his battles have held the sporting pages  
    and on the street they indicate him with their  
    right fore-finger as one who once wore  
    a championship belt.

A hundred stories have been published and a thousand  
rumored  
About why this tall dark man has divorced two beau-  
tiful young women  
And married a third who resembles the first two  
    and they shake their heads and say, " There he  
    goes,"  
    when he passes by in sunny weather or in rain  
    along the city streets.

## TO CERTAIN JOURNEYMEN

UNDERTAKERS, hearse drivers, grave diggers,  
I speak to you as one not afraid of your business.

You handle dust going to a long country,  
You know the secret behind your job is the same whether  
you lower the coffin with modern, automatic ma-  
chinery, well-oiled and noiseless, or whether the  
body is laid in by naked hands and then covered  
by the shovels.

Your day's work is done with laughter many days of the  
year,  
And you earn a living by those who say good-by today  
in thin whispers.

## CHAMFORT

THERE'S Chamfort. He's a sample.  
Locked himself in his library with a gun,  
Shot off his nose and shot out his right eye.  
And this Chamfort knew how to write  
And thousands read his books on how to live,  
But he himself didn't know  
How to die by force of his own hand—see ?  
They found him a red pool on the carpet  
Cool as an April forenoon,  
Talking and talking gay maxims and grim epi-  
grams.  
Well, he wore bandages over his nose and right  
eye,  
Drank coffee and chatted many years  
With men and women who loved him  
Because he laughed and daily dared Death:  
" Come and take me/'

## LIMITED

I AM riding on a limited express, one of the crack trains  
of the nation.

Hurling across the prairie into blue haze and dark air  
go fifteen all-steel coaches holding a thousand peo-  
ple.

(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the men  
and women laughing in the diners and sleepers shall  
pass to ashes.)

I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and he  
answers: " Omaha."

## THE HAS-BEEN

A STONE face higher than six horses stood five thousand years gazing at the world seeming to clutch a secret.

A boy passes and throws a niggerhead that chips off the end of the nose from the stone face; he lets fly a mud ball that spatters the right eye and cheek of the old looker-on.

The boy laughs and goes whistling " ee-ce-ce ee-ec-ce."  
The stone face stands silent, seeming to clutch a secret.

## IN A BACK ALLEY

REMEMBRANCE for a great man is this.  
The newsies are pitching pennies.  
And on the copper disk is the man's face.  
Dead lover of boys, what do you ask for now ?

## A COIN

YOUR western heads here cast on money,  
You are the two that fade away together,  
Partners in the mist.

Lunging buffalo shoulder,  
Lean Indian face,  
We who come after where you are gone  
Salute your forms on the new nickel.

You are  
To us:  
The past.

Runners  
On the prairie:  
Good-by.

## DYNAMITER

I SAT with a dynamiter at supper in a German saloon  
eating steak and onions.

And he laughed and told stories of his wife and children  
and the cause of labor and the working class.

It was laughter of an unshakable man knowing life to be  
a rich and red-blooded thing.

Yes, his laugh rang like the call of gray birds filled with  
a glory of joy ramming their winged flight through  
a rain storm.

His name was in many newspapers as an enemy of the  
nation and few keepers of churches or schools would  
open their doors to him.

Over the steak and onions not a word was said of his  
deep days and nights as a dynamiter.

Only I always remember him as a lover of life, a lover  
of children, a lover of all free, reckless laughter  
everywhere—lover of red hearts and red blood the  
world over.

## ICE HANDLER

I KNOW an ice handler who wears a flannel shirt with  
pearl buttons the size of a dollar,  
And he lugs a hundred-pound hunk into a saloon ice-  
box, helps himself to cold ham and rye bread,  
Tells the bartender it's hotter than yesterday and will be  
hotter yet to-morrow, by Jesus,  
And is on his way with his head in the air and a hard  
pair of fists.  
He spends a dollar or so every Saturday night on a two  
hundred pound woman who washes dishes in the  
Hotel Morrison.  
He remembers when the union was organized he broke  
the noses of two scabs and loosened the nuts so the  
wheels came off six different wagons one morning,  
and he came around and watched the ice melt in the  
street.  
All he was sorry for was one of the scabs bit him on the  
knuckles of the right hand so they bled when he  
came around to the saloon to tell the boys about it.

## JACK

JACK was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun.

He worked thirty years on the railroad, ten hours a day, and his hands were tougher than sole leather.

He married a tough woman and they had eight children and the woman died and the children grew up and went away and wrote the old man every two years.

He died in the poorhouse sitting on a bench in the sun telling reminiscences to other old men whose women were dead and children scattered.

There was joy on his face when he died as there was joy on his face when he lived—he was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun.

## FELLOW CITIZENS

I DRANK musty ale at the Illinois Athletic Club with  
the millionaire manufacturer of Green River butter  
one night

And his face had the shining light of an old-time Quaker,  
he spoke of a beautiful daughter, and I knew he had  
a peace and a happiness up his sleeve somewhere.

Then I heard Jim Kirch make a speech to the Advertising  
Association on the trade resources of South  
America.

And the way he lighted a three-for-a-nickel stogie and  
cocked it at an angle regardless of the manners of  
our best people,

I knew he had a clutch on a real happiness even though  
some of the reporters on his newspaper say he is  
the living double of Jack London's Sea Wolf.

In the mayor's office the mayor himself told me he was  
happy though it is a hard job to satisfy all the office-  
seekers and eat all the dinners he is asked to eat.

Down in Gilpin Place, near Hull House, was a man with  
his jaw wrapped for a bad toothache,

And he had it all over the butter millionaire, Jim Kirch  
and the mayor when it came to happiness.

He is a maker of accordions and guitars and not only  
makes them from start to finish, but plays them  
after he makes them.

And he had a guitar of mahogany with a walnut bottom  
he offered for seven dollars and a half if I wanted it,  
And another just like it, only smaller, for six dollars,  
though he never mentioned the price till I asked  
him,

And he stated the price in a sorry way, as though the  
music and the make of an instrument count for a  
million times more than the price in money.

I thought he had a real soul and knew a lot about God.  
There was light in his eyes of one who has conquered  
sorrow in so far as sorrow is conquerable or worth  
conquering.

Anyway he is the only Chicago citizen I was jealous of  
that day.

He played a dance they play in some parts of Italy  
when the harvest of grapes is over and the wine  
presses are ready for work.

## NIGGER

I AM the nigger.  
Singer of songs,  
Dancer. . .  
Softer than fluff of cotton. . .  
Harder than dark earth  
Roads beaten in the sun  
By the bare feet of slaves. . .  
Foam of teeth . . . breaking crash of laughter. . .  
Red love of the blood of woman,  
White love of the tumbling pickaninnies. . .  
Lazy love of the banjo thrum. . .  
Sweated and driven for the harvest-wage,  
Loud laughter with hands like hams,  
Fists toughened on the handles,  
Smiling the slumber dreams of old jungles,  
*Crazy* as the sun and dew and dripping, heaving life  
of the jungle,  
Brooding and muttering with memories of shackles:  
    I am the nigger.  
    Look at me.  
    I am the nigger.

## TWO NEIGHBORS

FACES of two eternities keep looking at me.

One is Omar Khayam and the red stuff

wherein men forget yesterday and to-morrow  
and remember only the voices and songs,  
the stories, newspapers and fights of today.

One is Louis Cornaro and a slim trick

of slow, short meals across slow, short years,  
letting Death open the door only in slow, short  
inches.

I have a neighbor who swears by Omar.

I have a neighbor who swears by Cornaro.

Both are happy.

Faces of two eternities keep looking at me.

Let them look.

## STYLE

STYLE—go ahead talking about style.  
You can tell where a man gets his style just  
as you can tell where Pavlowa got her legs  
or Ty Cobb his batting eye.

Go on talking.  
Only don't take my style away.  
It's my face.  
Maybe no good  
but anyway, my face.  
I talk with it, I sing with it, I see, taste and feel with it,  
I know why I want to keep it.

Kill my style  
and you break Pavlowa's legs,  
and you blind Ty Cobb's batting eye.

TO BEACHEY, 1912

RIDING against the east,  
A veering, steady shadow  
Purrs the motor-call  
Of the man-bird  
Ready with the death-laughter  
In his throat  
And in his heart always  
The love of the big blue beyond.

Only a man,  
A far fleck of shadow on the east  
Sitting at ease  
With his hands on a wheel  
And around him the large gray wings.  
Hold him, great soft wings,  
Keep and deal kindly, O wings,  
With the cool, calm shadow at the wheel.

## UNDER A HAT RIM

WHILE the hum and the hurry  
Of passing footfalls  
Beat in my ear like the restless surf  
Of a wind-blown sea,  
A soul came to me  
Out of the look on a face.

Eyes like a lake  
Where a storm-wind roams  
Caught me from under  
The rim of a hat.

I thought of a midsea wreck  
and bruised fingers clinging  
to a broken state-room door.

## IN A BREATH

*To the Williamson Brothers*

HIGH noon. White sun flashes on the Michigan Avenue asphalt. Drum of hoofs and whirr of motors. Women tramping along in flimsy clothes catching play of sun-fire to their skin and eyes.

Inside the playhouse are movies from under the sea. From the heat of pavements and the dust of sidewalks, passers-by go in a breath to be witnesses of large cool sponges, large cool fishes, large cool valleys and ridges of coral spread silent in the soak of the ocean floor thousands of years.

A naked swimmer dives. A knife in his right hand shoots a streak at the throat of a shark. The tail of the shark lashes. One swing would kill the swimmer. . . . Soon the knife goes into the soft under-neck of the veering fish. . . . Its mouthful of teeth, each tooth a dagger itself, set row on row, glistens when the shuddering, yawning cadaver is hauled up by the brothers of the swimmer.

Outside in the street is the murmur and singing of life in the sun—horses, motors, women tramping along in flimsy clothes, play of sun-fire in their blood.

## **BATH**

A MAN saw the whole world as a grinning skull and cross-bones. The rose flesh of life shriveled from all faces. Nothing counts. Everything is a fake. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes and then an old darkness and a useless silence. So he saw it all. Then he went to a Mischa Elman concert. Two hours waves of sound beat on his eardrums. Music washed something or other inside him. Music broke down and rebuilt something or other in his head and heart. He joined in five encores for the young Russian Jew with the fiddle. When he got outside his heels hit the sidewalk a new way. He was the same man in the same world as before. Only there was a singing fire and a climb of roses everlastingly over the world he looked on.

## BRONZES

### I

THE bronze General Grant riding a bronze horse in Lincoln Park

Shrivels in the sun by day when the motor cars whirr  
by in long processions going somewhere to keep appointment for dinner and matinees and buying and selling

Though in the dusk and nightfall when high waves are piling

On the slabs of the promenade along the lake shore near  
**by**

I have seen the general dare the combers come closer  
And make to ride his bronze horse out into the hoofs  
and guns of the storm.

## II

I cross Lincoln Park on a winter night when the snow  
is falling.

Lincoln in bronze stands among the white lines of snow,  
his bronze forehead meeting soft echoes of the new-  
sies crying forty thousand men are dead along the  
Yser, his bronze ears listening to the mumbled roar  
of the city at his bronze feet.

A lithe Indian on a bronze pony, Shakespeare seated with  
long legs in bronze, Garibaldi in a bronze cape, they  
hold places in the cold, lonely snow to-night on their  
pedestals and so they will hold them past midnight  
and into the dawn.

## DUNES

WHAT do we see here in the sand dunes of the white  
moon alone with our thoughts, Bill,  
Alone with our dreams, Bill, soft as the women tying  
scarves around their heads dancing,  
Alone with a picture and a picture coming one after the  
other of all the dead,  
The dead more than all these grains of sand one by one  
piled here in the moon,  
Piled against the sky-line taking shapes like the hand of  
the wind wanted,  
What do we see here, Bill, outside of what the wise men  
beat their heads on,  
Outside of what the poets cry for and the soldiers drive  
on headlong and leave their skulls in the sun for—  
what, Bill?

## ON THE WAY

LITTLE one, you have been buzzing in the books,  
Flittering in the newspapers and drinking beer with  
lawyers

And amid the educated men of the clubs you have been  
getting an earful of speech from trained tongues.

Take an earful from me once, go with me on a hike

Along sand stretches on the great inland sea here

And while the eastern breeze blows on us and the rest-  
less surge

Of the lake waves on the breakwater breaks with an ever  
fresh monotone,

Let us ask ourselves: What is truth ? what do you or I  
know?

How much do the wisest of the world's men know about  
where the massed human procession is going?

You have heard the mob laughed at?

I ask you: Is not the mob rough as the mountains are  
rough ?

And all things human rise from the mob and relapse and  
rise again as rain to the sea ?

## READY TO KILL

TEN minutes now I have been looking at this.  
I have gone by here before and wondered about it.  
This is a bronze memorial of a famous general  
Riding horseback with a flag and a sword and a revolver  
on him.

I want to smash the whole thing into a pile of junk to be  
hailed away to the scrap yard.

I put it straight to you,  
After the farmer, the miner, the shop man, the factory  
hand, the fireman and the teamster,

Have all been remembered with bronze memorials,  
Shaping them on the job of getting all of us  
Something to eat and something to wear,  
When they stack a few silhouettes

Against the sky

Here in the park,

And show the real huskies that are doing the work of  
the world, and feeding people instead of butchering  
them,

Then maybe I will stand here

And look easy at this general of the army holding a flag  
in the air,

And riding like hell on horseback

Ready to kill anybody that gets in his way,

Ready to run the red blood and slush the bowels of men  
all over the sweet new grass of the prairie.

## TO A CONTEMPORARY BUNKSHOOTER

You come along. . . tearing your shirt. . . yelling about Jesus.

Where do you get that stuff ?

What do you know about Jesus?

Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope.

You come along squirting words at us, shaking your fist and calling us all dam fools so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips. . . always blabbing we're all going to hell straight off and you know all about it.

I've read Jesus' words. I know what he said. You don't throw any scare into me. I've got your number. I know how much you know about Jesus.

He never came near clean people or dirty people but they felt cleaner because he came along. It was your crowd of bankers and business men and lawyers hired the sluggers and murderers who put Jesus out of the running.

I say the same bunch backing you nailed the nails into the hands of this Jesus of Nazareth. He had lined up against him the same crooks and strong-arm men now lined up with you paying your way.

This Jesus was good to look at, smelled good, listened good. He threw out something fresh and beautiful from the skin of his body and the touch of his hands wherever he passed along.

You slimy bunkshooter, you put a smut on every human blossom in reach of your rotten breath belching about hell-fire and hiccupping about this Man who lived a clean life in Galilee.

When are you going to quit making the carpenters build emergency hospitals for women and girls driven crazy with wrecked nerves from your gibberish about Jesus—I put it to you again: Where do you get that stuff; what do you know about Jesus?

Go ahead and bust all the chairs you want to. Smash a whole wagon load of furniture at every performance. Turn sixty somersaults and stand on your nutty head. If it wasn't for the way you scare the women and kids I'd feel sorry for you and pass the hat.

I like to watch a good four-flusher work, but not when he starts people puking and calling for the doctors.

I like a man that's got nerve and can pull off a great original performance, but you—you're only a bug-house peddler of second-hand gospel—you're only

shoving out a phoney imitation of the goods this Jesus wanted free as air and sunlight.

You tell people living in shanties Jesus is going to fix it up all right with them by giving them mansions in the skies after they're dead and the worms have eaten 'em.

You tell \$6 a week department store girls all they need is Jesus; you take a steel trust wop, dead without having lived, gray and shrunken at forty years of age, and you tell him to look at Jesus on the cross and he'll be all right.

You tell poor people they don't need any more money on pay day and even if it's fierce to be out of a job, Jesus'll fix that up all right, all right—all they gotta do is take Jesus the way you say.

*I'm* telling you Jesus wouldn't stand for the stuff you're handing out. Jesus played it different. The bankers and lawyers of Jerusalem got their sluggers and murderers to go after Jesus just because Jesus wouldn't play their game. He didn't sit in with the big thieves.

I don't want a lot of gab from a bunkshooter in my religion.

I won't take my religion from any man who never works except with his mouth and never cherishes any memory except the face of the woman on the American silver dollar.

I ask you to come through and show me where you're pouring out the blood of your life.

I've been to this suburb of Jerusalem they call Golgotha,  
where they nailed Him, and I know if the story is  
straight it was real blood ran from His hands and  
the nail-holes, and it was real blood spurted in red  
drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed  
in between the ribs of this Jesus of Nazareth.

## SKYSCRAPER

BY day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul.

Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys.

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.

(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and parcels and iron pipes carry gas and water in and sewage out.

Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words, and tell terrors and profits and loves—curses of men grappling plans of business and questions of women in plots of love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the earth and hold the building to a turning planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid in graves where the wind whistles a wild song without words

And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipes and tubes and those who saw it rise floor by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors hundreds of miles away and the bricklayer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.

(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge—he is here—his soul has gone into the stones of the building.)

On the office doors from tier to tier—hundreds of names and each name standing for a face written across with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's ease of life.

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from room to room.

Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.

Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just the same as the master-men who rule the building.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away and eat and come back to work.

Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on them.

One by one the floors are emptied. . . The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . . Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day.

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds. . . Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets. . . Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul.



# HANDFULS



## FOG

THE fog comes  
on little cat feet.

It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

## POOL

OUT of the fire  
Came a man sunken  
To less than cinders,  
A tea-cup of ashes or so.  
And I,  
The gold in the house,  
Writhed into a stiff pool.

JAN KUBELIK

YOUR bow swept over a string, and a long low note  
quivered to the air.

(A mother of Bohemia sobs over a new child perfect  
learning to suck milk.)

Your bow ran fast over all the high strings fluttering  
and wild.

(All the girls in Bohemia are laughing on a Sunday after-  
noon in the hills with their lovers.)

## CHOOSE

THE single clenched fist lifted and ready,  
Or the open asking hand held out and waiting.

Choose:

For we meet by one or the other.

## CRIMSON

CRIMSON is the slow smolder of the cigar end I hold,  
Gray is the ash that stiffens and covers all silent the fire.  
(A great man I know is dead and while he lies in his  
coffin a gone flame I sit here in cumbering shadows  
and smoke and watch my thoughts come and go.)

## WHITELIGHT

YOUR whitelight flashes the frost to-night  
Moon of the purple and silent west.  
Remember me one of your lovers of dreams.

## **FLUX**

SAND of the sea runs red  
Where the sunset reaches and quivers.  
Sand of the sea runs yellow  
Where the moon slants and wavers.

## KIN

BROTHER, I am fire  
Surging under the ocean floor.  
I shall never meet you, brother—  
Not for years, anyhow;  
Maybe thousands of years, brother.  
Then I will warm you,  
Hold you close, wrap you in circles,  
Use you and change you—  
Maybe thousands of years, brother.

## WHITE SHOULDERS

YOUR white shoulders  
I remember  
And your shrug of laughter.

Low laughter  
Shaken slow  
From your white shoulders.

## LOSSES

I HAVE love  
And a child,  
A banjo  
And shadows.  
(Losses of God,  
All will go  
And one day  
We will hold  
Only the shadows.)

## TROTHS

YELLOW dust on a bumble  
bee's wing,  
Grey lights in a woman's  
asking eyes,  
Red ruins in the changing  
sunset embers:  
I take you and pile high  
the memories.  
Death will break her claws  
on some I keep.



WAR POEMS  
(1914-1915)



## KILLERS

I AM singing to you  
Soft as a man with a dead child speaks;  
Hard as a man in handcuffs,  
Held where he cannot move:

Under the sun  
Are sixteen million men,  
Chosen for shining teeth,  
Sharp eyes, hard legs,  
And a running of young warm blood in their wrists.

And a red juice runs on the green grass;  
And a red juice soaks the dark soil.  
And the sixteen million are killing . . . and killing  
and killing.

I never forget them day or night:  
They beat on my head for memory of them;  
They pound on my heart and I cry back to them,  
To their homes and women, dreams and games.

I wake in the night and smell the trenches,  
And hear the low stir of sleepers in lines—  
Sixteen million sleepers and pickets in the dark:  
Some of them long sleepers for always,

Some of them tumbling to sleep to-morrow for al-  
ways,  
Fixed in the drag of the world's heartbreak,  
Eating and drinking, toiling ... on a long job of  
killing.  
Sixteen million men.

## AMONG THE RED GUNS

*After waking at dawn one morning when the wind sang  
low among dry leaves in an elm*

AMONG the red guns,  
In the hearts of soldiers  
Running free blood  
In the long, long campaign:  
Dreams go on.

Among the leather saddles,  
In the heads of soldiers  
Heavy in the wracks and kills  
Of all straight fighting:  
Dreams go on.

Among the hot muzzles,  
In the hands of soldiers  
Brought from flesh-folds of women—  
Soft amid the blood and crying—  
In all your hearts and heads  
Among the guns and saddles and muzzles:

Dreams,  
Dreams go on,  
Out of the dead on their backs,  
Broken and no use any more:  
Dreams of the way and the end go on.

## IRON

GUNS,  
Long, steel guns,  
Pointed from the war ships  
In the name of the war god.  
Straight, shining, polished guns,  
Clambered over with jackies in white blouses,  
Glory of tan faces, tousled hair, white teeth,  
Laughing lithe jackies in white blouses,  
Sitting on the guns singing war songs, war  
chanties.

Shovels,  
Broad, iron shovels,  
Scooping out oblong vaults,  
Loosening turf and leveling sod.

I ask you  
To witness—  
The shovel is brother to the gun.

## MURMURINGS IN A FIELD HOSPITAL

*[They picked him up in the grass where he had lain two days in the rain with a piece of shrapnel in his lungs.,*

COME to me only with playthings now . . .  
A picture of a singing woman with blue eyes  
Standing at a fence of hollyhocks, poppies and sun-  
flowers . . .  
Or an old man I remember sitting with children telling  
stories  
Of days that never happened anywhere in the  
world . . .

No more iron cold and real to handle,  
Shaped for a drive straight ahead.  
Bring me only beautiful useless things.  
Only old home things touched at sunset in the  
quiet . . .  
And at the window one day in summer  
Yellow of the new crock of butter  
Stood against the red of new climbing roses . . .  
And the world was all playthings.

## STATISTICS

NAPOLEON shifted,  
Restless in the old sarcophagus  
And murmured to a watchguard:  
"Who goes there?"  
" Twenty-one million men,  
Soldiers, armies, guns,  
Twenty-onemillion  
Afoot, horseback,  
In the air,  
Under the sea."  
And Napoleon turned to his sleep:  
" It is not my world answering;  
It is some dreamer who knows not  
The world I marched in  
From Calais to Moscow."  
And he slept on  
In the old sarcophagus  
While the aeroplanes  
Droned their motors  
Between Napoleon's mausoleum  
And the cool night stars.

## FIGHT

RED drips from my chin where I have been eating.  
Not all the blood, nowhere near all, is wiped off my  
mouth.

Clots of red mess my hair  
And the tiger, the buffalo, know how.

I was a killer.  
Yes, I am a killer.

I come from killing.  
I go to more.  
I drive red joy ahead of me from killing.  
Red gluts and red hungers run in the smears and juices  
of my inside bones:  
The child cries for a suck mother and I cry for war.

## BUTTONS

I HAVE been watching the war map slammed up for  
advertising in front of the newspaper office.  
Buttons—red and yellow buttons—blue and black but-  
tons—are shoved back and forth across the map.

A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,  
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,  
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west  
And follows the yellow button with a black button one  
inch west.

(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in  
a red soak along a river edge,  
Gasping of wounds, calling for water, some rattling  
death in their throats.)

Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one  
inch on the war map here in front of the newspaper  
office where the freckle-faced young man is laugh-  
ing to us?

## AND THEY OBEY

SMASH down the cities.

Knock the walls to pieces.

Break the factories and cathedrals, warehouses  
and homes

Into loose piles of stone and lumber and black  
burnt wood :

You are the soldiers and we command you.

Build up the cities.

Set up the walls again.

Put together once more the factories and cathedrals,  
warehouses and homes

Into buildings for life and labor :

You are workmen and citizens all: We  
command you.

## JAWS

SEVEN nations stood with their hands on the jaws of death.

It was the first week in August, Nineteen Hundred Fourteen.

I was listening, you were listening, the whole world was listening,

And all of us heard a Voice murmuring:

" I am the way and the light,

He that believeth on me

Shall not perish

But shall have everlasting life."

Seven nations listening heard the Voice and answered:

"O Hell!"

The jaws of death began clicking and they go on clicking:

"O Hell!"

## SALVAGE

GUNS on the battle lines have pounded now a year between Brussels and Paris.

And, William Morris, when I read your old chapter on the great arches and naves and little whimsical corners of the Churches of Northern France—Brr-rr! I'm glad you're a dead man, William Morris, I'm glad you're down in the damp and mouldy, only a memory instead of a living man—I'm glad you're gone.

You never lied to us, William Morris, you loved the shape of those stones piled and carved for you to dream over and wonder because workmen got joy of life into them,

Workmen in aprons singing while they hammered, and praying, and putting their songs and prayers into the walls and roofs, the bastions and cornerstones and gargoyles—all their children and kisses of women and wheat and roses growing.

I say, William Morris, I'm glad you're gone, I'm glad you're a dead man.

Guns on the battle lines have pounded a year now between Brussels and Paris.

## WARS

IN the old wars drum of hoofs and the beat of shod feet.  
, In the new wars hum of motors and the tread of rubber  
tires.

In the wars to come silent wheels and whirr of rods not  
yet dreamed out in the heads of men.

In the old wars clutches of short swords and jabs into  
faces with spears.

In the new wars long range guns and smashed walls, guns  
running a spit of metal and men falling in tens and  
twenties.

In the wars to come new silent deaths, new silent hurlers  
not yet dreamed out in the heads of men.

In the old wars kings quarreling and thousands of men  
following.

In the new wars kings quarreling and millions of men  
following.

In the wars to come kings kicked under the dust and  
millions of men following great causes not yet  
dreamed out in the heads of men.

THE ROAD AND THE END



## THE ROAD AND THE END

### **I SHALL foot it**

Down the roadway in the dusk,  
Where shapes of hunger wander  
And the fugitives of pain go by.

I shall foot it

In the silence of the morning,  
See the night slur into dawn,  
Hear the slow great winds arise  
Where tall trees flank the way  
And shoulder toward the sky.

The broken boulders by the road  
Shall not commemorate my ruin.  
Regret shall be the gravel under foot.

I shall watch for

Slim birds swift of wing

That go where wind and ranks of thunder  
Drive the wild processions of rain.

The dust of the traveled road  
Shall touch my hands and face.

## CHOICES

THEY offer you many things,

I a few.

Moonlight on the play of fountains at night

With water sparkling a drowsy monotone,

Bare-shouldered, smiling women and talk

And a cross-play of loves and adulteries

And a fear of death

and a remembering of regrets:

All this they offer you.

I come with:

salt and bread

a terrible job of work

and tireless war;

Come and have now:

hunger.

danger

and hate.

## GRAVES

I DREAMED one man stood against a thousand,  
One man damned as a wrongheaded fool.  
One year and another he walked the streets,  
And a thousand shrugs and hoots  
Met him in the shoulders and mouths he passed.

He died alone  
And only the undertaker came to his funeral.

Flowers grow over his grave anod in the wind,  
And over the graves of the thousand, too,  
The flowers grow anod in the wind.

Flowers and the wind,  
Flowers anod over the graves of the dead,  
Petals of red, leaves of yellow, streaks of white,  
Masses of purple sagging . . .  
I love you and your great way of forgetting.

## AZTEC MASK

I WANTED a man's face looking into the jaws and throat  
of life

With something proud on his face, so proud no smash  
of the jaws,

No gulp of the throat leaves the face in the end

With anything else than the old proud look:

Even to the finish, dumped in the dust,

Lost among the used-up cinders,

This face, men would say, is a flash,

Is laid on bones taken from the ribs of the earth,

Ready for the hammers of changing, changing  
years,

Ready for the sleeping, sleeping years of silence.

Ready for the dust and fire and wind.

I wanted this face and I saw it today in an Aztec mask.

A cry out of storm and dark, a red yell and a purple  
prayer,

A beaten shape of ashes

waiting the sunrise or night,

something or nothing,

proud-mouthed,

proud-eyed gambler.

## MOMUS

MOMUS is the name men give your face,  
The brag of its tone, like a long low steamboat whistle  
Finding a way mid mist on a shoreland,  
Where gray rocks let the salt water shatter spray  
Against horizons purple, silent.

Yes, Momus,  
Men have flung your face in bronze  
To gaze in gargyle downward on a street-whirl of folk.  
They were artists did this, shaped your sad mouth,  
Gave you a tall forehead slanted with calm, broad wisdom;  
All your lips to the corners and your cheeks to the high bones  
Thrown over and through with a smile that forever  
wishes and wishes, purple, silent, fled from all the  
iron things of life, evaded like a sought bandit, gone  
into dreams, by God.

I wonder, Momus,  
Whether shadows of the dead sit somewhere and look  
with deep laughter  
On men who play in terrible earnest the old, known,  
solemn repetitions of history.

A droning monotone soft as sea laughter hovers from  
your kindness of bronze,

You give me the human ease of a mountain peak, purple,  
silent;

Granite shoulders heaving above the earth curves,  
Careless eye-witness of the spawning tides of men and  
women

Swarming always in a drift of millions to the dust of toil,  
the salt of tears,

And blood drops of undiminishing war.

## THE ANSWER

You have spoken the answer.  
A child searches far sometimes  
Into the red dust  
    On a dark rose leaf  
And so you have gone far  
    For the answer is:  
        Silence.

In the republic  
Of the winking stars  
    and spent cataclysms  
Sure we are it is off there the answer  
    is hidden and folded over,  
Sleeping in the sun, careless whether  
    it is Sunday or any other day of  
    the week,

Knowing silence will bring all one way  
or another.

Have we not seen  
Purple of the pansy  
    out of the mulch  
    and mold  
    crawl

into a dusk  
of velvet?  
blur of yellow ?

Almost we thought from nowhere but it was  
the silence,  
the future,  
working.

## TO A DEAD MAN

OVER the dead line we have called to you  
To come across with a word to us,  
Some beaten whisper of what happens  
Where you are over the dead line  
Deaf to our calls and voiceless.

The flickering shadows have not answered  
Nor your lips sent a signal  
Whether Icve talks and roses grow  
And the sun breaks at morning  
Splattering the sea with crimson.

## UNDER

### I

I AM the undertow  
Washing tides of power  
Battering the pillars  
Under your things of high law.

### II

I am a sleepless  
Slowfaring eater,  
Maker of rust and rot  
In your bastioned fastenings,  
Caissons deep.

### in

I am the Law  
Older than you  
And your builders proud,

I am deaf  
In all days  
Whether you  
Say " Yes " or " No ".

I am the crumbier:  
To-morrow.

## A SPHINX

CLOSE-MOUTHED you sat five thousand years and never  
let out a whisper.

Processions came by, marchers, asking questions you  
answered with grey eyes never blinking, shut lips  
never talking.

Not one croak of anything you know has come from your  
cat crouch of ages.

I am one of those who know all you know and I keep my  
questions: I know the answers you hold.

## WHO AM I?

MY head knocks against the stars.

My feet are on the hilltops.

My finger-tips are in the valleys and shores of  
universal life.

Down in the sounding foam of primal things I  
reach my hands and play with pebbles of  
destiny.

I have been to hell and back many times.

I know all about heaven, for I have talked with  
God.

I dabble in the blood and guts of the terrible.

I know the passionate seizure of beauty

And the marvelous rebellion of man at all signs  
reading " Keep Off."

My name is Truth and I am the most elusive cap-  
tive in the universe.

## OUR PRAYER OF THANKS

FOR the gladness here where the sun is shining at evening  
on the weeds at the river,  
Our prayer of thanks.

For the laughter of children who tumble barefooted and  
bareheaded in the summer grass,  
Our prayer of thanks.

For the sunset and the stars, the women and the white  
arms that hold us,  
Our prayer of thanks.

God,  
If you are deaf and blind, if this is all lost to you,  
God, if the dead in their coffins amid the silver handles  
on the edge of town, or the reckless dead of war  
days thrown unknown in pits, if these dead are forever  
deaf and blind and lost,  
Our prayer of thanks.

God,  
The game is all your way, the secrets and the signals and  
the system; and so for the break of the game and  
the first play and the last.  
Our prayer of thanks.



..

# FOGS AND FIRES



## AT A WINDOW

GIVE me hunger,  
O you gods that sit and give  
The world its orders.  
Give me hunger, pain and want,  
Shut me out with shame and failure  
From your doors of gold and fame,  
Give me your shabbiest, weariest hunger!

But leave me a little love,  
A voice to speak to me in the day end,  
A hand to touch me in the dark room  
Breaking the long loneliness.  
In the dusk of day-shapes  
Blurring the sunset,  
One little wandering, western star  
Thrust out from the changing shores of shadow.  
Let me go to the window,  
Watch there the day-shapes of dusk  
And wait and know the coming  
Of a little love.

## UNDER THE HARVEST MOON

UNDER the harvest moon,  
When the soft silver  
Drips shimmering  
Over the garden nights,  
Death, the gray mocker,  
Comes and whispers to you  
As a beautiful friend  
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses  
When the flagrant crimson  
Lurks in the dusk  
Of the wild red leaves,  
Love, with little hands,  
Comes and touches you  
With a thousand memories,  
And asks you  
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

## THE GREAT HUNT

I CANNOT tell you now;  
When the wind's drive and whirl  
Blow me along no longer,  
And the wind's a whisper at last—  
Maybe I'll tell you then—  
some other time.

When the rose's flash to the sunset  
Reels to the rack and the twist,  
And the rose is a reel bygone,  
When the face I love is going  
And the gate to the end shall clang,  
And it's no use to beckon or say, " So long "—  
Maybe I'll tell you then—  
some other time.

I never knew any more beautiful than you:  
I have hunted you under my thoughts,  
I have broken down under the wind  
And into the roses looking for you.  
I shall never find any  
greater than you.

## MONOTONE

THE monotone of the rain is beautiful,  
And the sudden rise and slow relapse  
Of the long multitudinous rain.

The sun on the hills is beautiful,  
Or a captured sunset sea-flung,  
Bannered with fire and gold.

A face I know is beautiful—  
With fire and gold of sky and sea,  
And the peace of long warm rain.

## JOY

LET a joy keep you.  
Reach out your hands  
And take it when it runs by,  
As the Apache dancer  
Clutches his woman.  
I have seen them  
Live long and laugh loud,  
Sent on singing, singing,  
Smashed to the heart  
Under the ribs  
With a terrible love.  
Joy always,  
Joy everywhere—  
Let joy kill you !  
Keep away from the little deaths.

## SHIRT

I REMEMBER once I ran after you and tagged the fluttering shirt of you in the wind.

Once many days ago I drank a glassful of something and the picture of you shivered and slid on top of the stuff.

And again it was nobody else but you I heard in the singing voice of a careless humming woman.

One night when I sat with chums telling stories at a bonfire flickering red embers, in a language its own talking to a spread of white stars:

It was you that slunk laughing  
in the clumsy staggering shadows.

Broken answers of remembrance let me know you are alive with a peering phantom face behind a doorway somewhere in the city's push and fury

Or under a pack of moss and leaves waiting in silence under a twist of oaken arms ready as ever to run away again when I tag the fluttering shirt of you.



## TWO

MEMORY of you is ... a blue spear of flower.  
I cannot remember the name of it.  
Alongside a bold dripping poppy is fire and silk.  
And they cover you.

## BACK YARD

SHINE on, O moon of summer.  
Shine to the leaves of grass, catalpa and oak,  
All silver under your rain to-night.

An Italian boy is sending songs to you to-night from an  
accordion.

A Polish boy is out with his best girl; they many next  
month; to-night they are throwing you kisses.

An old man next door is dreaming over a sheen that sits  
in a cherry tree in his back yard.

The clocks say I must go—I stay here sitting on the  
back porch drinking white thoughts you rain down.

Shine on, O moon,  
Shake out more and more silver changes.

## ON THE BREAKWATER

ON the breakwater in the summer dark, a man and a  
girl are sitting,  
She across his knee and they are looking face into face  
Talking to each other without words, singing rhythms in  
silence to each other.

A funnel of white ranges the blue dusk from an out-  
going boat,  
Playing its searchlight, puzzled, abrupt, over a streak of  
green,  
And two on the breakwater keep their silence, she on his  
knee.

## MASK

FLING your red scarf faster and faster, dancer.  
It is summer and the sun loves a million green leaves,  
masses of green.  
Your red scarf flashes across them calling and a-calling.  
The silk and flare of it is a great soprano leading a  
chorus  
Carried along in a rouse of voices reaching for the heart  
of the world.  
Your toes are singing to meet the song of your arms:  
  
Let the red scarf go swifter.  
Summer and the sun command you.

## PEARL FOG

OPEN the door now.  
Go roll up the collar of your coat  
To walk in the changing scarf of mist.

Tell your sins here to the pearl fog  
And know for once a deepening night  
Strange as the half-meanings  
Alurk in a wise woman's mousey eyes.

Yes, tell your sins  
And know how careless a pearl fog is  
Of the laws you have broken.

## I SANG

I SANG to you and the moon  
But only the moon remembers.

I sang

~~O reckless free-hearted~~ /  
O reckless free-hearted free-throated rhythms,

Even the moon remembers 'them  
And is kind to me.

## FOLLIES

SHAKEN,  
The blossoms of lilac,  
And shattered,  
The atoms of purple.  
Green dip the leaves,  
Darker the bark,  
Longer the shadows.

Sheer lines of poplar  
Shimmer with masses of silver  
And down in a garden old with years  
And broken walls of ruin and story,  
Roses rise with red rain-memories.

May!  
In the open world  
The sun comes and finds your face,  
Remembering all.

## JUNE

PAULA is digging and shaping the loam of a salvia,  
Scarlet Chinese talker of summer.  
Two petals of crabapple blossom blow fallen in Paula's  
hair,  
And fluff of white from a cottonwood.

NOCTURNE IN A DESERTED  
BRICKYARD

STUFF of the moon  
Runs on the lapping sand  
Out to the longest shadows.  
Under the curving willows,  
And round the creep of the wave line,  
Fluxions of yellow and dusk on the waters  
Make a wide dreaming pansy of an old pond in the night.

## HYDRANGEAS

DRAGOONS, I tell you the white hydrangeas  
turn rust and go soon.

Already mid September a line of brown runs  
over them.

One sunset after another tracks the faces, the  
petals.

Waiting, they look over the fence for what  
way they go.

## THEME IN YELLOW

I SPOT the hills  
With yellow balls in autumn.  
I light the prairie cornfields,  
Orange and tawny gold clusters  
And I am called pumpkins.  
On the last of October  
When dusk is fallen  
Children join hands  
And circle round me  
Singing ghost songs  
And love to the harvest moon;  
I am a jack-o'-lantern  
With terrible teeth  
And the children know  
I am fooling.

## BETWEEN TWO HILLS

BETWEEN two hills  
The old town stands.  
The houses loom  
And the roofs and trees  
And the dusk and the dark,  
The damp and the dew  
Are there.

The prayers are said  
And the people rest  
For sleep is there  
And the touch of dreams  
Is over all.

## LAST ANSWERS

I WROTE a poem on the mist  
And a woman asked me what I meant by it.  
I had thought till then only of the beauty of the mist,  
    how pearl and gray of it mix and reel,  
And change the drab shanties with lighted lamps at even-  
    ing into points of mystery quivering with color.

I answered:  
The whole world was mist once long ago and some day  
    it will all go back to mist,  
Our skulls and lungs are more water than bone and  
    tissue  
And all poets love dust and mist because all the last  
    answers.  
Go running back to dust and mist.

## WINDOW

NIGHT from a railroad car window  
Is a great, dark, soft thing  
Broken across with slashes of light.

## YOUNG SEA

THE sea is never still.  
It pounds on the shore  
Restless as a young heart,  
Hunting.

The sea speaks  
And only the stormy hearts  
Know what it says:  
It is the face  
    of a rough mother speaking.

The sea is young.  
One storm cleans all the hoar  
And loosens the age of it.  
I hear it laughing, reckless.

They love the sea,  
Men who ride on it  
And know they will die  
Under the salt of it

Let only the young come,  
Says the sea.

Let them kiss my face  
And hear me.  
I am the last word  
And I tell  
Where storms and stars come from.

## BONES

SLING me under the sea.  
Pack me down in the salt and wet.  
No farmer's plow shall touch my bones.  
No Hamlet hold my jaws and speak  
How jokes are gone and empty is my mouth.  
Long, green-eyed scavengers shall pick my eyes,  
Purple fish play hide-and-seek,  
And I shall be song of thunder, crash of sea,  
Down on the floors of salt and wet.  
    Sling me ... under the sea.

## PALS

TAKE a hold now  
On the silver handles here,  
Six silver handles,  
One for each of his old pals.

Take hold  
And lift him down the stairs,  
Put him on the rollers  
Over the floor of the hearse.

Take him on the last haul,  
To the cold straight house,  
The level even house,  
To the last house of all.

The dead say nothing  
And the dead know much  
And the dead hold under their tongues  
A locked-up story.

## CHILD

THE young child, Christ, is straight and wise  
And asks questions of the old men, questions  
Found under running water for all children  
And found under shadows thrown on still waters  
By tall trees looking downward, old and gnarled.  
Found to the eyes of children alone, untold,  
Singing a low song in the loneliness.  
And the young child, Christ, goes on asking  
And the old men answer nothing and only know love  
For the young child. Christ, straight and wise.



## CHILD MOON

THE child's wonder  
At the old moon  
Comes back nightly.  
She points her finger  
To the far silent yellow thing  
Shining through the branches  
Filtering on the leaves a golden sand,  
Crying with her little tongue, " See the moon!"  
And in her bed fading to sleep  
With babblings of the moon on her little mouth.

## MARGARET

MANY birds and the beating of wings  
Make a flinging reckless hum  
In the early morning at the rocks  
Above the blue pool  
Where the gray shadows swim lazy.

In your blue eyes, O reckless child,  
I saw today many little wild wishes,  
Eager as the great morning.



# SHADOWS



## POEMS DONE ON A LATE NIGHT CAR

### I. CHICKENS

I AM The Great White Way of the city:  
When you ask what is my desire, I answer:  
" Girls fresh as country wild flowers,  
With young faces tired of the cows and barns,  
Eager in their eyes as the dawn to find my mysteries,  
Slender supple girls with shapely legs,  
Lure in the arch of their little shoulders  
And wisdom from the prairies to cry only softly at  
the ashes of my mysteries.'

## II. USED UP

*Lines based on certain regrets that come with rumination upon the painted faces of women on North Clark Street, Chicago*

Roses,  
Red roses,  
Crushed  
In the rain and wind  
Like mouths of women  
Beaten by the fists of  
Men using them.  
O little roses  
And broken leaves  
And petal wisps:  
You that so flung your crimson  
To the sun  
Only yesterday.

### III. HOME

Here is a thing my heart wishes the world had more of:  
I heard it in the air of one night when I listened  
To a mother singing softly to a child restless and angry  
in the darkness.

## IT IS MUCH

WOMEN of night life amid the lights  
Where the line of your full, round throats  
Matches in gleam the glint of your eyes  
And the ring of your heart-deep laughter:  
    It is much to be warm and sure of to-morrow.

Women of night life along the shadows,  
Lean at your throats and skulking the walls,  
Gaunt as a bitch worn to the bone,  
Under the paint of your smiling faces:  
    It is much to be warm and sure of to-morrow.

## TRAFFICKER

AMONG the shadows where two streets cross,  
A woman lurks in the dark and waits  
To move on when a policeman heaves in view.  
Smiling a broken smile from a face  
Painted over haggard bones and desperate eyes,  
All night she offers passers-by what they will  
Of her beauty wasted, body faded, claims gone,  
And no takers.

## HARRISON STREET COURT

I HEARD a woman's lips  
Speaking to a companion  
Say these words:

" A woman what hustles  
Never keeps nothin'  
For all her hustlin'.  
Somebody always gets  
What she goes on the street for.  
If it ain't a pimp  
It's a bull what gets it.  
I been hustlin' now  
Till I ain't much good any more.  
I got nothin' to show for it.  
Some man got it all,  
Every night's hustlin' I ever did."

## SOILED DOVE

LET us be honest; the lady was not a harlot until she married a corporation lawyer who picked her from a Ziegfeld chorus.

Before then she never took anybody's money and paid for her silk stockings out of what she earned singing and dancing.

She loved one man and he loved six women and the game was changing her looks, calling for more and more massage money and high coin for the beauty doctors.

Now she drives a long, underslung motor car all by herself, reads in the day's papers what her husband is doing to the inter-state commerce commission, requires a larger corsage from year to year, and wonders sometimes how one man is coming along with six women.

## JUNGHEIMER'S

IN western fields of corn and northern timber lands,  
They talk about me, a saloon with a soul,  
The soft red lights, the long curving bar,  
The leather seats and dim corners,  
Tall brass spittoons, a nigger cutting ham,  
And the painting of a woman half-dressed thrown reck-  
less across a bed after a night of booze and riots.

## GONE

EVERYBODY loved Chick Lorimer in our town.

Far off

Everybody loved her.

So we all love a wild girl keeping a hold

On a dream she wants.

Nobody knows now where Chick Lorimer went.

Nobody knows why she packed her trunk . . . a few  
old things

And is gone,

Gone with her little chin

Thrust ahead of her

And her soft hair blowing careless

From under a wide hat,

Dancer, singer, a laughing passionate lover.

Were there ten men or a hundred hunting Chick ?

Were there five men or fifty with aching hearts ?

Everybody loved Chick Lorimer.

Nobody knows where she's gone.



# **OTHER DAYS**

(1900-1910)



## DREAMS IN THE DUSK

DREAMS in the dusk,  
Only dreams closing the day  
And with the day's close going back  
To the gray things, the dark things,  
The far, deep things of dreamland.

Dreams, only dreams in the dusk,  
Only the old remembered pictures  
Of lost days when the day's loss  
Wrote in tears the heart's loss.

Tears and loss and broken dreams  
May find your heart at dusk.

## DOCKS

STROLLING along  
By the teeming docks,  
I watch the ships put out.  
Black ships that heave and lunge  
And move like mastodons  
Arising from lethargic sleep.

The fathomed harbor  
Calls them not nor dares  
Them to a strain of action,  
But outward, on and outward,  
Sounding low-reverberating calls,  
Shaggy in the half-lit distance,  
They pass the pointed headland,  
View the wide, far-lifting wilderness  
And leap with cumulative speed  
To test the challenge of the sea.

Plunging,  
Doggedly onward plunging,  
Into salt and mist and foam and sun.

## ALL DAY LONG

ALL day long in fog and wind,  
The waves have flung their beating crests  
Against the palisades of adamant.

My boy, he went to sea, long and long ago,  
Curls of brown were slipping underneath his cap,  
He looked at me from blue and steely eyes;  
Natty, straight and true, he stepped away,  
My boy, he went to sea.

All day long in fog and wind,  
The waves have flung their beating crests  
Against the palisades of adamant.

## WAITING

TODAY I will let the old boat stand  
Where the sweep of the harbor tide comes in  
To the pulse of a far, deep-steady sway.  
And I will rest and dream and sit on the deck  
    Watching the world go by  
And take my pay for many hard days gone I re-  
    member.

I will choose what clouds I like  
In the great white fleets that wander the blue  
As I lie on my back or loaf at the rail.  
And I will listen as the veering winds kiss me and  
    fold me  
And put on my brow the touch of the world's great  
    will.

Daybreak will hear the heart of the boat beat,  
    Engine throb and piston play  
In the quiver and leap at call of life.  
To-morrow we move in the gaps and heights  
On changing floors of unlevel seas  
And no man shall stop us and no man follow  
For ours is the quest of an unknown shore  
And we are husky and lusty and shouting-gay.

## FROM THE SHORE

A LONE gray bird,  
Dim-dipping, far-flying,  
Alone in the shadows and grandeurs and tumults  
Of night and the sea  
And the stars and storms.

Out over the darkness it wavers and hovers,  
Out into the gloom it swings and batters,  
Out into the wind and the rain and the vast,  
Out into the pit of a great black world,  
Where fogs are at battle, sky-driven, sea-blown,  
Love of mist and rapture of flight,  
Glories of chance and hazards of death  
On its eager and palpitant wings.

Out into the deep of the great dark world,  
Beyond the long borders where foam and drift  
Of the sundering waves are lost and gone  
On the tides that plunge and rear and crumble.

## UPLANDS IN MAY

WONDER as of old things  
Fresh and fair come back  
Hangs over pasture and road.  
Lush in the lowland grasses rise  
And upland beckons to upland.  
The great strong hills are humble.

## DREAM GIRL

You will come one day in a waver of love,  
Tender as dew, impetuous as rain,  
The tan of the sun will be on your skin,  
The purr of the breeze in your murmuring speech,  
You will pose with a hill-flower grace.

You will come, with your slim, expressive arms,  
A poise of the head no sculptor has caught  
And nuances spoken with shoulder and neck,  
Your face in a pass-and-repass of moods  
As many as skies in delicate change  
Of cloud and blue and flimmering sun.

Yet,

You may not come, O girl of a dream,  
We may but pass as the world goes by  
And take from a look of eyes into eyes,  
A film of hope and a memoried day.

## PLOWBOY

AFTER the last red sunset glimmer,  
Black on the line of a low hill rise,  
Formed into moving shadows, I saw  
A plowboy and two horses lined against the  
    gray,  
Plowing in the dusk the last furrow.  
The turf had a gleam of brown,  
And smell of soil was in the air,  
And, cool and moist, a haze of April.

I shall remember you long,  
Plowboy and horses against the sky in shadow.  
I shall remember you and the picture  
You made for me,  
Turning the turf in the dusk  
And haze of an April gloaming.

## BROADWAY

I SHALL never forget you, Broadway  
Your golden and calling lights.

I'll remember you long,  
Tall-walled river of rush and play.

Hearts that know you hate you  
And lips that have given you laughter  
Have gone to their ashes of life and its roses,  
Cursing the dreams that were lost  
In the dust of your harsh and trampled stones.

## OLD WOMAN

THE owl-car clatters along, dogged by the echo  
From building and battered paving-stone;  
The headlight scoffs at the mist  
And fixes its yellow rays in the cold slow rain;  
Against a pane I press my forehead  
And drowsily look on the walls and sidewalks.

The headlight finds the way  
And life is gone from the wet and the welter—  
Only an old woman, bloated, disheveled and bleared.  
Far-wandered waif of other days,  
Huddles for sleep in a doorway,  
Homeless.

## NOON HOUR

SHE sits in the dust at the walls  
And makes cigars,  
Bending at the bench  
With fingers wage-anxious,  
Changing her sweat for the day's pay.

Now the noon hour has come,  
And she leans with her bare arms  
On the window-sill over the river,  
Leans and feels at her throat  
Cool-moving things out of the free open ways:

At her throat and eyes and nostrils  
The touch and the blowing cool  
Of great free ways beyond the walls.

## 'BOES

I WAITED today for a freight train to pass.  
Cattle cars with steers butting their horns against the  
bars, went by.  
And a half a dozen hoboes stood on bumpers between  
cars.  
Well, the cattle are respectable, I thought.  
Every steer has its transportation paid for by the farmer  
sending it to market,  
While the hoboes are law-breakers in riding a railroad  
train without a ticket.  
It reminded me of ten days I spent in the Allegheny  
County jail in Pittsburgh.  
I got ten days even though I was a veteran of the Span-  
ish-American war.  
Cooped in the same cell with me was an old man, a  
bricklayer and a booze-fighter.  
But it just happened he, too, was a veteran soldier, and  
he had fought to preserve the Union and free the  
niggers.  
We were three in all, the other being a Lithuanian who  
got drunk on pay day at the steel works and got to  
fighting a policeman;  
All the clothes he had was a shirt, pants and shoes—  
somebody got his hat and coat and what money he  
had left over when he got drunk.

## UNDER A TELEPHONE POLE

I AM a copper wire slung in the air,  
Slim against the sun I make not even a clear line of  
shadow.  
Night and day I keep singing—humming and thrum-  
ming:  
It is love and war and money; it is the fighting and the  
tears, the work and want,  
Death and laughter of men and women passing through  
me, carrier of your speech,  
In the rain and the wet dripping, in the dawn and the  
shine drying,  
A copper wire.

## I AM THE PEOPLE, THE MOB

I AM the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.

Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?

I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.

I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.

I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death conies to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.

Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then—I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.

The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

## GOVERNMENT

THE Government—I heard about the Government and I went out to find it. I said I would look closely at it when I saw it.

Then I saw a policeman dragging a drunken man to the calaboose. It was the Government in action.

I saw a ward alderman slip into an office one morning and talk with a judge. Later in the day the judge dismissed a case against a pickpocket who was a live ward worker for the alderman. Again I saw this was the Government, doing things.

I saw militiamen level their rifles at a crowd of workingmen who were trying to get other workingmen to stay away from a shop where there was a strike on. Government in action.

Everywhere I saw that Government is a thing made of men, that Government has blood and bones, it is many mouths whispering into many ears, sending telegrams, aiming rifles, writing orders, saying "yes" and "no."

Government dies as the men who form it die and are laid away in their graves and the new Government that comes after is human, made of heartbeats of blood,

ambitions, lusts, and money running through it all, money paid and money taken, and money covered up and spoken of with hushed voices.

A Government is just as secret and mysterious and sensitive as any human sinner carrying a load of germs, traditions and corpuscles handed down from fathers and mothers away back.

## LANGUAGES

THERE are no handles upon a language  
Whereby men take hold of it  
And mark it with signs for its remembrance.  
It is a river, this language,  
Once in a thousand years  
Breaking a new course  
Changing its way to the ocean.  
It is mountain effluvia  
Moving to valleys  
And from nation to nation  
Crossing borders and mixing.  
Languages die like rivers.  
Words wrapped round your tongue today  
And broken to shape of thought  
Between your teeth and lips speaking  
Now and today  
Shall be faded hieroglyphics  
Ten thousand years from now.  
Sing—and singing—remember  
Your song dies and changes  
And is not here to-morrow  
Any more than the wind  
Blowing ten thousand years ago.

## LETTERS TO DEAD IMAGISTS

EMILY DICKINSON:

You gave us the bumble bee who has a soul,  
The everlasting traveler among the hollyhocks,  
And how God plays around a back yard garden.

STEVIE CRANE:

War is kind and we never knew the kindness of war till  
you came;  
Nor the black riders and clashes of spear and shield out  
of the sea,  
Nor the mumblings and shots that rise from dreams on  
call.

## SHEEP

Thousands of sheep, soft-footed, black-nosed sheep— one by one going up the hill and over the fence—one by one four-footed pattering up and over—one by one wiggling their stub tails as they take the short jump and go over—one by one silently unless for the multitudinous drumming of their hoofs as they move on and go over— thousands and thousands of them in the grey haze of evening just after sundown—one by one slanting in a long line to pass over the hill—

I am the slow, long-legged Sleepyman and I love you sheep in Persia, California, Argentine, Australia, or Spain—you are the thoughts that help me when I, the Sleepyman, lay my hands on the eyelids of the children of the world at eight o'clock every night—you thousands and thousands of sheep in a procession of dusk making an endless multitudinous drumming on the hills with your hoofs.

## THE RED SON

I LOVE your faces I saw the many years  
I drank your milk and filled my mouth  
With your home talk, slept in your house  
And was one of you.

But a fire burns in my heart.

Under the ribs where pulses thud  
And flitting between bones of skull  
Is the push, the endless mysterious command,  
Saying:

" I leave you behind—

You for the little hills and the years all alike,  
You with your patient cows and old houses  
Protected from the rain,  
I am going away and I never come back to you;  
Crag and high rough places call me,  
Great places of death  
Where men go empty handed  
And pass over smiling  
To the star-drift on the horizon rim.  
My last whisper shall be alone, unknown;  
I shall go to the city and fight against it,  
And make it give me passwords  
Of luck and love, women worth dying for,  
And money.

I go where you wist not of  
Nor I nor any man nor woman.  
I only know I go to storms  
Grappling against things wet and naked."

There is no pity of it and no blame.

None of us is in the wrong.

After all it is only this:

You for the little hills and I go away.

## THE MIST

I AM the mist, the impalpable mist,  
Back of the thing you seek.  
My arms are long,  
Long as the reach of time and space.

Some toil and toil, believing,  
Looking now and again on my face,  
Catching a vital, olden glory.

But no one passes me,  
I tangle and snare them all.  
I am the cause of the Sphinx,  
The voiceless, baffled, patient Sphinx.

I was at the first of things,  
I will be at the last.  
I am the primal mist  
And no man passes me;  
My long impalpable arms  
Bar them all.

## THE JUNK MAN

I AM glad God saw Death  
And gave Death a job taking care of all who are tired  
of living:

When all the wheels in a clock are worn and slow and  
the connections loose

And the clock goes on ticking and telling the wrong time  
from hour to hour

And people around the house joke about what a bum  
clock it is,

How glad the clock is when the big Junk Man drives  
his wagon

Up to the house and puts his arms around the clock and  
says:

" You don't belong here,

You gotta come

Along with me,"

How glad the clock is then, when it feels the arms of the  
Junk Man close around it and carry it away.

## SILVER NAILS

A MAN was crucified. He came to the city a stranger, was accused, and nailed to a cross. He lingered hanging. Laughed at the crowd. "The nails are iron," he said, "You are cheap. In my country when we crucify we use silver nails ...". So he went jeering. They did not understand him at first. Later they talked about him in changed voices in the saloons, bowling alleys, and churches. It came over them every man is crucified only once in his life and the law of humanity dictates silver nails be used for the job. A statue was erected to him in a public square. Not having gathered his name when he was among them, they wrote him as John Silvernail on the statue.

## GYPSY

I ASKED a gypsy pal  
To imitate an old image  
And speak old wisdom.  
She drew in her chin,  
Made her neck and head  
The top piece of a Nile obelisk-  
and said:  
Snatch off the gag from thy mouth, child,  
And be free to keep silence.  
Tell no man anything, for no man listens,  
Yet hold thy lips ready to speak.



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