

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Carl Sandburg**

**- poems -**

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## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **A Teamster's Farewell**

<i>Sobs En Route to a Penitentiary</i>

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.

Carl Sandburg

## **A.E.F.**

There will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,  
The rifle grooves curling with flakes of rust.  
A spider will make a silver string nest in the  
darkest, warmest corner of it.  
The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty.  
And no hands will polish the gun, and it will hang on the wall.  
Forefingers and thumbs will point casually toward it.  
It will be spoken among half-forgotten, wished-to-be-forgotten things.  
They will tell the spider: Go on, you're doing good work.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Among the Red Guns**

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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Anna Imroth**

Cross the hands over the breast here--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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Aprons of Silence**

Many things I might have said today.  
And I kept my mouth shut.  
So many times I was asked  
To come and say the same things  
Everybody was saying, no end  
To the yes-yes, yes-yes,  
me-too, me-too.

The aprons of silence covered me.  
A wire and hatch held my tongue.  
I spit nails into an abyss and listened.  
I shut off the gable of Jones, Johnson, Smith,  
All whose names take pages in the city directory.

I fixed up a padded cell and lugged it around.  
I locked myself in and nobody knew it.  
Only the keeper and the kept in the hoosegow  
Knew it--on the streets, in the post office,  
On the cars, into the railroad station  
Where the caller was calling, "All a-board,  
All a-board for . . . Blaa-blaa . . . Blaa-blaa,  
Blaa-blaa . . . and all points northwest . . .all a-board."  
Here I took along my own hoosegow  
And did business with my own thoughts.  
Do you see? It must be the aprons of silence.

Carl Sandburg

## Arithmetic

Arithmetic is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head.

Arithmetic tell you how many you lose or win if you know how many you had before you lost or won.

Arithmetic is seven eleven all good children go to heaven -- or five six bundle of sticks.

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your pencil to your paper till you get the answer.

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can look out of the window and see the blue sky -- or the answer is wrong and you have to start all over and try again and see how it comes out this time.

If you take a number and double it and double it again and then double it a few more times, the number gets bigger and bigger and goes higher and higher and only arithmetic can tell you what the number is when you decide to quit doubling.

Arithmetic is where you have to multiply -- and you carry the multiplication table in your head and hope you won't lose it.

If you have two animal crackers, one good and one bad, and you eat one and a striped zebra with streaks all over him eats the other, how many animal crackers will you have if somebody offers you five six seven and you say No no no and you say Nay nay nay and you say Nix nix nix?

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast and she gives you two fried eggs and you eat both of them, who is better in arithmetic, you or your mother?

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Autumn Movement**

I cried over beautiful things knowing no beautiful thing lasts.

The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck of the copper  
sunburned woman, the mother of the year, the taker of seeds.

The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full of holes,  
new beautiful things come in the first spit of snow on the northwest wind,  
and the old things go, not one lasts.

Carl Sandburg

## **Aztec**

You came from the Aztecs  
With a copper on your fore-arms  
Tawnier than a sunset  
Saying good-by to an even river.

And I said, you remember,  
Those fore-arms of yours  
Were finer than bronzes  
And you were glad.

It was tears  
And a path west  
and a home-going  
when I asked  
Why there were scars of worn gold  
Where a man's ring was fixed once  
On your third finger.  
And I call you  
To come back  
before the days are longer.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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 marry 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Bas-Relief**

Five geese deploy mysteriously.  
Onward proudly with flagstuffs,  
Hearses with silver bugles,  
Bushes of plum-blossoms dropping  
For ten mystic web-feet--  
Each his own drum-major,  
Each charged with the honor  
Of the ancient goose nation,  
Each with a nose-length surpassing  
The nose-lengths of rival nations.  
Somberly, slowly, unimpeachably,  
Five geese deploy mysteriously.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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?

Carl Sandburg

## **Blue Island Intersection**

Six streets come together here.  
They feed people and wagons into the center.  
In and out all day horses with thoughts of nose-bags,  
Men with shovels, women with baskets and baby-buggies.  
Six ends of streets and no sleep for them all day.  
The people and wagons come and go, out and in.  
Triangles of banks and drug stores watch.  
The policemen whistle, the trolley cars bump:  
Wheels, wheels, feet, feet, all day.

In the false dawn when the chickens blink  
And the east shakes a lazy baby toe at tomorrow,  
And the east fixes a lazy pink half-eye this way,  
In the time when only one milk wagon crosses  
These three streets, these six street ends,  
It is the sleep time and they rest.  
The triangle banks and the drug stores rest.  
The policeman is gone, his star and gun sleep.  
The owl car blutters along in a sleep walk.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 Spanish-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.

Carl Sandburg

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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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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-peek,  
And I shall be song of thunder, crash of sea,  
Down on the floors of salt and wet.  
Sling me ... under the sea.

Carl Sandburg

## **Bricklayer Love**

I thought of killing myself because I am only a bricklayer  
and you a woman who loves the man who runs a drug store.

I don't care like I used to; I lay bricks straighter than I  
used to and I sing slower handling the trowel afternoons.

When the sun is in my eyes and the ladders are shaky and the  
mortar boards go wrong, I think of you.

Carl Sandburg

## **Bringers**

Cover me over  
In dusk and dust and dreams.

Cover me over  
And leave me alone.

Cover me over,  
You tireless, great.

Hear me and cover me,  
Bringers of dusk and dust and dreams.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 matineés 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 buttons—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 laughing to us?

Carl Sandburg

## 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 epigrams.  
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."

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg



## Chicago Poet

I saluted a nobody.  
I saw him in a looking-glass.  
He smiled--so did I.  
He crumpled the skin on his forehead, frowning--so did I.  
Everything I did he did.  
I said, "Hello, I know you."  
And I was a liar to say so.

Ah, this. looking-glass man!  
Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor,  
Soldier, dusty drinker of dust--  
Ah! he will go with me  
Down the dark stairway  
When nobody else is looking,  
When everybody else is gone.

He locks his elbow in mine,  
I lose all--but not him.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## Cool Tombs

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs he forgot  
the copperheads and the assassin . . . in the dust, in the  
cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street,  
cash and collateral turned ashes . . . in the dust, in the  
cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in  
November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she  
remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries,  
cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin  
horns . . . tell me if the lovers are losers . . . tell me if any  
get more than the lovers . . . in the dust . . . in the cool  
tombs.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.)

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Crucible**

Hot gold runs a winding stream on the inside of a green bowl.

Yellow trickles in a fan figure, scatters a line of skirmishes, spreads a chorus of dancing girls, performs blazing ochre evolutions, gathers the whole show into one stream, forgets the past and rolls on.

The sea-mist green of the bowl's bottom is a dark throat of sky crossed by quarreling forks of umber and ochre and yellow changing faces.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 beautiful  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## Death Snips Proud Men

DEATH is stronger than all the governments because  
the governments are men and men die and then  
death laughs: Now you see 'em, now you don't.  
Death is stronger than all proud men and so death  
snips proud men on the nose, throws a pair of  
dice and says: Read 'em and weep.  
Death sends a radiogram every day: When I want  
you I'll drop in--and then one day he comes with a  
master-key and lets himself in and says: We'll  
go now.  
Death is a nurse mother with big arms: 'Twon't hurt  
you at all; it's your time now; just need a  
long sleep, child; what have you had anyhow  
better than sleep?

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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?

Carl Sandburg

## **Dust**

Here is dust remembers it was a rose  
one time and lay in a woman's hair.  
Here is dust remembers it was a woman  
one time and in her hair lay a rose.  
Oh things one time dust, what else now is it  
you dream and remember of old days?

Carl Sandburg

## **Dusty Doors**

Child of the Aztec gods,  
how long must we listen here,  
how long before we go?

The dust is deep on the lintels.  
The dust is dark on the doors.  
If the dreams shake our bones,  
what can we say or do?

Since early morning we waited.  
Since early, early morning, child.  
There must be dreams on the way now.  
There must be a song for our bones.

The dust gets deeper and darker.  
Do the doors and lintels shudder?  
How long must we listen here?  
How long before we go?

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## Evening Waterfall

What is the name you called me?--  
And why did you go so soon?

The crows lift their caws on the wind,  
And the wind changed and was lonely.

The warblers cry thier sleepy-songs  
Across the valley gloaming,  
Across the cattle-horns of early stars.

Feathers and people in the crotch of a treetop  
Throw an evening waterfall of sleepy-songs.

What is the name you called me?--  
And why did you go so soon?

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Fire Pages**

I will read ashes for you, if you ask me.  
I will look on the fire and tell you from the gray lashes  
And out of the red and black tongues and stripes,  
I will tell how fire comes  
And how fire runs far as the sea.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Flanders**

Flanders, the name of a place, a country of people,  
Spells itself with letters, is written in books.

"Where is Flanders?" was asked one time,  
Flanders known only to those who lived there  
And milked cows and made cheese and spoke the home language.

"Where is Flanders?" was asked.  
And the slang adepts shot the reply: Search me.

A few thousand people milking cows, raising radishes,  
On a land of salt grass and dunes, sand-swept with a sea-breath on it:  
This was Flanders, the unknown, the quiet,  
The place where cows hunted lush cuds of green on lowlands,  
And the raw-boned plowmen took horses with long shanks  
Out in the dawn to the sea-breath.

Flanders sat slow-spoken amid slow-swung windmills,  
Slow-circling windmill arms turning north or west,  
Turning to talk to the swaggering winds, the childish winds,  
So Flanders sat with the heart of a kitchen girl  
Washing wooden bowls in the winter sun by a window.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Fog**

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

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

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Good Night**

Many ways to say good night.

Fireworks at a pier on the Fourth of July  
spell it with red wheels and yellow spokes.  
They fizz in the air, touch the water and quit.  
Rockets make a trajectory of gold-and-blue  
and then go out.

Railroad trains at night spell with a smokestack mushrooming a white pillar.

Steamboats turn a curve in the Mississippi crying a baritone that crosses lowland  
cottonfields to razorback hill.

It is easy to spell good night.  
Many ways to spell good night.

Carl Sandburg



## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.)

Carl Sandburg

## **Grass**

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.  
Shovel them under and let me work--  
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg  
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.  
Shovel them under and let me work.  
Two years, ten years, and the passengers ask the conductor:  
What place is this?  
Where are we now?

I am the grass.  
Let me work.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Happiness**

I asked the 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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."

Carl Sandburg



## **Haunts**

There are places I go when I am strong.  
One is a marsh pool where I used to go  
with a long-ear hound-dog.  
One is a wild crabapple tree; I was there  
a moonlight night with a girl.  
The dog is gone; the girl is gone; I go to these  
places when there is no other place to go.

Carl Sandburg

## **Hell on the Wabash**

When country fiddlers held a convention in Danville, the big money went to a barn dance artist who played Turkey in the Straw, with variations.

They asked him the name of the piece calling it a humdinger and he answered, "I call it 'Hell on the Wabash.'"

The two next best were The Speckled Hen, and Sweet Potatoes Grow in Sandy Land, with variations.

Carl Sandburg

## **Honky Tonk in Cleveland, Ohio**

It's a jazz affair, drum crashes and coronet razzes.  
The trombone pony neighs and the tuba jackass snorts.  
The banjo tickles and titters too awful.  
The chippies talk about the funnies in the papers.  
The cartoonists weep in their beer.  
Shop riveters talk with their feet  
To the feet of floozies under the tables.  
A quartet of white hopes mourn with interspersed snickers:  
"I got the blues.  
I got the blues.  
I got the blues."  
And . . . as we said earlier:  
The cartoonists weep in their beer.

Carl Sandburg

## Hope Is a Tattered Flag

Hope is a tattered flag and a dream of time.  
Hope is a heartspun word, the rainbow, the shadblow in white  
The evening star inviolable over the coal mines,  
The shimmer of northern lights across a bitter winter night,  
The blue hills beyond the smoke of the steel works,  
The birds who go on singing to their mates in peace, war, peace,  
The ten-cent crocus bulb blooming in a used-car salesroom,  
The horseshoe over the door, the luckpiece in the pocket,  
The kiss and the comforting laugh and resolve—  
Hope is an echo, hope ties itself yonder, yonder.  
The spring grass showing itself where least expected,  
The rolling fluff of white clouds on a changeable sky,  
The broadcast of strings from Japan, bells from Moscow,  
Of the voice of the prime minister of Sweden carried  
Across the sea in behalf of a world family of nations  
And children singing chorals of the Christ child  
And Bach being broadcast from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania  
And tall skyscrapers practically empty of tenants  
And the hands of strong men groping for handholds  
And the Salvation Army singing God loves us....

Carl Sandburg

## Horses and Men in Rain

Let us sit by a hissing steam radiator a winter's day, gray wind pattering frozen  
raindrops on the window,  
And let us talk about milk wagon drivers and grocery delivery boys.

Let us keep our feet in wool slippers and mix hot punches--and talk about mail carriers  
and  
messenger boys slipping along the icy sidewalks.  
Let us write of olden, golden days and hunters of the  
Holy Grail and men called "knights" riding horses in the rain, in the cold frozen rain for  
ladies they loved.

A roustabout hunched on a coal wagon goes by, icicles drip on his hat rim, sheets of ice  
wrapping  
the hunks of coal, the caravanserai a gray blur in slant of rain.  
Let us nudge the steam radiator with our wool slippers and write poems of Launcelot,  
the hero, and  
Roland, the hero, and all the olden golden men who rode horses in the rain.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 comes 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **I Sang**

I sang to you and the moon  
But only the moon remembers.  
I sang  
O reckless free-hearted  
free-throated rythms,  
Even the moon remembers them  
And is kind to me.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## Improved Farm Land

Tall timber stood here once, hee on a corn belt farm along the Monon.  
Here the roots of a half-mile of trees dug their runners deep in the loam for a grip and a hold against wind storms.  
Then the axemen came and the chips flew to the zing of steel and handle--the lank railsplitters cut the big ones first, the beeches and the oaks, then the brush.  
Dynamite, wagons, and horses took the stumps--the plows sunk their teeth in--now it is first class corn land--omproved property--and the hogs grunt over the fodder crops.  
It would come hard now for this half mile of improved farm land along the Monon corn belt, on a piece of Grand Prarie, to remember once it had a great singing family of trees.

Carl Sandburg

## **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?

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## Interior

In the cool of the night time  
The clocks pick off the points  
And the mainsprings loosen.  
They will need winding.  
One of these days  
they will need winding.

Rabelais in red boards,  
Walt Whitman in green,  
Hugo in ten-cent paper covers,  
Here they stand on shelves  
In the cool of the night time  
And there is nothing . . . .  
To be said against them . . . .  
Or for them . . . .  
In the cool of the night time  
And the docks.

A man in pigeon-gray pyjamas.  
The open window begins at his feet  
And goes taller than his head.  
Eight feet high is the pattern.

Moon and mist make an oblong layout.  
Silver at the man's bare feet.  
He swings one foot in a moon silver.  
And it costs nothing.

(One more day of bread and work.  
One more day . . . .so much rags .

The man barefoot in moon silver  
Mutters "You" and "You"  
To things hidden  
In the cool of the night time,  
In Rabelais, Whitman, Hugo,  
In an oblong of moon mist.

Out from the window . . . . prairielands.  
Moon mist whitens a golf ground.  
Whiter yet is a limestone quarry.  
The crickets keep on chirring.

Switch engines of the Great Western  
Sidetrack box cars, make up trains  
For Weehawken, Oskaloosa, Saskatchewan;  
The cattle, the coal, the corn, must go  
In the night . . . . on the prairielands.

Chuff-chuff go the pulses.  
They beat in the cool of the night time.  
Chuff-chuff and chuff-chuff . . . .

These heartbeats travel the night a mile  
And touch the moon silver at the window  
And the bones of the man.  
It costs nothing.

Rabelais in red boards,  
Whitman in green,  
Hugo in ten-cent paper covers,  
Here they stand on shelves  
In the cool of the night time  
And the clocks.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 afternoon in the hills with their lovers.)

Carl Sandburg

## **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!"

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 reckless across a bed after a night of  
booze and riots.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 always,  
Fixed in the drag of the world's heartbreak,  
Eating and drinking, toiling. . . on a long job of  
killing.  
Sixteen million men.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 evening  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## Laughing Corn

There was a high majestic fooling  
Day before yesterday in the yellow corn.

And day after to-morrow in the yellow corn  
There will be high majestic fooling.

The ears ripen in late summer  
And come on with a conquering laughter,  
Come on with a high and conquering laughter.

The long-tailed blackbirds are hoarse.  
One of the smaller blackbirds chitters on a stalk  
And a spot of red is on its shoulder  
And I never heard its name in my life.

Some of the ears are bursting.  
A white juice works inside.  
Cornsilk creeps in the end and dangles in the wind.  
Always--I never knew it any other way--  
The wind and the corn talk things over together.  
And the rain and the corn and the sun and the corn  
Talk things over together.

Over the road is the farmhouse.  
The siding is white and a green blind is slung loose.  
It will not be fixed till the corn is husked.  
The farmer and his wife talk things over together.

Carl Sandburg

## Lawyer

When the jury files in to deliver a verdict after weeks of direct and cross examinations,  
hot clashes  
of lawyers and cool decisions of the judge,  
There are points of high silence--twiddling of thumbs is at an end--bailiffs near  
cuspidors take fresh  
chews of tobacco and wait--and the clock has a chance for its ticking to be heard.  
A lawyer for the defense clears his throat and holds himself ready if the word is "Guilty"  
to enter  
motion for a new trial, speaking in a soft voice, speaking in a voice slightly colored with  
bitter wrongs  
mingled with monumental patience, speaking with mythic Atlas shoulders of many  
preposterous,  
unjust circumstances.

Carl Sandburg

## Letters to Dead Imagists

<i>EMILY DICKINSON:</i>

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.

<i>STEVIE CRANE:</i>

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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 people.  
(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."

Carl Sandburg

## **Loam**

In the loam we sleep,  
In the cool moist loam,  
To the lull of years that pass  
And the break of stars,

From the loam, then,  
The soft warm loam,  
We rise:  
To shape of rose leaf,  
Of face and shoulder.

We stand, then,  
To a whiff of life,  
Lifted to the silver of the sun  
Over and out of the loam  
A day.

Carl Sandburg

## Localities

Wagon wheel gap is a place I never saw  
And Red Horse Gulch and the chutes of Cripple Creek.

Red-shirted miners picking in the sluices,  
Gamblers with red neckties in the night streets,  
The fly-by-night towns of Bull Frog and Skiddoo,  
The night-cool limestone white of Death Valley,  
The straight drop of eight hundred feet  
From a shelf road in the Hasiampa Valley:  
Men and places they are I never saw.

I have seen three White Horse taverns,  
One in Illinois, one in Pennsylvania,  
One in a timber-hid road of Wisconsin.

I bought cheese and crackers  
Between sun showers in a place called White Pigeon  
Nestling with a blacksmith shop, a post-office,  
And a berry-crate factory, where four roads cross.

On the Pecatonica River near Freeport  
I have seen boys run barefoot in the leaves  
Throwing clubs at the walnut trees  
In the yellow-and-gold of autumn,  
And there was a brown mash dry on the inside of their hands.  
On the Cedar Fork Creek of Knox County  
I know how the fingers of late October  
Loosen the hazel nuts.  
I know the brown eyes of half-open hulls.  
I know boys named Lindquist, Swanson, Hildebrand.  
I remember their cries when the nuts were ripe.  
And some are in machine shops; some are in the navy;  
And some are not on payrolls anywhere.  
Their mothers are through waiting for them to come home.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.)

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## Manitoba Childe Roland

LAST night a January wind was ripping at the shingles over our house and whistling a wolf song under the eaves.

I sat in a leather rocker and read to a six-year-old girl the Browning poem, Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.

And her eyes had the haze of autumn hills and it was beautiful to her and she could not understand.

A man is crossing a big prairie, says the poem, and nothing happens--and he goes on and on--and it's all lonesome and empty and nobody home.

And he goes on and on--and nothing happens--and he comes on a horse's skull, dry bones of a dead horse--and you know more than ever it's all lonesome and empty and nobody home.

And the man raises a horn to his lips and blows--he fixes a proud neck and forehead toward the empty sky and the empty land--and blows one last wonder-cry.

And as the shuttling automatic memory of man clicks off its results willy-nilly and inevitable as the snick of a mouse-trap or the trajectory of a 42-centimetre projectile,

I flash to the form of a man to his hips in snow drifts of Manitoba and Minnesota--in the sled derby run from Winnipeg to Minneapolis.

He is beaten in the race the first day out of Winnipeg--the lead dog is eaten by four team mates--and the man goes on and on--running while the other racers ride, running while the other racers sleep--

Lost in a blizzard twenty-four hours, repeating a circle of travel hour after hour--fighting the dogs who dig holes in the snow and whimper for sleep--pushing on--running and walking five hundred miles to the end of the race--almost a winner--one toe frozen, feet blistered and frost-bitten.

And I know why a thousand young men of the Northwest meet him in the finishing miles and yell cheers --I know why judges of the race call him a winner and give him a special prize even though he is a loser.

I know he kept under his shirt and around his thudding heart amid the blizzards of five hundred miles that one last wonder-cry of Childe Roland--and I told the six year old girl about it.

And while the January wind was ripping at the shingles and whistling a wolf song under the eaves, her eyes had the haze of autumn hills and it was beautiful to her and she could not understand.

Carl Sandburg

## **Manual System**

Mary has a thingamajig clamped on her ears  
And sits all day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in.  
Flashes and flashes--voies and voices  
calling for ears to put words in  
Faces at the ends of wires asking for other faces  
at the ends of other wires:  
All day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in,  
Mary has a thingamajig clamped on her ears.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **Masses**

Among the mountains I wandered and saw blue 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 workers, 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 crags, tides, and stars; innumerable, patient as the darkness of  
night—and all broken, humble ruins of nations.

Carl Sandburg

## **Maybe**

Maybe he believes me, maybe not.  
Maybe I can marry him, maybe not.

Maybe the wind on the prairie,  
The wind on the sea, maybe,  
Somebody, somewhere, maybe can tell.

I will lay my head on his shoulder  
And when he asks me I will say yes,  
Maybe.

Carl Sandburg

## Medallion

The brass medallion profile of your face I keep always.  
It is not jingling with loose change in my pockets.  
It is not stuck up in a show place on the office wall.  
I carry it in a special secret pocket in the day  
And it is under my pillow at night.  
The brass came from a long ways off: it was up against hell and high water, fire and  
flood, before the  
face was put on it.  
It is the side of a head; a woman wishes; a woman waits; a woman swears behind  
silent lips that the  
sea will bring home what is gone.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 gargoyle 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 kindliness 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Monosyllabic**

Let me be monosyllabic to-day, O Lord.  
Yesterday I loosed a snarl of words on a fool, on a child.  
To-day, let me be monosyllabic . . . . a crony of old men who wash sunlight in their  
fingers and enjoy slow-pacing clocks.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 murmer, "O, its a hell of a job,"  
Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job."

Carl Sandburg



## **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 sunflowers. . .  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## Neighbors

On Forty-first Street  
near Eighth Avenue  
a frame house wobbles.

If houses went on crutches  
this house would be  
one of the cripples.

A sign on the house:  
Church of the Living God  
And Rescue Home for Orphan Children.

From a Greek coffee house  
Across the street  
A cabalistic jargon  
Jabbers back.  
And men at tables  
Spill Peloponnesian syllables  
And speak of shovels for street work.  
And the new embankments of the Erie Railroad  
At Painted Post, Horse's Head, Salamanca.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Old Timers**

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was a cleaner of pans.  
On the march of Miltiades' phalanx I had a haft and head;  
I had a bristling gleaming spear-handle.

Red-headed Cæsar picked me for a teamster.  
He said, "Go to work, you Tuscan bastard,  
Rome calls for a man who can drive horses."

The units of conquest led by Charles the Twelfth,  
The whirling whimsical Napoleonic columns:  
They saw me one of the horseshoers.

I trimmed the feet of a white horse Bonaparte swept the night stars with.

Lincoln said, "Get into the game; your nation takes you."  
And I drove a wagon and team and I had my arm shot off  
At Spottsylvania Court House.

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Omaha**

Red barns and red heifers spot the green  
grass circles around Omaha--the farmers  
haul tanks of cream and wagon-loads of  
cheese.

Shale hogbacks across the river at Council  
Bluffs--and shanties hang by an eyelash to  
the hill slants back around Omaha.

A span of steel ties up the kin of Iowa and  
Nebraska across the yellow, big-hoofed Missouri  
River.

Omaha, the roughneck, feeds armies,  
Eats and swears from a dirty face.  
Omaha works to get the world a breakfast.

Carl Sandburg



## **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 outgoing boat,  
Playing its searchlight, puzzled, abrupt, over a streak of green,  
And two on the breakwater keep their silence, she on his knee.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 restless 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?

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Pennsylvania**

I have been in Pennsylvania,  
In the Monongahela and Hocking Valleys.

In the blue Susquehanna  
On a Saturday morning  
I saw a mounted constabulary go by,  
I saw boys playing marbles.  
Spring and the hills laughed.

And in places  
Along the Appalachian chain,  
I saw steel arms handling coal and iron,  
And I saw the white-cauliflower faces  
Of miner's wives waiting for the men to come home from the day's work.

I made color studies in crimson and violet  
Over the dust and domes of culm at sunset.

Carl Sandburg



## **People Who Must**

I painted on the roof of a skyscraper.  
I painted a long while and called it a day's work.  
The people on the corner swarmed and the traffic cop's whistle never let up all  
afternoon.  
They were the same as bugs, many bugs on their way--  
These people on the go or at a standstill;  
And the traffic cop a spot of blue, a splinter of brass,  
Where the black tids ran around him  
And he kept the street. I painted a long while  
And called it a day's work.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Poppies**

She loves blood-red poppies for a garden to walk in.  
In a loose white gown she walks  
    and a new child tugs at cords in her body.  
Her head to the west at evening when the dew is creeping,  
A shudder of gladness runs in her bones and torsal fiber:  
She loves blood-red poppies for a garden to walk in.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 adenoids  
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 flutters  
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.

Carl Sandburg



## **Prairie Waters By Night**

Chatter of birds two by two raises a night song joining a litany of running water--sheer waters  
showing the russet of old stones remembering many rains.

And the long willows drowse on the shoulders of the running water, and sleep from much music;  
joined songs of day-end, feathery throats and stony waters, in a choir chanting new psalms.

It is too much for the long willows when low laughter of a red moon comes down; and the willows  
drowse and sleep on the shoulders of the running water.

Carl Sandburg

## **Prayers of Steel**

Lay me on an anvil, O God.  
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.  
Let me pry loose old walls.  
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.  
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.  
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.  
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.  
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

Carl Sandburg

## **Primer Lesson**

Look out how you use proud words.  
When you let proud words go, it is not easy to call them back.  
They wear long boots, hard boots; they walk off proud; they can't hear you calling--  
Look out how you use proud words.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **River Roads**

Let the crows go by hawking their caw and caw.  
They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines somewhere.  
Let 'em hawk their caw and caw.

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump.  
He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere hundreds of years  
And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to his head.  
Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass.  
And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many wings, old swimmers from old  
places.

Let the redwing streak a line of vermillion on the green wood lines.  
And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a woman's shawl on lazy  
shoulders.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## Sea Slant

On up the sea slant,  
On up the horizon,  
The ship limps.

The bone of her nose fog-gray,  
The heart of her sea-strong,  
She came a long way,  
She goes a long way.

On up the sea slant,  
On up the horizon,  
She limps sea-strong, fog-gray

She is a green-lit night gray.  
She comes and goes in sea-fog.  
Up the horizon slant she limps.

Carl Sandburg

## **Sea-Wash**

The sea-wash never ends.  
The sea-wash repeats, repeats.  
Only old songs? Is that all the sea knows?  
Only the old strong songs?  
Is that all?  
The sea-wash repeats, repeats.

Carl Sandburg



## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## Shirt

My shirt is a token and symbol,  
more than a cover for sun and rain,  
my shirt is a signal,  
and a teller of souls.

I can take off my shirt and tear it,  
and so make a ripping razzly noise,  
and the people will say,  
"Look at him tear his shirt."

I can keep my shirt on.  
I can stick around and sing like a little bird  
and look 'em all in the eye and never be fazed.  
I can keep my shirt on.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Sixteen Months**

On the lips of the child Janet float changing dreams.  
It is a thin spiral of blue smoke,  
A morning campfire at a mountain lake.

On the lips of the child Janet,  
Wisps of haze on ten miles of corn,  
Young light blue calls to young light gold of morning.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 brick-  
layer 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **Soup**

I saw a famous man eating soup.  
I say he was lifting a fat broth  
Into his mouth with a spoon.  
His name was in the newspapers that day  
Spelled out in tall black headlines  
And thousands of people were talking about him.

When I saw him,  
He sat bending his head over a plate  
Putting soup in his mouth with a spoon.

Carl Sandburg

## **Stars, Songs, Faces**

Gather the stars if you wish it so.  
Gather the songs and keep them.  
Gather the faces of women.  
Gather for keeping years and years.  
And then . . .  
Loosen your hands, let go and say goodbye.  
Let the stars and songs go.  
Let the faces and years go.  
Loosen your hands and say goodbye.

Carl Sandburg

## Statistics

Napoleon shifted,  
Restless in the old sarcophagus  
And murmured to a watchguard:  
"Who goes there?"  
"Twenty-one million men,  
Soldiers, armies, guns,  
Twenty-one million  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Street Window**

The pawn-shop man knows hunger,  
And how far hunger has eaten the heart  
Of one who comes with an old keepsake.  
Here are wedding rings and baby bracelets,  
Scarf pins and shoe buckles, jeweled garters,  
Old-fashioned knives with inlaid handles,  
Watches of old gold and silver,  
Old coins worn with finger-marks.  
They tell stories.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Summer Stars**

Bend low again, night of summer stars.  
So near you are, sky of summer stars,  
So near, a long-arm man can pick off stars,  
Pick off what he wants in the sky bowl,  
So near you are, summer stars,  
So near, strumming, strumming,  
So lazy and hum-strumming.

Carl Sandburg

## **Sunset From Omaha Hotel Window**

Into the blue river hills  
The red sun runners go  
And the long sand changes  
And to-day is a goner  
And to-day is not worth haggling over.

Here in Omaha  
The gloaming is bitter  
As in Chicago  
Or Kenosha.

The long sand changes.  
To-day is a goner.  
Time knocks in another brass nail.  
Another yellow plunger shoots the dark.

Constellations  
Wheeling over Omaha  
As in Chicago  
Or Kenosha.

The long sand is gone  
and all the talk is stars.  
They circle in a dome over Nebraska.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 red 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **The Hangman at Home**

What does a hangman think about  
When he goes home at night from work?  
When he sits down with his wife and  
Children for a cup of coffee and a  
Plate of ham and eggs, do they ask  
Him if it was a good day's work  
And everything went well or do they  
Stay off some topics and kill about  
The weather, baseball, politics  
And the comic strips in the papers  
And the movies? Do they look at his  
Hands when he reaches for the coffee  
Or the ham and eggs? If the little  
Ones say, Daddy, play horse, here's  
A rope--does he answer like a joke:  
I seen enough rope for today?  
Or does his face light up like a  
Bonfire of joy and does he say:  
It's a good and dandy world we live  
'In. And if a white face moon looks  
In through a window where a baby girl  
Sleeps and the moon-gleams mix with  
Baby ears and baby hair--the hangman--  
How does he act then? It must be easy  
For him. Anything is easy for a hangman,  
I guess.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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-ee-ee ee-ee-ee." The stone face stands silent, seeming to clutch a secret.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **The Mayor of Gary**

I asked the mayor of Gary about the 12-hour day and the 7-day week.  
And the mayor of Gary answered more workmen steal time on the job in Gary than any other place in the United States.  
"Go into the plants and you will see men sitting around doing nothing--machinery does everything," said the mayor of Gary when I asked him about the 12-hour day and the 7-day week.  
And he wore cool cream pants, the Mayor of Gary, and white shoes, and a barber had fixed him up with a shampoo and a shave and he was east and imperturbable though the government weather bureau thermometer said 96 and children were soaking their heads at bubbling fountains on the street corners.  
And I said good-bye to the Mayor of Gary and I went out from the city hall and turned the corner into Broadway.  
And I saw workmen wearing leather shoes scuffed with fire and cinders, and pitted with little holes from running molten steel,  
And some had bunches of specialized muscles around their shoulder blades hard as pig iron, muscles of their forearms were sheet steel and they looked to me like men who had been somewhere.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **The 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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;  
Craggs 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 bank  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **The Year**

I

A storm of white petals,  
Buds throwing open baby fists  
Into hands of broad flowers.

II

Red roses running upward,  
Clambering to the clutches of life  
Soaked in crimson.

III

Rabbles of tattered leaves  
Holding golden flimsy hopes  
Against the tramplings  
Into the pits and gullies.

IV

Hoarfrost and silence:  
Only the muffling  
Of winds dark and lonesome--  
Great lullabies to the long sleepers.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg



## **They All Want to Play Hamlet**

They all want to play Hamlet.  
They have not exactly seen their fathers killed  
Nor their mothers in a frame-up to kill,  
Nor an Ophelia lying with dust gagging the heart,  
Not exactly the spinning circles of singing golden spiders,  
Not exactly this have they got at nor the meaning of flowers--O flowers, flowers slung  
by a dancing girl--in the saddest play the inkfish, Shakespeare ever wrote;  
Yet they all want to play Hamlet because it is sad like all actors are sad and to stand by  
an open grave with a joker's skull in the hand and then to say over slow and over slow  
wise, keen, beautiful words asking the heart that's breaking, breaking,  
This is something that calls and calls to their blood.  
They are acting when they talk about it and they know it is acting to be particular  
about it and yet: They all want to play Hamlet.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## Threes

I was a boy when I heard three red words  
a thousand Frenchmen died in the streets  
for: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity--I asked  
why men die for words.

I was older; men with mustaches, sideburns,  
lilacs, told me the high golden words are:  
Mother, Home, and Heaven--other older men with  
face decorations said: God, Duty, Immortality  
--they sang these threes slow from deep lungs.

Years ticked off their say-so on the great clocks  
of doom and damnation, soup, and nuts: meteors flashed  
their say-so: and out of great Russia came three  
dusky syllables workmen took guns and went out to die  
for: Bread, Peace, Land.

And I met a marine of the U.S.A., a leatherneck with a girl on his knee  
for a memory in ports circling the earth and he said: Tell me how to say  
three things and I always get by--gimme a plate of ham and eggs--how  
much--and--do you love me, kid?

Carl Sandburg

## 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 damn 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 love talks and roses grow  
And the sun breaks at morning  
Splattering the sea with crimson.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 machinery,  
    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.

Carl Sandburg



## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

III  
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 crumbler:  
To-morrow.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 thrumming:  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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 fragrant 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.

Carl Sandburg



## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **Upstairs**

I too have a garret of old playthings.  
I have tin soldiers with broken arms upstairs.  
I have a wagon and the wheels gone upstairs.  
I have guns and a drum, a jumping-jack and a magic lantern.  
And dust is on them and I never look at them upstairs.  
I too have a garret of old playthings.

Carl Sandburg

## Valley Song

Your eyes and the valley are memories.  
Your eyes fire and the valley a bowl.  
It was here a moonrise crept over the timberline.  
It was here we turned the coffee cups upside down.  
And your eyes and the moon swept the valley.

I will see you again to-morrow.  
I will see you again in a million years.  
I will never know your dark eyes again.  
These are three ghosts I keep.  
These are three sumach-red dogs I run with.

All of it wraps and knots to a riddle:  
I have the moon, the timberline, and you.  
All three are gone -- and I keep all three.

Carl Sandburg

## 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 remember.

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.

Carl Sandburg

## **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.

Carl Sandburg

## **White Shoulders**

Your white shoulders  
I remember  
And your shrug of laughter.

Low laughter  
Shaken slow  
From your white shoulders.

Carl Sandburg

## **Whitelight**

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

Carl Sandburg

## **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 captive  
in the universe.

Carl Sandburg



## **Window**

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

Carl Sandburg

## 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 memories,"  
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.

Carl Sandburg

## 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.

Carl Sandburg