

# Sun-Up and Other Poems

Lola Ridge

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# Dedication

(To my Mother)

Let me cradle myself back  
Into the darkness  
Of the half shapes...  
Of the cauled beginnings...  
Let me stir the attar of unused air,  
Elusive... ironically fragrant  
As a dead queen's kerchief..  
Let me blow the dust from off you...  
Resurrect your breath  
Lying limp as a fan  
In a dead queen's hand.

# Sun-Up

# Sun-Up

(Shadows over a cradle...  
fire-light craning...  
A hand  
throws something in the fire  
and a smaller hand  
runs into the flame and out again,  
singed and empty...  
Shadows  
settling over a cradle...  
two hands  
and a fire.)

## I Celia

Cherry, cherry,  
glowing on the hearth,  
bright red cherry...  
When you try to pick up cherry  
Celia's shriek  
sticks in you like a pin.

::

When God throws hailstones  
you cuddle in Celia's shawl  
and press your feet on her belly  
high up like a stool.  
When Celia makes umbrella of her hand.  
Rain falls through  
big pink spokes of her fingers.  
When wind blows Celia's gown up off her legs  
she runs under pillars of the bank—  
great round pillars of the bank  
have on white stockings too.

::

Celia says my father  
will bring me a golden bowl.  
When I think of my father  
I cannot see him  
for the big yellow bowl  
like the moon with two handles  
he carries in front of him.

::

Grandpa, grandpa...  
(Light all about you...  
ginger... pouring out of green jars...)  
You don't believe he has gone away and left his great coat...  
so you pretend... you see his face up in the ceiling.  
When you clap your hands and cry, grandpa, grandpa, grandpa,  
Celia crosses herself.

::



It isn't a dream...  
It comes again and again...  
You hear ivy crying on steeples  
the flames haven't caught yet  
and images screaming  
when they see red light on the lilies  
on the stained glass window of St. Joseph.  
The girl with the black eyes holds you tight,  
and you run... and run  
past the wild, wild towers...  
and trees in the gardens tugging at their feet  
and little frightened dolls  
shut up in the shops  
crying... and crying... because no one stops...  
you spin like a penny thrown out in the street.  
Then the man clutches her by the hair...  
He always clutches her by the hair...  
His eyes stick out like spears.  
You see her pulled-back face  
and her black, black eyes  
lit up by the glare...  
Then everything goes out.  
Please God, don't let me dream any more  
of the girl with the black, black eyes.

::

Celia's shadow rocks and rocks...  
and mama's eyes stare out of the pillow  
as though she had gone away  
and the night had come in her place  
as it comes in empty rooms...  
you can't bear it—  
the night threshing about  
and lashing its tail on its sides  
as bold as a wolf that isn't afraid—  
and you scream at her face, that is white as a stone on a grave  
and pull it around to the light,  
till the night draws backward... the night that walks alone  
and goes away without end.  
Mama says, I am cold, Betty, and shivers.  
Celia tucks the quilt about her feet,  
but I run for my little red cloak  
because red is hot like fire.

::

I wish Celia  
could see the sea climb up on the sky  
and slide off again...  
...Celia saying  
I'd beg the world with you...  
Celia... holding on to the cab...  
hands wrenched away...  
wind in the masts... like Celia crying...  
Celia never minded if you slapped her  
when the comb made your hairs ache,  
but though you rub your cheek against mama's hand  
she has not said darling since...  
Now I will slap her again...  
I will bite her hand till it bleeds.

It is cool by the port hole.  
The wet rags of the wind  
flap in your face.

## II

### The Alley

Because you are four years old  
the candle is all dressed up in a new frill.  
And stars nod to you through the hole in the curtain,  
(except the big stiff planets  
too fat to move about much,  
and you curtsy back to the stars  
when no one is looking.  
You feel sorry for the poor wooden chair  
that knows it isn't nice to sit on,  
and no one is sad but mama.  
You don't like mama to be sad  
when you are four years old,  
so you pretend  
you like the bitter gold-pale tea—  
you pretend  
if you don't drink it up pretty quick  
a little gold-fish  
will think it is a pond  
and come and get born in it.

::

It's hot in our street  
and the breeze is a dirty little broom  
that sweeps dust into our room  
and bits of paper out of the alley.  
You are not let to play  
with the children in the alley  
But you must be very polite—  
so you pass them and say good day  
and when they fling banana skins  
you fling them back again.

::

There is no one to play with  
and the flies on the window  
buzz and buzz...  
...you can pull out their legs  
and stick pins in their bodies  
but still they buzz...  
and mama says:  
When Nero was a little boy  
he caught flies on his mama's window  
and pulled out their legs  
and stuck pins in their bodies  
and nobody loved him.  
Buzz, blue-bellied flies—  
buzz, nasty black wheel  
of mama's machine—  
you are the biggest fly of all—  
you have the loudest buzz.  
I hear you at dawn before the locusts.  
But I like the picture of the Flood  
and the little babies getting drowned...  
If I were there I would save them,  
but as I can't save them  
I like to watch them  
getting drowned.

::

When mama buys of Ling Ho,  
he smiles very wide  
and picks her the largest loquots.  
The greens-man gave her a cabbage  
and she held it against her black bodice  
and said what a beautiful green it was  
and put it on the table  
as though it had been a flower.  
But next day we boiled and ate it with salt.  
It was our dinner.

::

Christmas day  
I found Janie on my pillow.  
Janie is made of rubber.  
Her red and blue jacket won't come off.  
Christmas dinner was green and white  
chicken and lettuce and peas  
and drops of oil on the salad  
smiley and full of light  
like the gold on the lady's teeth.

But mama said politely  
Thank you, we are dining out.  
She wouldn't let you take one pea  
to put in the hole where the whistle was  
at the back of Janie's head,  
so Janie should have some dinner  
So you went to the park with biscuits  
and black tea in a bottle.

::

You feel very sad  
when you climb on the fence  
to watch mama out of sight.  
The women in the alley  
poke their heads out of doorways  
and watch her too.  
You know her  
by the way she holds her shoulders  
till she is only a speck  
in a chain of specks—  
till she is swallowed up.  
But suppose  
that day after day  
you were to watch for her face  
and it didn't come back?  
Suppose  
it were to drop out of the string of white faces  
like the pearl out of my chain  
I never found again?

::

Mabel minds you while mama is out,  
she washes while she sings  
Three blind mice!  
they all run away from the farmer's wife  
who cut off their tails  
with a carving knife—  
Wind blows out Mabel's sheets,  
way you blow in a bag before you burst it.  
Wind has a soapy smell.  
It's heavier'n sun  
that lies all over you without any weight  
and makes you feel happy  
and crinkly like bubbling water.  
There's no sun on the empty house—  
sly-looking house—  
you can't see in its windows  
that watch you out of their corners.  
Perhaps there's a big spider there  
spinning gray threads over the windows  
till they look like dead people's faces...  
Jimmie says:  
Jimmie's hair is white as a white mouse.  
His lashes are gold as mama's wedding ring  
and his mouth feels cool and smooth  
like a flower wet with rain.  
You wouldn't believe Jimmie was different...  
till he showed you...

::

Blind wet sheets  
flapping on the lines...  
sun in your eyes,  
dark gold sun  
full of little black spots,  
you have to blink and blink...  
round eyes of Jimmie...  
Jimmie's blue jumper...  
blue shadow of wall...  
all the world holding still  
as when a clock stops...  
streets still... people still...  
no streets... no people...  
only sky and wall...  
sun glaring bright as God  
down at you and Jimmie...  
shadow like a purple cloth  
trailing off the wall...

Wild wet sheets  
flapping in the wind...  
big slippered feet flapping too...  
big-balloon-face  
rushing up the alley...  
houses closing up again...  
windows looking round...  
... Mabel pulls you in the gate and shakes you  
and tells you not to tell your mama...  
And you wonder  
if God has spoiled Jimmie.

### III

## Mama

Mama's face  
is smooth and pale as tea-rose leaves.  
That ivory oval of aunt Gem  
you sucked the miniature off  
had black black hair like mama.

::

Pit-it-ty-pat,  
Mama walks so fast,  
street lamps jig  
without bending a leg...  
lights in the windows  
play twinkling tunes  
on crimson and blue  
bottles like bubbles  
big as balloons...  
Faster and faster...  
and pink light spurts  
over cakes doing polkas  
in little white shirts,  
with cake-princesses  
in flounced white skirts.

Pit-pat—  
mama walks slower...  
slower and... slower...  
Eyes... lamps... stars...  
acres and acres of stars...  
bells... and sleepily  
flapping feet...  
You're glad mama walks slow.  
It's nice to be carried along  
up high near the stars  
that look at you with a grave, great look.

::



Every night  
mama sings you to sleep.  
When she sings, O for the light of thine eyes Dolores,  
there's a castle on a cliff  
and the sea roars like lions.  
It leaps at the castle  
and the cliff knocks it down  
but always the sea  
shakes its flattened head  
and gets up again.  
The castle has no roof  
so the rain spins silvery webs in it,  
and Dolores' face  
floats dim and beautiful  
the way flowers do when they are drowned.  
Step by white step  
she goes up the castle stairs,  
but the stair goes up into the sky  
and the sky keeps going up too,  
and none of them ever get there.

When mama sings Ba ba black sheep,  
the stars seem to shine through her voice  
so everything has to be still,  
and when she has finished singing  
her song goes up off the earth,  
higher and higher...  
till it is only as big as a tiny silver bird  
with nothing but moonlight around it.

## IV

### Betty

You can see the sandhills from our new room.

Butterflies

live in the sandhills

and lizards

and centipedes.

If you keep very still

lizards will think you a stone

and run over your lap.

Butterflies' liveries

are scarlet and black.

They drive chariots in air.

People in the chariots

are pale as dew—

you can see right through them—

but the chariots

are made of gold of the sun.

They go up to heaven

and never catch fire.

There are green centipedes

and brown centipedes

and black centipedes,

because green and brown and black

are the colors in hell's flag.

Centipedes

have hundreds of feet

because it is so far from hell

to come up for air.

Centipedes

do not hurry.

They are waiting for the last day

when they will creep over the false prophets

who will have their hands tied.

::

Night calls to the sandhills  
and gathers them under her.  
she pushes away cities  
because their sharp lights  
hurt her soft breast.  
Even candles make a sore place  
when they stick in the night.

There are things in the sandhills  
that no one knows about...  
they come out at dark when the young snakes play  
and tell each other secrets  
in the deaf logs.

Sometimes... before rain...  
when the stars have gone inside...  
the night comes close to your window  
and sniffs at the light...  
But you must not run away—  
you must keep your face to the night  
and walk backward.

::

When it rains  
and you are pulling off flies' legs...  
mama lets you play houses  
with Lizzie and Clara.  
Because you are the Only One—  
and because Only Ones have to live alone  
while sisters stay together,  
Lizzie and Clara  
give you the dry house  
and take the one with the leaking roof.

Rain like curly hairpins  
blows on Lizzie and Clara's two heads  
turned like one head—  
two mouths  
spread into one laugh.  
Lizzie is saying:  
why don't you want to play—  
when you feel you'd like to braid  
the crinkled-silver rain  
into a shining rope  
to climb up... and up... and up... into the wet sky  
and never see any one again.

Our gate doesn't hang right.  
It must have pawed at the wind  
and gotten a kick  
as the wind passed over.  
The sitting sky  
puffs out a gray smoke  
and the wind makes a red-striped sound  
blowing out straight,  
but our gate drags its foot  
and whines to itself on one hinge.

::

What do you think I've found—  
two wee knickers of fairy brass,  
or two gold sovereigns folded up  
in a bit of green silk,  
or two gold bugs  
in little green shirts?  
If you want to know,  
you must walk tip-toe  
so your feet just whisper in the grass—  
you must carry them careful  
and very proud,  
for their stems bleed drops of milk—  
but Lizzie and Clara shout in glee:  
Pee-a-bed, pee-a-bed—  
dandelions!  
You look in the eyes of grown-up people  
to see if they feel  
the way you feel...  
but they hide inside of themselves,  
and so you do not find out.  
Grown-up people say:  
The stars are bright to-night,  
but they do not say  
what you are thinking about stars—  
not even mama says what you are thinking about stars.  
This makes you feel very lonely.

::

It's strange about stars...  
You have to be still when they look at you.  
They push your song inside of you with their song.  
Their long silvery rays  
sink into you and do not hurt.  
It is good to feel them resting on you  
like great white birds...  
and their shining whiteness  
doesn't burn like the sun—  
it washes all over you  
and makes you feel cleaner'n water.

::

My doll Janie has no waist  
and her body is like a tub with feet on it.  
Sometimes I beat her  
but I always kiss her afterwards.  
When I have kissed all the paint off her body  
I shall tie a ribbon about it  
so she shan't look shabby.  
But it must be blue—  
it mustn't be pink—  
pink shows the dirt on her face  
that won't wash off.

::

I beat Janie  
and beat her...  
but still she smiled...  
so I scratched her between the eyes with a pin.  
Now she doesn't love me anymore...  
she scowls... and scowls...  
though I've begged her to forgive me  
and poured sugar in the hole at the back of her head.

::

Mama says Janie is a fairy doll  
and she has forgiven me—  
that she's gone to the market  
to buy me some sweets.  
—Now she's at the door  
and a little bag tied to her neck—  
I run to Janie  
and kiss her all over...  
Ah... she is still frowning.  
I let the sweets drop on the floor—  
mama  
has told you a lie.

::

Chinaman  
singing in street:  
gleen ledd-ish-es, gleen ledd-ish-es—  
hot sun  
shining on your face—  
it must be a new day.  
But why aren't you happy  
if it's a new day?  
Because something has happened...  
something sad and terrible...  
Now I remember... it's Janie.  
Yesterday  
I took Janie out  
and tied my handkerchief over her face  
and put sand in it  
and threw her into the ditch  
down in the black water  
under the dock leaves...  
and when mama asked me where Janie was  
I said I had lost her.

::

I'm glad it is night-time  
so I'll be able to go to sleep  
and forget all about it...  
But mama looks at my tongue  
and says she will give me senna tea.  
When you smell the tea  
you shut your eyes tight  
and pretend not to hear  
the soft, cool voice of mama  
that goes over your forehead  
like a little wind.  
And then you lie in the dark  
and stare... and stare...  
till the faces come...  
yellow faces with leering eyes  
drifting in a greeny mist...  
I wonder  
if Janie sees faces  
out there... alone in the dark...  
I wonder  
if she has got the handkerchief off  
or if the water has gone in the hole  
where the whistle was  
at the back of her head  
and drowned her...  
or if the stars  
can see her under the dock leaves?

::



It's smoky-blue and still  
over the red road.  
Wind must be lying down with its tail under it—  
doesn't even flick off the flies.  
And you can hear the silence  
buzzing in the gum trees,  
the way the angels buzzed  
when they flew through the cedars of Lebanon  
with thin gauze wings  
you could see through.  
Nice to hear the silence buzzing—  
till it comes too close  
and booms in your ears  
and presses all over you  
till you scream...  
When you scream at the silence  
it goes to jingling pieces  
like a silver mirror  
broken into tiny bits.  
Perhaps its wings are made of glass—  
perhaps it lives down in a dark, dark cave  
and only comes up  
to warm its wings in the sun...  
It's cold in the cave—  
no matter how you cover yourself up.  
Little girls sit there  
dressed in white  
and the dolls in their arms  
all have white handkerchiefs  
over their faces.  
Their shadows cannot play with them...  
their shadows lie down at their feet...  
for the little girls sit stiff as stones  
with their backs to the mouth of the cave  
where a little light falls off  
the wings of the silence  
when it comes down out of the sun.

::

Moon catches the flying fish  
as they dive in the bay.  
Flying fish  
spin over and over  
slippity-silver  
into the water.  
Mom bends over jungles  
and touches the foreheads of tigers  
as they pass under openings made by dropped leaves.  
Tigers stop on the trail of the deer  
while the moon is on their foreheads—  
they let the stags go by.

Moon is shining strangely  
on the white palings of the fence.  
Fence keeps very still...  
most times it moves a little...  
everything moves a little  
though you mayn't know it...  
but now the little fence  
wouldn't change places with the great cross  
that stands so stiff and high  
with its back to the moon.  
Moon shining strangely  
on the white palings of the fence,  
I am shining too  
but my light is shut inside of me  
and can't get out.

::

Old house with black windows—  
blind house begging moonlight  
to put out the shadows—  
why do you want so much light?  
You creak when the wind steps on you—  
you cough up dust  
and your beams ache—  
you know you will soon fall,  
the moon just pities you!  
Don't waste yourself moon—  
come on my bed and play with me.  
Wrap me up in blue light,  
you who are cool.  
I am too hot,  
I am all alive  
and the shadows are outside of me.

::

There are different kinds of shadows.  
The blind ones  
are the shadows of things.  
These are the tame shadows—  
they love to play on the wall with you  
and follow you about like cats and dogs.  
Sometimes  
they hiss at you softly  
like snakes that do not bite,  
or swish like women's dresses,  
but if you poke a candle at them  
they pull in their heads and disappear.

But there is a shadow  
that is not the shadow of a thing...  
it is a thing itself.  
When you meet this shadow  
you must not look at it too long...  
it grows with your looking at it...  
till you are all alone  
with nothing around you...  
nothing... nothing... nothing...  
but a shadow  
with its eyes full of black light.

: :

There's a shadow in the corner of the shed,  
crouching, lying in wait...  
a black coiled shadow,  
watching... ready to strike...  
but I mustn't be afraid of it—  
I mustn't be afraid of anything.  
Poor evil shadow,  
the candle would chase it away  
only she can't get at it.  
Do you think that every one hates you,  
shadow with your back to the wall,  
afraid to lie down and sleep?  
But I don't hate you.  
Even the moon means to be kind.  
She just treads on you  
as I'd tread on a worm that I didn't see.  
Don't be afraid of me, shadow.  
See—I've no light in my hand—  
nothing to save myself with—  
yet I walk right up to you—  
if you'll let me  
I'll put my arms around you  
and stroke you softly.  
Are you surprised I'd put my arms around you?  
Is it your black black sorrow  
that nobody loves you?

## V

### Jude

When you tell mama  
you are going to do something great  
she looks at you  
as though you were a window  
she were trying to see through,  
and says she hopes you will be good  
instead of great.

::

When you are five years old  
you spend the day in the Gardens.  
The grass is greener than cabbages,  
and orange lilies  
stand up very straight  
and will not curtsy to the sun  
when the wind tells them.  
Only pansies bow down very low.  
Pansies make little purple cushions  
for queen bees to stand on.  
Bees  
have brown silk hair on their bodies.  
If you are careful  
they will let you stroke them.

The trees over the marble man  
catch up all the sunbeams  
so the shadows have it their way—  
the shadows swallow him up  
like a blue shark.  
When you scoop a sunbeam up on your palm  
and offer it to the marble man,  
he does not notice...  
he looks into his stone beard.  
... When you do something great  
people give you a stone face,  
so you do not care any more  
when the sun throws gold on you  
through leaf-holes the wind makes  
in green bushes...  
This thought makes me very sad.

::

Jude has eyes like tobacco  
with yellow specks on it  
and his hair is red as a red orange.  
Jude and I  
have made a garden in the field  
that no one knows about.  
We creep in and out  
through a little place  
where the barbed wire is down.  
We lie in the long grass  
and crush dandelions  
between our two cheeks  
till the milk comes out on our faces.  
We hold each other tight  
and the wind tip-toes all over us  
and pelts us with thistle-down.

::

Jude isn't afraid of shadows—  
not even of the ones that have eyes in them.  
And he can look in the face of the sun  
without blinking at all.  
Hush! don't say sun so loud.  
The sun gets angry when you stare at him.  
If you peek in his glory-windows  
he spreads into a great white flame  
like God out of his Burning Bush...  
till you put your hands up on your face  
and tremble like a drop of rain upon a flower  
that some one throws into the fire...  
and then  
the sun makes himself small,  
the sun swings down out of the sky—  
littler'n a star,  
little as a spark  
little as a fierce red spider  
on a burning thread...  
and then  
the light goes out...  
shivers into blackened bits...  
You hold on to a wall that whirls around  
and the gate is a black hole.  
You grope your way in like a toad  
that's blinded by a stone...  
and mama puts on cold wet rags  
that get hot soon...  
Hush! don't let's talk about the sun.

::

When you pass by the ditch where Janie is  
You run very fast  
and look at the other side.  
Jude says Janie did love me  
only she couldn't forgive me,  
and that you can love people very much  
and never, never, never forgive them...  
so we poked a stick in the bottle-green water.  
But only weeds came up  
and an old top with the paint washed off.

::



Jude and I  
wave to the new moon  
curled right up like one gold hair  
on the bald-head sandhill.  
Mama peeps out the window and smiles.  
She thinks  
I am playing with myself...  
Run, Jude, run with the wind—  
but hold my hand tight  
or the wind,  
looking for some one to play with,  
will take me away from you!  
Wind with no one to play with  
cooees the orange-trees—  
stay-at-home orange trees,  
have to nurse oranges,  
greeny-gold.  
Wind shouts to the grass—  
run-away-grass  
tugs at its roots,  
but the earth holds tight  
and the grass falls down  
and wind boos over it.  
Wind whistles the bees—  
bees too busy  
with taking home stuff out of flowers  
won't look back—  
bees always going somewhere.  
Only Jude and I—  
heads over shoulders  
watching all roads at one time—  
run with the wind,  
going to nowhere.

::

Jude and I  
were weeding our garden  
when we heard his whip—  
must have been a new whip  
to cut off dandelion-heads at one swing...  
He was the kind of boy you knew when you had Celia...  
with nice clothes on and curls  
crawling about his collar  
like little golden slugs,  
and his man was leading his horse.  
I wish I hadn't run to meet him...  
If you hadn't run to meet him  
he mightn't have trod on your garden and said:  
Get out of my field you dirty little beggar...  
he mightn't have struck you with his whip...  
How the daisies stared...  
I hate daisies—  
stupid white faces—  
skinny necks  
craning over the grass!  
I said It is not your field,  
and he struck me again.  
But he didn't make me run.  
His hand  
smelled of sweet soap...  
he couldn't shake me off,  
but his man did...  
Funny—how the sky fell down  
and turned over and over  
like a blue carpet rolling you up,  
and the grass caught at your face—  
it couldn't have been spiteful—  
it must have been saving itself.  
Hot road... silly wind playing with your hair...  
The road smelled of horses.  
I only got up  
when I heard a dray.

::

Mama has sung ba ba black sheep,  
and put a chair with a cloth on it  
between me and the light.  
But the clock keeps saying:  
Dirty little beggar,  
dirty little beggar...  
Some day  
I will get that boy.  
I will pull off his arms and legs  
and put him in a box  
and hide the box  
under the bed...  
I wonder  
will he buzz  
when I take him out to look at his body  
that will have no arms to whip me?  
Mama drew my cot to the window  
so I can look at the stars.  
I will not look at the stars.  
There is a black chimney  
throwing up sparks  
and one tall flame  
like gold hair in a blaze...  
I know now  
what I shall do...  
I will set fire to him  
and he will burn up into a tall flame—  
he will scream into the sky  
and sparks will fly out of him—  
he will burn and burn...  
and his blazing hair  
shall light up the world.

::

Before he hit me—  
I knew he was going to—  
I thought about Jude...  
I thought if he'd fight...  
but he shriveled all up...  
he lay down like a fear.

Mama never knew about Jude.  
You always wanted to tell her,  
but somehow you never did.  
You were afraid she'd smile  
and say he wasn't real—  
that he was only a little dream-boy,  
because the grass didn't fall down under his feet...  
He is fading now...  
He is just lines... like a drawing...  
You can see mama in between.  
When she moves  
she rubs some of him out.

# Monologues

# Jaguar

Nasal intonations of light  
and clicking tongues...  
publicity of windows  
stoning me with pent-up cries...  
smells of abattoirs...  
smells of long-dead meat.

Some day-end—  
while the sand is yet cozy as a blanket  
off the warm body of a squaw,  
and the jaguars are out to kill...  
with a blue-black night coming on  
and a painted cloud  
stalking the first star—  
I shall go alone into the Silence...  
the coiled Silence...  
where a cry can run only a little way  
and waver and dwindle  
and be lost.

And there...  
where tiny antlers clinch and strain  
as life grapples in a million avid points,  
and threshing things  
strike and die,  
letting their hate live on  
in the spreading purple of a wound...  
I too  
will make covert of a crevice in the night,  
and turn and watch...  
nose at the cleft's edge.

# Wild Duck

## I

That was a great night we spied upon  
See-sawing home,  
Singing a hot sweet song to the super-stars  
Shuffling off behind the smoke-haze...  
Fog-horns sentimentalizing on the river...  
Lights dwindling to shining slits  
In the wet asphalt...  
Purring lights... red and green and golden-whiskered...  
Digging daintily pointed claws in the soft mud...  
... But you did not know...  
As the trains made golden augers  
Boring in the darkness...  
How my heart kept racing out along the rails,  
As a spider runs along a thread  
And hauls him in again  
To some drawing point...  
You did not know  
How wild ducks' wings  
Itch at dawn...  
How at dawn the necks of wild ducks  
Arch to the sun  
And new-mown air  
Trickles sweet in their gullets.

## II

As water, cleared of the reflection of a bird  
That has lately flown across it,  
Yet trembles with the beating of its wings,  
So my soul... emptied of the known you... utterly...  
Is yet vibrant with the cadence of the song  
You might have been...  
'Twas a great night...  
With never a waste look over a shoulder  
Curved to the crook of the wind...  
And a great word we threw  
For memory to play knuckles with...  
A word the waters of the world have washed,  
Leaving it stark and without smell...  
A world that rattles well in emptiness: Good-by.



# The Dream

I have a dream  
to fill the golden sheath  
of a remembered day...  
(Air  
heavy and massed and blue  
as the vapor of opium...  
domes  
fired in sulphurous mist...  
sea  
quiescent as a gray seal...  
and the emerging sun  
spurting up gold  
over Sydney, smoke-pale, rising out of the bay...)  
But the day is an up-turned cup  
and its sun a junk of red iron  
guttering in sluggish-green water—  
where shall I pour my dream?

# Altitude

I wonder  
how it would be here with you,  
where the wind  
that has shaken off its dust in low valleys  
touches one cleanly,  
as with a new-washed hand,  
and pain  
is as the remote hunger of droning things,  
and anger  
but a little silence  
sinking into the great silence.

# Comrades

Life

You have been good to me...

You have not made yourself too dear  
to juggle with.

# Nocturne

Indigo bulb of darkness  
Punctured by needle lights  
Through a fissure of brick canyon shutting out stars,  
And a sliver of moon  
Spigoting two high windows over the West river...  
Boy, I met to-night,  
Your eyes are two red-glowing arcs shifting with my vision...  
They reflect as in a fading proof  
The deadened eyes of a woman,  
And your shed virginity,  
Light as the withered pod of a sweet pea,  
Moist and fragrant  
Blows against my soul.  
What are you to me, boy,  
That I, who have passed so many lights,  
Should carry your eyes  
Like swinging lanterns?

# Cactus Seed

Radiant notes  
piercing my narrow-chested room,  
beating down through my ceiling—  
smeared with unshapen  
belly-prints of dreams  
drifted out of old smokes—  
trillions of icily  
pelting notes  
out of just one canary,  
all grown to song  
as a plant to its stalk,  
from too long craning at a sky-light  
and a square of second-hand blue.

Silvery-strident throat—  
so assiduously serenading my brain,  
flinching under  
the glittering hail of your notes—  
were you not safe behind... rats know what thickness of... plastered  
wall...

I might fathom  
your golden delirium  
with throttle of finger and thumb  
shutting valve of bright song.

## II

But if... away off... on a fork of grassed earth  
socketing an inlet reach of blue water...  
if canaries (do they sing out of cages?)  
flung such luminous notes,  
they would sink in the spirit...  
lie germinal...  
housed in the soul as a seed in the earth...  
to break forth at spring with the crocuses into young smiles  
on the mouth.  
Or glancing off buoyantly,  
radiate notes in one key  
with the sparkle of rain-drops  
on the petal of a cactus flower  
focusing the just-out sun.  
Cactus... why cactus?  
God... God...  
somewhere... away off...  
cactus flowers, star-yellow  
ray out of spiked green,  
and empties of sky  
roll you over and over  
like a mother her baby in long grass.  
And only the wind scandal-mongers with gum trees,  
pricking multiple leaves  
at his amazing story.

# Windows

# Time-Stone

Hallo, Metropolitan—  
Ubiquitous windows staring all ways,  
Red eye notching the darkness.  
No use to ogle that slip of a moon.  
This midnight the moon,  
Playing virgin after all her encounters,  
Will break another date with you.  
You fuss an awful lot,  
You flight of ledger books,  
Overrun with multiple ant-black figures  
Dancing on spindle legs  
An interminable can-can.  
But I'd rather... like the cats in the alley... count time  
By the silver whistle of a moonbeam  
Falling between my stoop-shouldered walls,  
Than all your tally of the sunsets,  
Metropolitan, ticking among stars.



# Train Window

Small towns  
Crawling out of their green shirts...  
Tubercular towns  
Coughing a little in the dawn...  
And the church...  
There is always a church  
With its natty spire  
And the vestibule—  
That's where they whisper:  
Tzz-tzz... tzz-tzz... tzz-tzz...  
How many codes for a wireless whisper—  
And corn flatter than it should be  
And those chits of leaves  
Gadding with every wind?  
Small towns  
From Connecticut to Maine:  
Tzz-tzz... tzz-tzz...tzz-tzz...

# Scandal

Aren't there bigger things to talk about  
Than a window in Greenwich Village  
And hyacinths sprouting  
Like little puce poems out of a sick soul?  
Some cosmic hearsay—  
As to whom—it can't be Mars! put the moon—that way...  
Or what winds do to canyons  
Under the tall stars...  
Or even  
How that old roué, Neptune,  
Cranes over his bald-head moons  
At the twinkling heel of a sky-scraper.

# Electricity

Out of fiery contacts...  
Rushing auras of steel  
Touching and whirled apart...  
Out of the charged phallases  
Of iron leaping  
Female and male,  
Complete, indivisible, one,  
Fused into light.

# Skyscrapers

Skyscrapers... remote, unpartisan...  
Turning neither to the right nor left  
Your imperturbable fronts...  
Austerely greeting the sun  
With one chilly finger of stone...  
I know your secrets... better than all the policemen  
like fat blue mullet along the avenues.

# Wall Street at Night

Long vast shapes... cooled and flushed through with darkness...  
Lidless windows  
Glazed with a flashy luster  
From some little pert cafe chirping up like a sparrow.  
And down among iron guts  
Piled silver  
Throwing gray spatter of light... pale without heat...  
Like the pallor of dead bodies.

# East River

Dour river  
Jaded with monotony of lights  
Diving off mast heads...  
Lights mad with creating in a river... turning its sullen back...  
Heave up, river...  
Vomit back into the darkness your spawn of light...  
The night will gut what you give her.

# Secrets

# Interim

The earth is motionless  
And poised in space...  
A great bird resting in its flight  
Between the alleys of the stars.  
It is the wind's hour off...  
The wind has nestled down among the corn...  
The two speak privately together,  
Awaiting the whirr of wings.



# After Storm

Was there a wind?  
Tap... tap...  
Night pads upon the snow  
with moccasined feet...  
and it is still... so still...  
an eagle's feather  
might fall like a stone.  
Could there have been a storm...  
mad-tossing golden mane on the neck of the wind...  
tearing up the sky...  
loose-flapping like a tent  
about the ice-capped stars?  
Cool, sheer and motionless  
the frosted pines  
are jeweled with a million flaming points  
that fling their beauty up in long white sheaves  
till they catch hands with stars.  
Could there have been a wind  
that haled them by the hair...  
and blinding  
blue-forked  
flowers of the lightning  
in their leaves?  
Tap... tap...  
slow-ticking centuries...  
Soft as bare feet upon the snow...  
faint... lulling as heard rain  
upon heaped leaves...  
Silence  
builds her wall  
about a dream impaled.

# Secrets

Secrets  
infesting my half-sleep...  
did you enter my wound from another wound  
brushing mine in a crowd...  
or did I snare you on my sharper edges  
as a bird flying through cobwebbed trees at sun-up  
carries off spiders on its wings?

Secrets,  
running over my soul without sound,  
only when dawn comes tip-toeing  
ushered by a suave wind,  
and dreams disintegrate  
like breath shapes in frosty air,  
I shall overhear you, bare-foot,  
scatting off into the darkness...  
I shall know you, secrets  
by the litter you have left  
and by your bloody foot-prints.

# Potpourri

Do you remember  
Honey-melon moon  
Dripping thick sweet light  
Where Canal Street saunters off by herself among quiet trees?  
And the faint decayed patchouli—  
Fragrance of New Orleans  
Like a dead tube rose  
Upheld in the warm air...  
Miraculously whole.

# Thaw

Blow through me wind  
As you blow through apple blossoms...  
Scatter me in shining petals over the passers-by...  
Joyously I reunite... sway and gather to myself...  
Sedately I walk by the dancing feet of children—  
Not knowing I too dance over the cobbled spring.  
O, but they laugh back at me,  
(Eyes like daisies smiling wide open),  
And we both look askance at the snowed-in people  
Thinking me one of them.

# Portraits

# Mother

## I

Your love was like moonlight  
turning harsh things to beauty,  
so that little wry souls  
reflecting each other obliquely  
as in cracked mirrors...  
beheld in your luminous spirit  
their own reflection,  
transfigured as in a shining stream,  
and loved you for what they are not.

You are less an image in my mind  
than a luster  
I see you in gleams  
pale as star-light on a gray wall...  
evanescent as the reflection of a white swan  
shimmering in broken water.

## II

(To E. S.)

You inevitable,  
Unwieldy with enormous births,  
Lying on your back, eyes open, sucking down stars,  
Or you kissing and picking over fresh deaths...  
Filtth... worms... flowers...  
Green and succulent pods...  
Tremulous gestation  
Of dark water germinal with lilies...  
All in you from the beginning...  
Nothing buried or thrown away...  
Only the moon like a white sheet  
Spread over the dead you carry.

### III

(To H.)

Speeding gull  
Passing under a cloud  
Caught on his white back  
You... drop of crystal rain.  
Now you gleam softly triumphant  
Folding immensities of light.

### IV

(To O. F. T.)

You have always gotten up after blows  
And smiled... and shaken off the dust...  
Only you could not shake the darkness  
From off the bruised brown of your eyes.

### V

(To E. A. R.)

Centuries shall not deflect  
nor many suns  
absorb your stream,  
flowing immune and cold  
between the banks of snow.  
Nor any wind  
carry the dust of cities  
to your high waters  
that arise out of the peaks  
and return again into the mountain  
and never descend.



# Sons of Belial

# Sons of Belial

## I

We are old,  
Old as song.  
Before Rome was  
Or Cyrene.  
Mad nights knew us  
And old men's wives.  
We knew who spilled the sacred oil  
For young-gold harlots of the town...  
We knew where the peacocks went  
And the white doe for sacrifice.

## II

We were the Sons of Belial.  
One black night  
Centuries ago  
We beat at a door  
In Gilead...  
We took the Levite's concubine  
We plucked her hands from off the door...  
We choked the cry into her throat  
And stuck the stars among her hair...  
We glimpsed the madly swaying stars  
Between the rhythms of her hair  
And all our mute and separate strings  
Swelled in a raging symphony...  
Our blood sang paeans  
All that night  
Till dawn fell like a wounded swan  
Upon the fields of Gilead.

### III

We are old...  
Old as song...  
We are dumb song.  
(Epics tingled  
In our blood  
When we haled Hypatia  
Over the stones  
In Alexandria.)  
Could we loose  
The wild rhythms clinched in us...  
March in bands of troubadours...  
We would be of gentle mood.  
When Christ healed us  
Who were dumb—  
When he freed our shut-in song—  
We strewed green palms  
At his pale feet...  
We sang hosannas  
In Jerusalem.  
And all our fumbling voices blent  
In a brief white harmony.  
(But a mightier song  
Was in us pent  
When we nailed Christ  
To a four-armed tree.)

## IV

We are young.  
When we rise up with singing roots,  
(Warm rains washing  
Gutters of Berlin  
Where we stamped Rosa... Luxemburg  
On a night in spring.)  
Rhythms skurry in our blood.  
Little nimble rats of song  
In our feet run crazily  
And all is dust... we trample... on.  
  
Mad nights when we make ritual  
(Feet running before the sleuth-light...  
And the smell of burnt flesh  
By a flame-ringed hut  
In Missouri,  
Sweet as on Rome's pyre...)  
We make ropes do rigadoons  
With copper feet that jig on air...  
We are the Mob...  
Old as song.  
Tyre knew us  
And Israel.

# Reveille

# In Harness

## I

The foreman's head  
slowly circling...  
White rims  
under yellow disks of eyes...  
Gold hairs  
starting out of a blond scowl...  
Hovering... disappearing... recurring...  
the foreman's head.

Droning of power-machines...  
droning of girl with adenoids...  
Arms flapping with a fin-like motion  
under sun burning down through a sky-light like a glass lid.  
Light skating on the rims of wheels...  
boring in gimlet points.  
Needles flickering  
fierce white threads of light  
fine as a wasp's sting.  
Light in sweat-drops brighter than eyes  
and calico-pallid faces  
and bodies throwing off smells—  
and the air a bloated presence pressing on the walls  
and the silence a compressed scream.

Allons enfants de la patrie—  
Electric... piercing... shrill as a fife  
the voice of a little Russian  
breaks out of the shivered circle.  
Another voice rises... another and another  
leaps like flame to flame.  
And life—surging, clamorous, swarming like a rabble  
crazily fluttering ragged petticoats—  
comes rushing back into torpid eyes  
like suddenly yielded gates.

The girl with adenoids  
rocks on her hams.  
A torrent of song  
strains at her throat,  
gurgles, rushes, gouges her blocked pipes.  
Her feet beat a wild tattoo—  
head flung back and pelvis lifting  
to the white body of the sun.  
Mates now, these two—  
goddess and god...  
Marchons!

Only the power machines drone  
with metallic docility  
under the flaxen head of the foreman  
poised like an amazed gull.

## II

To-day  
little French merchant men  
with pointed beards  
and fat American merchant men  
without any beards  
drive to a feast of buttered squabs.  
The band... accoutered and neatly caparisoned...  
    plays the Marseillaise...  
And I think of a wild stallion... newly caught...  
flanks yet taut and nostrils spread  
to the smell of a racing mare,  
hitched to a grocer's cart.



# Reveille

Come forth, you workers!  
Let the fires go cold—  
Let the iron spill out, out of the troughs—  
Let the iron run wild  
Like a red bramble on the floors—  
Leave the mill and the foundry and the mine  
And the shrapnel lying on the wharves—  
Leave the desk and the shuttle and the loom—  
Come,  
With your ashen lives,  
Your lives like dust in your hands.

I call upon you, workers.  
It is not yet light  
But I beat upon your doors.  
You say you await the Dawn  
But I say you are the Dawn.  
Come, in your irresistible unspent force  
And make new light upon the mountains.

You have turned deaf ears to others—  
Me you shall hear.  
Out of the mouths of turbines,  
Out of the turgid throats of engines,  
Over the whistling steam,  
You shall hear me shrilly piping.  
Your mills I shall enter like the wind,  
And blow upon your hearts,  
Kindling the slow fire.

They think they have tamed you, workers—  
Beaten you to a tool  
To scoop up hot honor  
Till it be cool—  
But out of the passion of the red frontiers  
A great flower trembles and burns and glows  
And each of its petals is a people.

Come forth, you workers—  
Clinging to your stable  
And your wisp of warm straw—  
Let the fires grow cold,  
Let the iron spill out of the troughs,  
Let the iron run wild  
Like a red bramble on the floors...

As our forefathers stood on the prairies  
So let us stand in a ring,  
Let us tear up their prisons like grass  
And beat them to barricades—  
Let us meet the fire of their guns  
With a greater fire,  
Till the birds shall fly to the mountains  
For one safe bough.

# To Alexander Berkman

Can you see me, Sasha?

I can see you...

A tentacle of the vast dawn is resting on your face  
that floats as though detached  
in a sultry and greenish vapor.

I cannot reach my hands to you...

would not if I could,

though I know how warmly yours would close about them.

Why?

I do not know...

I have a sense of shame.

Your eyes hurt me... mysterious openings in the gray stone of your  
face

through which your spirit streams out taut as a flag  
bearing strange symbols to the new dawn.

If I stay... projected, trembling against these bars filtering  
emaciated light...  
will your eyes... that bore their lonely way through mine...  
stop as at a friendly gate...  
grow warm... and luminous?  
... but I cannot stay... for the smell...  
I know... how the days pass...  
The prison squats  
with granite haunches  
on the young spring,  
battered under with its twisting green...  
and you... socket for every bolt  
piercing like a driven nail.  
Eyes stare you through the bars...  
eyes blank as a graveled yard...  
and the silence shuffles heavy dice of feet in iron corridors...  
until the day... that has soiled herself in this black hole  
to caress the pale mask of your face...  
withdraws the last wizened ray  
to wash in the infinite  
her discolored hands.  
Can you hear me, Sasha,  
in your surrounded darkness?

# Emma Goldman

How should they appraise you,  
who walk up close to you  
as to a mountain,  
each proclaiming his own eyeful  
against the other's eyeful.

Only time  
standing well off  
shall measure your circumference and height.

# An Old Workman

Warped... gland-dry...  
With spine askew  
And body shrunken into half its space...  
Well-used as some cracked paving-stone...  
Bearing on his grimed and pitted front  
A stamp... as of innumerable feet.

# To Larkin

Is it you I see go by the window, Jim Larkin—you not looking  
at me nor any one,  
And your shadow swaying from East to West?  
Strange that you should be walking free—you shut down without light,  
And your legs tied up with a knot of iron.  
One hundred million men and women go inevitably about their affairs,  
In the somnolent way  
Of men before a great drunkenness...  
They do not see you go by their windows, Jim Larkin,  
With your eyes bloody as the sunset  
And your shadow gaunt upon the sky...  
You, and the like of you, that life  
Is crushing for their frantic wines.

# Wind Rising in the Alleys

Wind rising in the alleys  
My spirit lifts in you like a banner streaming free of hot walls.  
You are full of unspent dreams...  
You are laden with beginnings...  
There is hope in you... not sweet... acrid as blood in the mouth.  
Come into my tossing dust  
Scattering the peace of old deaths,  
Wind rising in the alleys,  
Carrying stuff of flame.



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Lola Ridge  
Sun-Up and Other Poems

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