

# “FOUR PRELUDES ON PLAYTHINGS OF THE WIND”

by Carl Sandburg

## I

The woman named Tomorrow  
sits with a hairpin in her teeth  
and takes her time  
and does her hair the way she wants it  
and fastens at last the last braid and coil  
and puts the hairpin where it belongs  
and turns and draws: Well, what of it?  
My grandmother, Yesterday, is gone.  
What of it? Let the dead by dead.

## II

The doors were cedar  
and the panel strips of gold  
and the girls were golden girls  
and the panels read and the girls chanted:  
    We are the greatest city,  
    and the greatest nation:  
    nothing like us ever was.  
The doors are twisted on broken hinges.  
Sheets of rain swish through on the wind  
    where the golden girls ran and the panels read:  
    We are the greatest city,  
    the greatest nation,  
    nothing like us ever was.

## III

It has happened before.  
Strong men put up a city and got a nation together,  
And paid singers to sing and women to warble: We are the greatest city,  
    the greatest nation,  
    nothing like us ever was.  
And while the singers sang  
and the strong men listened  
and paid the singers well,

there were rats and lizards who listened  
... and the only listeners left now  
...are... the rats ... and the lizards.  
And there are black crows  
crying, "Caw, caw,"  
bringing mud and sticks  
building a nest  
over the words carved  
on the doors where the panels were cedar  
and the strips on the panels were gold  
and the golden girls came singing:

We are the greatest city,  
the greatest nation:  
nothing like us ever was.

The only singers now are crows crying, "Caw, caw,"  
And the sheets of rain whine in the wind and doorways.  
And the only listeners now are ... the rats ... and the lizards.

#### IV

The feet of the rats  
scribble on the doorsills;  
the hieroglyphs of the rat footprints  
chatter the pedigrees of the rats  
and babble of the blood  
and gabble of the breed  
of the grandfathers and the great-grandfathers of the rats.  
And the wind shifts  
and the dust on the doorsill shifts  
and even the writing of the rat footprints  
tells us nothing, nothing at all  
about the greatest city, the greatest nation  
where the strong men listened  
and the women warbled: Nothing like us ever was.