

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT I

THE COURTHIP OF CARL SANDBURG

A Musical Play In Two Acts

by

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Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

ACT I

CHORUS:

He told us of the things he'd seen
Across his native land
He spoke of the injustices
He couldn't understand
He wrote of fields and factories
And he knew the pride of man
And he told a lot of people how things were
He told us how they ought to be
With promises and poetry
But he really must have said a lot to her
Loving Lillian
He really must have said a lot to her

SANDBURG: (*singing – accompanied by a banjo*)

Oh, I had a horse and his name was Bill
And when he ran he couldn't stand still
He ran away
One day
And also I ran with him
He ran so fast that he could not stop
He ran into a barbershop
And fell exhaustionized
With his eyeteeth
In the barber's left shoulder

CHORUS:

They talk about his poetry
They talk about his books
I think you'll find a hero
If you care to take a look
This prairie boy from Illinois
With a sense of great adventure
Did it all
He did it all
Carl Sandburg came from Illinois
Raised in Galesburg as a boy
And he dreamed his poet's dreams
He tried a million jobs it seems

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

SANDBURG: (*speaking- reciting his sales pitch*)

Stereographs as seen through a good glass, are the best possible substitute for travel. They bring a scene before the eyes with startling reality and impart much of the same inspiration that the original scene would. These, when studied in the same spirit of investigation and love of beauty that one should have in the study of art, history, geography, books of travel, are of inestimable value. To neglect them is to forego a genuine pleasure and a real addition to your stock of knowledge. They are the connecting link between illustration and reality.

I have been selling stereographs off and on since I was a boy in Galesburg, and in this manner I have supported my various activities; wandering socialist, itinerant poet, vagabond songster on the highways and byways of life. But after all is said and done, I'm a pretty good part-time stereograph salesman.

CHORUS: (*singing*)

On the sixth of January in 1878
He made his first appearance
On that auspicious date
A poet and a writer and a dreamer on the run
A prairie son
A prairie son

Raised in Galesburg as a boy
In the prairie state of Illinois
Grew up under prairie skies
Saw the world through a poet's eyes

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

SANDBURG: (*offstage*)

When I was a lad, one night at home I heard that the opera house was burning, and I ran down to the corner of Main and Prairie to watch it. I stood across the street from the fire until midnight. Saw the second story go; heard the roof crash. Saw the fireman try to keep the fire from spreading. I didn't like to see the place go. I could remember so much about it.

On that stage, I had seen the Kickapoo Indians. They stayed for six weeks. I went there at least once or twice a week. I saw them in buckskins and feather headdresses.
(*An Indian drumbeat plays in the background*)

Dancing and stomping, howling their war songs. Then the white man that they worked for would put on his spiel. He claimed if you had rheumatism or aches in your muscles or bones, you eased it away with Kickapoo Indian Snake Oil. If you had trouble with your stomach or your liver, you took a few spoons of Kickapoo Indian Sagwa -- why your insides felt better and a bottle or two cured you! He was a slicker!

CHORUS:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

I love to travel far and wide
Throughout my native land
I love to sell as I go along

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And take the cash in hand

CHORUS:

I love to cure all in distress
That happen in my way
And you better believe I feel quite fine
When the old folks rush up and say

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

SANDBURG:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil!
That's so, ladies and gentlemen, wherever the wizard oil is used, the people all are thriving. And whenever I get up to sell the second time in a town, I'm interrupted by the sweet silvery voice of a young lady or the sonorous tones of a gentleman. They rush up to me with a dollar in their hand and soon I hear their sweet exclamations, which sound very much like...

CHORUS:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

SANDBURG:

Music to my ears, and let me tell you this much, folks. Your requests for wizard oil shall not be denied! Remember the good lord helps those that help themselves so help your self to a bottle of Kickapoo Indian Snake Oil. A buck a bottle! Get...

Well my goodness, ma'am. It's good to see you again! As a thank you for coming back again this year, take this bottle of wizard oil absolutely free of charge. If you could have seen this woman just one year ago today, the sorry, sorry condition I found her in, you'd swear that five dollars, heck twenty dollars was not too much to ask. But a dollar a bottle!

Now there is a gentleman that looks like he needs help. A gentleman whose get up and go, looks like it got up and went. A gentleman whose crushed spirit is crying out for rejuvenation. Sir, tell me, how much would you spend to put the lilt back in your voice, the twinkle in your eye, the spring... don't tell me. Because- I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Absolutely free of charge, take this bottle of wizard oil, if you will. Now stand up, by God, stand up if you can. Hold it high over your head. Now you tell me - doesn't he look better already? (Cheers from the choristers)

I could go on and on ladies and gentleman, but now - here to tell the tale of two testimonials of tribute to that treasured tincture that is Kickapoo Indian Snake Oil,

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

direct your attention once again to my two musical counterparts!

CHORUS:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Now once while traveling way out west
In the state of Illinois
The people all came running up
To see what made the noise

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

The merchants from the counting rooms
Farmers from their hoeing

CHORUS:

Among the rest a Dutchman came
A-puffing and a-blowing

SANDBURG: (*speaks, music under*)

Mien Gott in Himmel! Vat a country und vat a peoples. Shtab me in dare back mit a double-barreled bootjack. He's there same man I saw in Chicago last week. I buys vun bottle of oil from him. I takes him home, und my damn, that's good shtuff!

So...

CHORUS:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Soon after this a lady spoke
Fresh from the Emerald Isle
She said, "Mister, if ya will,
I'll speak with ya a while!"

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

CHORUS:

Why certainly, madam, speak right up
What's the matter, anyway?
Are you sick or lame or blind?
Or what have you to say?

SANDBURG: *(speaks, music under)*

No, no, it's me husband! Bad luck to the lazy divil! Divil
a bit of work has he done for the past six months. He lies
about 'til ten in the mornin'! And I'll take your oil of
profitable quality to pull the lazy divil out of bed! So...

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two
I'll take another bottle of wizard oil
I'll take another bottle or two

*(After a slight pause, Chorus returns to the original
theme)*

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Agitator, socialist,
With a poet's pen in hand
He ventured forth to ramble
And to see his native land

CHORUS:

Bought himself a ticket
On the Chessie boxcar line
Doin' fine
Doin' fine

Well he rode the rods
And he hit the roads
From the windy city of Chicago
The hobo poet with a cause
Went to see-- America!

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

SANDBURG:

You know, I hoboed some. Out to Kansas, out to the wheat field harvest. I rode the rods. What a great adventure that was! Picked up some of the color of it -- picked up the flavor of hoboining.

(Banjo instrumental "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum")

I listened to the language of America. (Laughing) Picked up some other things, too, riding the rails. The dirt and the grime and the cinders in my eyes. But mostly, I picked up the feeling of what it's like to hear myself referred to as a bum!

CHORUS:

Hallelujah, I'm a bum
Hallelujah, bum again
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again

Well I'd like to work
Like the other men do
How the hell can I work
When there's no work to do

Hallelujah, I'm a bum
Hallelujah, bum again
Hallelujah, give us a handout

SANDBURG:

I was once called a bum by my own people! Swedes – how about that? I was really a hobo. I kept movin' around, but I was ready to work. A tramp won't work.

CHORUS: *(chanting)*

Tramp, tramp, keep on trampin'
Nothin' here for you!
Keep on trampin'
Keep on trampin'
It's the best thing you can do

SANDBURG:

He walked up and down the street

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Uh huh!

SANDBURG:

'Till the shoes fell off his feet
He spied a lady cookin' stew
Told that lady "How'dy do!
Can I chop some wood for you?"
What she told him made him blue

CHORUS: (*chanting*)

Tramp, tramp, keep on trampin'
Nothin' here for you!
Keep on trampin'
Keep on trampin'
It's the best thing you can do

SANDBURG:

Tramps can't even think about workin'!

CHORUS: (*chanting*)

Tramp, tramp, keep on trampin'

SANDBURG:

Gives a tramp a pain in the ass to think about work.

CHORUS: (*chanting*)

Keep on trampin'.

SANDBURG:

And a bum won't do anything at all.

CHORUS: (*chanting*)

Tramp, tramp

SANDBURG:

He won't move and he won't work! Ah-h-h-h... but a hobo...

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

CHORUS:

Tramp!

SANDBURG:

Prince of the Road!

CHORUS: (*singing*)

I went to a house,
I asked for some bread,
The lady come out
Says the baker is dead

Hallelujah, I'm a bum,
Hallelujah, bum again,
Hallelujah, give us a handout,

SANDBURG:

Once there was a hobo at the back door of a house, hungry for two days. He asked a hatchet-faced woman for a bite to eat. She said she'd get him something. He waited. Eventually the door opened again. She stuck out her skinny hand -- offered him a single dry crust of bread. She said, "I give this to you not for your sake, or for my sake, but for Christ's sake." He looked at the bread, said, "Listen, lady, not for my sake or for your sake, but for Christ's sake, put some butter on it!"

CHORUS:

I went to a house,
I knocked on the door.
The lady said, "Scram, bum,
You've been here before."

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Hallelujah, I'm a bum,
Hallelujah, bum again
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again.

SANDBURG:

Hallelujah, I'm a bum

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Hallelujah, bum again
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again.

CHORUS:

My daddy is an engineer
My brother drives a hack
My sister takes in washin'
And the baby balls the jack
An' it looks like
I'm never gonna cease
My wanderin'

(Banjo Instrumental)

SANDBURG:

One time, unshackling myself from all of the conventions and the elegances, swinging clean to the extreme of Bohemianism, I wandered across Pennsylvania, along the beautiful Susquehanna River, past the coal mines, along the mountain sides where I could look down on smelters and lurid lights much like the pits of hell -- at least according to orthodox descriptions. In Pittsburgh, I was captured by the railroad police and sent to the Allegheny County jail where I put in ten days. Now, the warden, he got 50¢ a day for each prisoner he was supposed to be feeding. And as said feeding does not entail the expense of a nickel a day, well, he can shake the plum tree and fill his own pockets. The charge against me was riding a freight train without a ticket. I was thrown in a cell along with a young Czech who didn't know forty words of English and a gray-haired Civil War veteran.

(Music stops)

Though it was a lark on the whole, I think it gave me a new light on the evolution of the system, as it works in this country.

CHORUS:

Oh, I went up in a balloon so big
The people on the earth
They looked like a pig
Like mice
Like katydids
Like flieses
And like fleasens

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

The balloon turned up with its bottom side higher,

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Then it fell on the wife of a country squire

SANDBURG:

She made a noise

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Like a hound dog
Like a steam whistle
And also like dynamite

SANDBURG:

Seems to me there are going to be some great times on the political firing line in this country. There is some splendid blood in the socialist party and such reckless zealots. I feel that whether I ever get a dim glimpse of a cooperative commonwealth, I'll certainly witness some grand assaults on capitalism and you know as sure as your blood is red, there will be a recession of some sort from the present arrogance. I cannot stomach the bland easy assumptions of the powers that be.

CHORUS:

Oh, what do you do in a case like that
Oh, what do you do but jump on your hat
Or your toothbrush
Or your grandmother
Or anything that's helpless

CHORUS: *(returning to the main theme)*

A poet agitator and a hobo socialist
Even sold some stereopticons a little bit

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Then he was a travelin' man
And a lecturer, you know

CHORUS:

On the go

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

On the go

So this boy from Galesburg town
Followed his star where it was bound
So many things he tried to do
He even tried the lecture circuit, too...

SANDBURG:

They are sort of crazy here about the lecture on Whitman I gave yesterday. You know, I have dreamed and welded and laughed and prayed with it. For me and for the audience, it was an occasion. They drew out of me my best. Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard say I have a "world-beater!" Well, the crowd caught things right on the wing, all the way through, and when I was done, had seated myself, was talking nothing with somebody, Hubbard grabs me by the arm and pulls me to the front again. They were clapping, yelling for an encore. For the tribute, I don't care any particular damn, but I am now sure I have trained my powers so that they can be of service to me. This presentation will get me a number of engagements next winter. I have changed it from a strong literary lecture into an oration, and now I know that I have a winner!

SANDBURG: (*singing*)

I'm goin' out in the woods next year
To shoot for beer -- not for deer
I am,
I ain't
I'll be a great sharpshootress

CHORUS:

At shootin' birds I am a beaut
There is no bird I cannot shoot
In the eyes
Or in the ears
Or in the teeth
Or in the fingers

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

To Reuben W. Borough

SANDBURG: (*reading*)

Dear Reuben:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Glad to hear the buggy sales are coming along well. Is it now Boroughs & Son Buggy Sales or have you not made that much of a commitment yet to the family firm? I hope you still dream of a literary career. I think you have great promise, good friend. It would be a loss to the world of letters for you to remain forever in the buggy business.

You mention the probability of you living on a farm. Reuben, I envy you. It is the right place for a man to be. On the land, a man is safe and comes nearer to being one soul and one body than anywhere else under present conditions.

(laughing) I hope she won't mind the liberties I've taken with your name in my new circular. It contains flattering comments attributed to one Reuben W. Borough of the Marshall Michigan News." I quote, "It says that Sandburg was "Tall, lean, proud, strange. Epithet, denunciation, and eulogy leap and pour from him. There are times when Sandburg means what he says absolutely."

It is a high ambition to want to be an orator – to move people with my words. High ambition, I think, because sometimes I feel myself standing in the shadow of another son of the prairie state, Abraham Lincoln.

(In the background, the melody line of Dixie begins, played on a 12-string guitar)

SANDBURG:

On the final day of the War Between the States, the rumor swept Washington that it was over.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

The news was run from Richmond
In that fading April sun
That Lee had handed Grant his sword
The war was finally won
Into the streets the people spilled
Feeling the excitement build
And the crowd around the White House milled
Asking, "Is it true – it's finally done?"

Inside the White House
Lincoln heard them calling out his name
He sat there wondering what to say
To ease their years of pain
Someone yelled, "Come out the door
And tell us what you've got in store

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

For the rebels who have lost the war"
So out upon the porch Abe Lincoln came

He said-

CHORUS:

"We are gathered not in anger
But in celebration
Let's be grateful we are once again
A single nation
Let's stand together reassured
Now that peace has been secured
Our nation's illness can be cured
And I suggest the overture for this occasion"

He said "Let the band play Dixie
Play that tune that holds its head up
High and proud
And let our nation once divided
Bloody but unbowed
Take the swords of war and beat them
Back into a plow"
On the day that Lee surrendered
Mr. Lincoln told the crowd
"Let the band lay Dixie"

A tired Union soldier hobbled
On his only limb
Filled with bitter memories
The war had left with him
He dragged his wooden leg and cane
His face was set and creased with pain
He stumbled, fell and rose again
And he wondered what the future held for him

He spied a black child kneeling there
In humble gratitude
He knelt down right beside her
To share her thankful mood
Grateful words were raised in prayer
God, in your sweet loving care
Our broken lives now please repair
And let out wounded nation be renewed

And let the band play Dixie
Play that tune that holds its head up
High and proud
And let our nation once divided

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Bloody but unbowed
Take the swords of war and beat them
Back into a plow
On the day that Lee surrendered
Mr. Lincoln told the crowd
"Let the band lay Dixie"

SANDBURG:

Now there was an orator!

I don't know if I'll be an orator or a poet- maybe a
socialist politician; maybe a writer. For now, I'm a
pilgrim. I don't know the tasks the gods would have me
perform but I hope I'm granted the boon of being effective.

CHORUS:

I've been a wanderin'
Early and late
From New York City
to the Golden Gate
And looks like I'm never going to cease my wandering

Been working in the army
Been working on a farm
All I got to show for it
Is the muscle in my arm
And looks like I'm never going to cease my wandering

(Banjo instrumental)

SANDBURG:

Band concert. Public Square. Nebraska City.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Flowing and circling

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Dresses- summer white dresses

SANDBURG:

Faces

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Flesh tints

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Flung like sprays of cherry blossoms

SANDBURG:

And gigglers

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

God knows, gigglers

SANDBURG:

Rivaling the pony whinnies of the livery stable blues

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And there's cowboy rags, and there's river rags
And boys on sorrel horses hurling cornfield laughter to the
girls in dresses

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Summer white dresses

SANDBURG:

Amid the coronet staccato and the tuba oompa

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

(Giggling)

SANDBURG:

Gigglers

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

God knows, gigglers

SANDBURG:

Daffy with life's razzle dazzle
Slow good night melodies and home sweet home

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

And the snare drummer bookkeeper in a hardware store nods
hello to the daughter of a railroad conductor.

A giggler, God knows, a giggler

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And the summer-white dresses filter fanwise out of the
public square

SANDBURG:

The crushed strawberries of the ice cream soda places
The night winds in the cottonwood and willows
The lattice shadows on doorsteps and porches
These know more of the story

CHORUS:

Somebody's tall and handsome
Somebody's brave and true
Somebody's hair is very fair
Somebody's eyes are blue

Somebody came to see me
Somebody came last night
Somebody asked me to marry him
Of course, I said alright

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
As many as skies in delicate change
Of cloud and blue and glimmering 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

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

CHORUS:

We know he was a poet
And he was a dreamer too
He lived his life the way he wrote his poems
A husband and a father and a family man you know
He loved his home
He loved his home
Carl Sandburg dreamed his poet's dreams
He tried a million jobs it seems
But the most important thing he done
Was to meet sweet lady Lillian

SANDBURG: (on the telephone)

Hello Ruben? Rube! (laughing) Well, hello old boy! No, I'm up in Manitowac, Wisconsin. I'm working as an organizer for the Social Democrats, rounding up the dilatory locals, trying to put some new spirit in 'em. Ah, no, there's just expenses. But I am learning a lot. Wisconsin socialists are different from most. (laughing) yeah... yeah.

They have very little use for a theory of a social and industrial cataclysm. They don't think the proletariat are stepping in and organizing the cooperative commonwealth. They want to participate. It's wonderful.

Yourself, Rube? – Oh, that's fine, that's fine.

Actually, yes. I met a wonderful woman. Lillian Steichen. Her brother's a photographer, she's a teacher-- down in Princeton, Illinois. Uh-- Delightful, good thinker. Good thinking. Good head on the woman! She sent me a marvelous letter.

I had sent her my leaflet "Labor and Politics". Oh, she liked it... but she, uh, wrote a very perceptive comment about my poem, "The Dream Girl". Wait a moment. I'll read it for you. Wait 'til you hear this, Rube.

She says, (clears throat) "My hope is that socialism will gradually create an environment favorable to the development of such a millennial dream girl. But meanwhile, under capitalism, your dream girl must be a leisure class product." (laughing) She's a winner! I'm writing to her.

CHORUS:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Tell me of your deepest heart
And I will tell you of mine
That we might know each other here
Upon this page of time

SANDBURG: (Writing letter)

Dear Lillian,
Dear Miss Steichen,
Dear Lillian Steichen,

It is a very good letter you sent me. It softens the intensity of this guerilla warfare I am carrying on up here. Never until lately, in the work I do with the Social Democrats, have I felt the attitude and had the experience of being a teacher. For those outside the party, I am an advocate, but those within the organization have so much to learn and to show those who have intelligence what to do to get the hypercritical to constructive work and to give cheer to the desperate and arousal to the stolid, sometimes I too, know just what it is to be a teacher.

The dream girl in the poem is millennial form, formed in the mist of an impressionist reverie. Millennial and at the same time, impossible, but, my good girl, she is not of the leisure class, as we know the leisure class. She is a disreputable gypsy..

(banjo begins to play in the background)

...and can walk, shoot, ride, row, hoe in the garden, wash dishes, grimace, haggle, live on half-rations, and laugh at luck.

I will, out of inborn generosity and largeness of nature, forgive you for writing such a long letter, provided, as hereinafter stated, that you repeat the offense.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Ah who will shoe your pretty feet
And who will glove your hand
Who will kiss your ruby lips
When I'm in a foreign land
When I'm in a foreign land

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Father will shoe my pretty feet

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Mother will glove my hand
But you will kiss my ruby lips
When you're home from a foreign land
When you're home from a foreign land

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

You are like to me a turtledove

CHORUS:

That flies from vine to vine
A-mourning for his own true love
As I will mourn for mine
As I will mourn for mine

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

You're like to me a sailing ship
That sails the raging main

CHORUS:

If ever I prove false to you
The raging sea will burn
The raging sea will burn

SANDBURG: (writing a letter)

Dear Lillian,
Back from a long hike, again. Sand and shore, night and stars, and this restless inland sea. Plunging white horses of surf in a forever recoiling Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. On the left, a ridge of jaggedly outlined pines, their zigzag jutting up into a steel-gray sky. Under me and ahead, a long brown swath of sand. To my right, the expanse of dark.

But over all, sweeping platoons of unguessable stars! Stars everywhere! Blinking, shy-hiding, gleams blazing effulgent beacons. An infinite, traveling, caravansary, going somewhere! "Hail!" I called. "Hail!"

Do you know? Do you know? You veering cotillions of worlds beyond this world. You marching imperturbable splendors. You serene, everlasting spectators, where are we going? Do you know? And the answer came back, "No, we don't know. What's more, we don't care!" And I called, "You answer well. For you are time and space. You are tomb and cradle.

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Forever, you renew your own origin, shatter today, reshape tomorrow, in a perpetual poem of transformations. Knowing no goal. Expecting no climax. Looking forward to no end. Indulging in no conception of a finale. Content to move in the eternal drama on which no curtain will be rung. You answer well. I salute you tonight.

I believe you, o stars, and I know we have met before, met many times. We will meet again and meet many times." All this time, I was striding along at a fast pace and a steady ozone-laden wind led me on.

And when I turned from the sea, there burst on my vision the garish arc-lamps of the municipality of Two Rivers, Wisconsin. So I turned to the sky and said "Good-bye, sweet stars! I have had a good companionship with you tonight but I must leave starland and enter the corporation limits of Two Rivers town. Remember me, o stars! And remember Lillian, down in Princeton, Illinois."

And as I plodded along, past the hovels of fishermen and the tenements of factory workers, I quoted from the bare-footed immortal Athenian, "The gods are on high Olympus. Let them stay there." Yes, let the gods, who are on high Olympus stay where they belong. And let us turn to the business of rearing on Earth a race of gods.

There. It's out of me, Lillian. It was a glorious hike. I shall sleep and sleep tonight. And you are near tonight. So near, and so dear. A goodnight kiss to you, great heart, good lips, and good eyes. My Lillian.

Carl

P.S. (Laughs) P.S.S.!! (Laughs even harder) I will never get this letter written and finished. It will always need postscripts. I end and six minutes after, I have to send more. All my life, I must write at this letter- this letter of love to the great woman who came and knew and loved.

(Banjo instrumental)

Lillian, you have letters and letters to come. And we will send lovebirds with love songs flying out over the world. We cannot live the sheltered life with any bars up. It's us for the open road, loosing the birds, loosing the birds, twenty thousand beautiful, vibrating, fleeting, indomitable, happy love birds singing love songs, swelling the world's joy.

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

CHORUS:

Again and then again
With his paper and his pen
His letters fell like whispers
In her ear, soft as April

Female chorus member:

His letters fell like whispers
In her ear

(intermission)

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – Act I

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

ACT II

CHORUS:

He said a fellow needed to be rooted to the land
With a wife to stand beside him
Why a man could take a stand
Then he wove together threads of life
Into a loving plan
While he wandered 'cross the country far and near
Again and then again
With his paper and his pen
His letters fell like whispers
In her ear
Soft as April
His letters fell like whispers
In her ear
He wrote to her of dreams
And the ambitions that inspired him
Their letters murmured fantasies
The two of them conspired in
Then he settled in Milwaukee
At a dry goods store that hired him
And he gave the salaried worker's life a whirl
So from party organizer
He went to writing advertising
But the best he ever wrote was to his girl

SANDBURG: (*reciting ad copy*)

"Special reductions! -- Great sample sale!" By God! "Low
prices --Terrific selling!" Jesus wept! "Quality, God damn
it! and prices!" Oh hell! "Sacrifice sale – Sacrifice!"
"Great offerings!" Holy mother of God! "Buy from us!
Purchase here!" For Christ's sake!

CHORUS:

Oh, I had a girl and her name was Daisy,
And when she sang the cat went crazy.
With St. Vitus's and deliriums,
And all kinds of cataleptics.

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

One day she sang a song about

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

A man who turned himself inside out

SANDBURG:

He jumped in the river
'Cause he was so very sleepy.

(Music stops)

SANDBURG: *(on the telephone)*

Lillian! Yes, the permanent job is mine. They'll fire the other man in the morning and begin taking their chances with me. God love Kroger's Department Store!

Yes, it's a long, long way from the Social Democrat Party, but it means we'll get married that much sooner, my love. I'll be getting 20 a week for now, as I understand it.

I edit the store news for a bargain circular and make copy for three daily papers. Oh- and also write the window show cards.

Generally, whatever advertising goes into the paper, that will be my responsibility. I'm quite a cog in this machine, if I make good. Old man Kroger says when I've demonstrated that fact there'll be from a thousand to two thousand dollars a year in it. I think that means they'll either raise my pay or fire me within a couple weeks. I can't see how I can fail to make good. No part of this store publicity machinery puzzles me. Beats newspaper work of most kinds.

(Banjo begins to play in background)

I want you to come on, come on here to Milwaukee, my darling. If you don't hear from me Thursday night in the mail, then come on. I'll talk to you then. And Lillian – hurry!

CHORUS:

Eyes like the mornin' star
Cheeks like a rose
Laura was pretty girl,
God, almighty, knows.
Weep, all ye little rains
Wail, winds, wail
All along, along, along
The Colorado Trail

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

SANDBURG: (*Reading a letter as he writes*)

It was a beautiful visit, Lillian, but now, about the essentials. I like your idea of the weddings doings at the farm. They will look at you so when we go to Galesburg one day. Downtown and at the college they will look, and they will find you baffling and only sense something of the power and beauty, wisdom and love; something as far off and cross-textured as my poetry; and warm and open as myself. They won't understand you any more than me, but they will love you. Yes, you will be good for them.

I shall save Sturgeon Bay for the honeymoon. Inasmuch, as we recognize some spectral validity in a wedding, we must also concede a period of time immediately following the wedding known as a honeymoon. Yes, we will call it a honeymoon, and then we will have done with concessions to society. We'll do our own christening and baptizing and, if it ever comes to funerals, we'll just read a few lines of Whitman, ourselves, and let it go at that. Such an adventure it will be, dear love pal, mate, woman, sweetheart, proud, beautiful Lillian!

P.S. I'm sending a five with this. It leaves me broke, but I can't raise money when I have money. I'm going to try to have fifty dollars or more for our starting. We'll make a compact that all money from literature sales will go into the baby fund. It should range around fifteen or twenty dollars a month and increase at that. And I'll turn over to you every once in a while (if not twice) all that there is to spare over our material needs. The baby fund! It will grow. And such a baby! Such a baby, it will be! Such a reckless cub! Never to hear a "Don't." Learning of fire by getting burnt! Getting religion and ethics and love powers from our kiss-in. Never knowing he or she is being educated, just living and unfolding. Such a cub!

CHORUS:

Went to see my gal on Sunday
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
Didn't get back 'til a week from Monday
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day

I've got a nickel, she's got a dime
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
Went to Lynchburg, had a time
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

SANDBURG: *(on telephone)*

Rube, old chum! (laughs) Well, I wanted you to be the first to know! Lillian and I expect to have a little red, babbling heir-apparent arrive this summer – June. Oh, uh, he or she will probably constitute our vacation, so it'll be up to you and Laura to come up and visit us. Oh, Rube, I...

CHORUS:

I got a gal on Sourwood Mountain
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
So many pretty girls I can't count 'em
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day

Ducks in the pond, geese in the ocean
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
Devil's in the women if they get the notion
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day

Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day
Devil's in the women if they get the notion
Ho-di-um-dum diddle long day

SANDBURG: *(on telephone)*

Yes, another baby! We're going to call this one Janet. No she's fine. She's another lusty howler like Margaret was. Oh, I love it, Reuben. Fatherhood is my natural calling... Yes, I think it suits me well... My work? My work is mostly with the children now.

CHORUS:

In Frisco Bay there lives a whale
She eats pork chops by the bale
By the hogshead
By the schooner
And sometimes by the pillbox

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Her name is Luna
She's a peach
But don't leave the food within her reach

SANDBURG:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Or babies or nursemaids
Or chocolate ice cream sodas

SANDBURG:

I've finally gotten the publishers to take my work seriously; seriously enough to send me financial advances. I'm working on a collection of short stories for children I'm calling "Rutabaga Tales"; really just a series of pieces I've written for little Margaret.

(clears his throat)

Poker Face, the Baboon and Hot Dog, the Tiger

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

When the moon has a green rim with red meat inside, the black seeds on the red meat.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Then in the Rutabaga Country they call it a "watermelon moon" and you can look for anything to happen!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

It was a night when a watermelon moon was shining.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Lizzie Lazarus went to the upstairs room of a potato-faced blind man.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Poker Face, the baboon and Hot Dog, the tiger were with her.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

She was leading them with a pink string.

SANDBURG:

And on and on, Reuben. I love to read to these two little wide-eyed girls who giggle... Yes, they giggle, Rube... It's a joy to gather the girls together and tell them stories, or read from something that I'm writing just for them.

(clears his throat)

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

The Five Marvelous Pretzels

Five nights before Christmas, five pretzels sat looking out of a grocery window, lighted by five candles. Outside..

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Snow falling!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Big white snowflakes, soft and quiet.

SANDBURG:

They see a man outside the window. He looks in while they look out.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And they see him brushing snow off his left shoulder with his right hand, and brushing snow off his right shoulder with his left hand.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Shaking snow off his hat and putting his hat back on his head.

SANDBURG:

But they don't hear the man say: "Well, well, well! Five pretzels! And how many children is it I have at home, running upstairs and downstairs, in and out of the corridors?"

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

One?

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Two?

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Three?

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Four?

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Five!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

One for each pretzel!

SANDBURG:

Now early that afternoon, the five pretzels decide they will go with a circus.

(Chorus sings Big Top music)

And be trapeze actors. On billboards everywhere:

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

THE FIVE MARVELOUS PRETZELS!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

In big letters.

SANDBURG:

And they run out of their dressing rooms in pink tights, bow to the audience and throw kisses; one kiss with the right hand and the other kiss with the left hand.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And a man with a big musical megaphone calls:

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

THE FIVE MARVELOUS PRETZELS!

SANDBURG:

Up in the air they go. Two of them hang by their knees and throw the other three pretzels back and forth in the air - in the empty and circumambient air. So far...

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

So good!

SANDBURG:

Then they argue

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Fuss!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Dispute!

SANDBURG:

Wrangle!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Which two will hang by their knees?

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And which three shall be thrown back and forth in the empty
and circumambient air?

SANDBURG:

All five want to be the two that hang by their knees. None
of them want to be one of the three thrown back and forth.
So they say...

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Let's forget it! Now they decide, instead...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

That they will ride on the heads of the elephants

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

In the vast...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Mammoth...

SANDBURG:

Stupendous...

SANDBURG AND CHORUS:

Parade of the Elephants!
(*Elephant trumpeting noises*)

SANDBURG:

On billboards everywhere people will see on each elephant...

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

One dazzling, glittering little pretzel in pink tights...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Bowing and throwing kisses...

SANDBURG:

One kiss with the right hand, the other kiss with the left hand! Yes!

SANDBURG AND CHORUS:

So they decide.

SANDBURG:

And just before the first elephant comes out leading the parade...

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

The man with the big musical megaphone calls...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

The Five Marvelous Pretzels!

SANDBURG:

So far...

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

SANDBURG AND CHORUS:

So good!

SANDBURG:

Then comes the argument.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Who should ride on the head of the first elephant?

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Who should come out first, bowing and throwing kisses to the audience?

SANDBURG:

They argue!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Fuss!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Dispute!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Wrangle!

SANDBURG:

Then at last, decide.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Whoever rides the first elephant today...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Rides the last elephant tomorrow.

SANDBURG:

Ha, ha, ha, ha! Then they see the man outside the window.

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And they see him brushing snow off his left shoulder with right left hand, brushing snow off his right shoulder with his left hand.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Shaking snow off his hat and putting his hat back on his head.

SANDBURG:

And the man walks into the store, and comes out...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

With the five pretzels in a paper sack!

SANDBURG:

And he walks along the street...

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

In the falling snow- big white snow flakes on his shoulders...

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

And on his hat.

SANDBURG:

And does he know, as he walks along in the falling snow, what happened that afternoon and evening among the pretzels?

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

No!

SANDBURG:

Does he know he has in his sack...

SANDBURG AND CHORUS: *(muffled)*

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

THE FIVE MARVELOUS PRETZELS!

SANDBURG:

No!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Does he know that afternoon they decided to join the circus and be trapeze actors, and then changed their minds?

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

No!

SANDBURG:

Does he know they decided, instead, they will ride on the heads of elephants, bow and throw kisses while thousands of people laugh, cheer and cry...

SANDBURG AND CHORUS:

LOOK, LOOK! **THE FIVE MARVELOUS PRETZELS!**

SANDBURG:

No!

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Then, what does the man know about what the five pretzels want to be?

SANDBURG:

Nothing. Absolutely nothing! Which shows how ignorant some people are.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

He's gone away
For to stay a little while

CHORUS:

And he's coming back
If he goes ten thousand miles
Look away over yonder

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Look away

SANDBURG: (*reading letter as he writes*)

Lillian, dearest,

I've just given another reading, the third reading, and the first real quiet reading to the letter you tucked into my pocket as a goodbye note. There were tears in it, and a big gladness, and a strong-hearted woman, my pal, in it.

I would not choose to report this war, but I am glad of the call to cover it. Whenever I see the young men in their coarse wool uniforms, going off to France to do battle, I know that ours is not a real separation – only a space between heartbeats. What we are having is only a breath of the world's storm. We will hope that resolves and consecrations enough have been born out of the millions of separations, enough for the remaking of the world.

What with your line about Janet waving, and Margaret's dear note, it all tugs at me tonight. I got the warm kiss of your calling me "buddy" at the finish. (*banjo plays*)

What we know is that all the chances are in favor of our sitting under our own cherry tree someday and talking about the year that Carl went away. And when I say "God keep you" I mean it in its oldest and deepest way. It is a while again until we maintain our establishment, our really truly home, and unless some over particular people rake up the leaves, it will be a fine yard for a homecoming celebration.

It's been mystically wonderful lately, that back yard, with a half moon through the poplars to the south in a haze, and rustlings -- always high or low rustlings -- on the ground and in the trees, a sort of a grand "Hush-hush child." And as the moon slanted in last night and the incessant rustlings went on softly, I thought that if we are restless and fail to love life big enough, it's because we have been away too much from the moon and the elemental rustlings.

I like Walt Whitman, musing among the ashes of dead soldiers, and talking as though he knows there is a thing he calls love, which is a reality finer than death. I haven't got room here to work it all out but soon we should go hand in hand again.

CHORUS:

There's a man

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Goin' round
Takin' names
There's a man
Goin' round
Takin' names

CHORUS: (*hums*)

SANDBURG:

With sweet little Janet and Margaret, I am ready for anything all the time. Every day I come home and find them alive, I take as a day snatched from death. I think, too, about how they die every week. The Margaret that was learning to talk three years ago is dead and replaced with an endless chatter. The little fluff of a Janet we had a year ago is gone. Every beautiful thing I know is ephemeral, a thing of the moment. Life is a series of things that vanish.

CHORUS:

There's a man
Goin' round
Takin' names
There's a man
Goin' round
Takin' names
And he took my brother's name
And left my heart in pain
There's a man
Goin' round
Takin' names

SANDBURG:

I had two brothers go with diphtheria when I was a boy. We had a double funeral on a bitter winter day. My family buried two children that had barely lived long enough to be named. And whenever I think about those two, who emerged into so little of living and then faded off, my head gets into all the big overtones of life -- that hazy illusion of time and clocks. We are all such little things. A day of life is a day snatched from death, and the only fool is the one who can prove that death is a blank nothing or something less than life.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

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 'em
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

(Banjo plays)

SANDBURG:

Lillian and Janet and Margaret call me back to the white blossoms that were singing all by themselves, a wonderful soft of peace this morning. This was their first real day for greetings of the season, a quiet summer opening, without advertising, all heavy with raindrops, sheer white and wild, the sun gleaming rainbows and prisms from them, a pathos of eager living in them. A pathos of eager living in them.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

My dearest dear
The time draws near

CHORUS:

When you and I must part
But little you know
Of the grief and woe
In my poor achin' heart
In my poor achin' heart

Oh, hush you bye,
Don't break my heart,
Don't let me hear you cry
The best of friends
Must part sometime,
So why not you and I

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

Her lips were like
The roses fair
That bloom in the month of June
Her voice was like a sweet instrument
That sang a mournful tune
That sang a mournful tune

SANDBURG: (*On the telephone*)

No, there's not much question about it, Rube. She's very sick. Margaret's a very sick little girl. We've seen several doctors about it. It's not exactly fatal. Rube, she's got nocturnal epilepsy and could, if she had a seizure in the middle of the night, if she were unattended and alone... (choking)

It's not fatal in itself, but it's a life sentence for such a little girl. No, she doesn't understand. She's so confused. She doesn't know what she's done that this should happen to her. She tries very hard. She's very brave. She's a good soldier, real good. Lillian and I are learning to love her all the more because she is so brave. We just go on, a day at a time. That's what we do. We just go on.

SANDBURG: (*reflecting*)

Sometimes there's nothing left but the work. When the world is falling apart, and the sadness presses on your chest with a terrible weight and there is no sense to be made out of all the things that seemed in perfect order just a little while ago. A man must turn to his work; throw himself at it with a fever, abandon all thought and feeling and go to work. I am bereft of answers, plans, dreams. I do not know today what I knew yesterday. But there must be a tomorrow... so I shall work.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER:

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Poet of the Prairie, Mr. Carl Sandburg!

SANDBURG:

I was born on the prairie, and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan. You came in wagons, making streets and schools, singing, "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Old Dan Tucker,"

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

"Turkey in the Straw". You in the coonskin cap at a log house door hearing a lone wolf howl; you at a sod house door reading the blizzards and the Chinooks. I am the dust of your dust as I am brother and mother to the copper faces, the workers in flint and clay.

I am here when the cities are gone. I am here before the cities come. I last while old wars are fought, while peace broods, mother-like; while new wars arise in the fresh killings of young men. I take peace or war. I say nothing and wait. Have you seen a red sunset drip over one of my cornfields; the wave lines of dawn, up a wheat valley, out of the prairie, brown grass crossed with a streamer of wigwam smoke?

Here, I saw a city rise and say to the peoples around the world, "Listen! I am strong. I know what I want. I am the prairie, mother of men. Wait! They are mine; the threshing crews eating beefsteak; the farm boys driving steers to the railroad cattle pens. They are mine; the crowds of people in a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and Roman candles at night; the young men and women, two by two, haunting the bypaths and kissing bridges. They are mine; the horses looking over a fence in the frost of a late October saying, "Good morning!" to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.

The cornhuskers wear leather on their hands. There is no let up to the wind. Look at six eggs in a mockingbird's nest. Listen to six mockingbirds flinging follies of "Oh, Be Joyful", over the marshes and uplands. Look at songs hidden in eggs. Oh, prairie Mother, I am one of your boys. I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love.

Here, I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water. I speak of new cities and new people. I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes. I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down; a sun dropped in the west. I tell you there is nothing in the world; only an ocean of tomorrows; a sky of tomorrows. I am brother of the cornhuskers who say at sundown, "Tomorrow is a day."

CHORUS:

So we leave our hero
With his children and his wife

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

You can read his poetry
To know more of his life

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER:

We leave him with his daughters
And his love maid, Lillian

CHORUS:

They just go on
They just go on
With faces toward tomorrow
They go on

(Banjo plays "Down in the Valley")

SANDBURG: *(Reading as he writes)*

Dear Margaret,

This is only a little letter from your daddy to say that he thinks of you hours and hours, and he knows that there never was a princess nor fairy with so much love. We are starting on a long journey and a hard fight; you and Mother and Daddy and Janet and Helga – all of us- and we are going to go on, slowly, quietly, hand in hand, all of us, never giving up. And so, we are going to win, slowly, quietly, never giving up. We are going to win! Daddy

CHORUS:

Down in the valley
The valley so low
Hang your head over
Hear the wind blow

Hear the wind blow, dear
Hear the wind blow
Hang your head over
Hear the wind blow

SANDBURG:

Writing this letter
Containing three lines
Answer my question
Will you be mine?

Courtship of Carl Sandburg – ACT II

CHORUS AND SANDBURG:

Will you be mine, dear?
Will you be mine?
Answer my question
Will you be mine?

Roses love sunshine
Violets love dew
Angels in heaven
Know I love you

Know I love you, dear
Know I love you
Angels in heaven
Know I love you

SANDBURG:

Know I love you, dear
Know I love you
Angels in heaven
Know I love you

CHORUS:

Whether it's your child or friend
Or very special lover
If you find you're full of
Lovin' feelings for another
Don't try to hide the light of love
Or keep it under cover
Don't wait for fate to pull you both apart
I'll tell you what you ought to do
Just tell them what they mean to you
Tell them all the love that's in your heart
Do it now
Tell them all the love that's in your heart

End ACT II

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