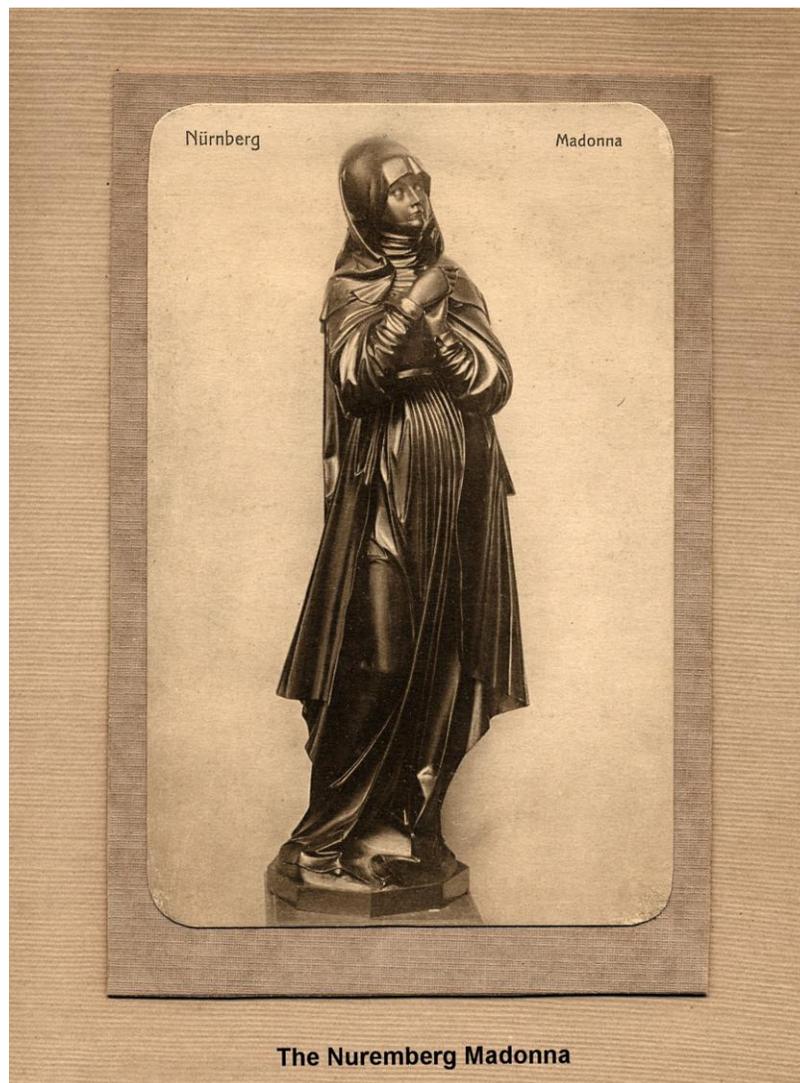


# The Annotated Letters of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay to Sara Trevor Teasdale

## Chapter 2 (Letters 22-47)



(See Letters 31 and 32.)

These letters are collected among the Vachel Lindsay Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

22) “I am busting to write but am too sleepy . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
 {Jan. 10  
 Jan 11} 1914.

My Dear Sara FIMM:

This is just greetings. I am busting to write but am too sleepy. It is 12:30. I have been writing the \*Fireman’s Ball all day or reading it to some one. The middle section—“in which the music of the Ball—awakening false desires—destroys true love—“has been an awful tussel^. I have read it aloud over and over and then polished and re read, and here tonight alone still scratching and recopying.

I just want to write a line and show I think of thee.

With esteem and  
 solicitous inquiries  
 as to your health and  
 prosperity  
 I remain  
 honorable lady,  
 Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
 603 South 5th.

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23) “you sure do speak the lingo . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
 Jan 11, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Now Miss \*Rittenhouse’s special invite via you requires some special acknowledgement, so please accept my especial acknowledgements

{Sara  
 Miss Rittenhouse.}

And as an extra—please accept Mr. George M. \*Richards and his wife as my ambassadors and representatives on all times and occasions when I am yearned for. George is exactly like me—and his wife is too I suppose, for he is very fond of her. So please step to the telephone at once—and call up \*Everybody’s Magazine office and get Mr. Richards to step in on his way home tonight, and see how I look and behave. Richards and I were in the same New York studio three months—in the same New York boarding-houses two years, in the same club (eating and sleeping club) one year and in the same gangs all the time in New York. We had a peculiar double bond. He drew and painted the kind of pictures I wanted to draw and paint—and we consulted over every step of the way. And in the same way he having written much good poetry at college

(Williams—where he graduated, with highest honors)—criticised<sup>^</sup> my work rigorously every step of the way—and we shared largely the same opinions in letters and art. Then my most intimate lady friend in New York married his most intimate artist friend. That is—Achsa Barlow married Earl Brewster.<sup>1</sup>

(Those two have just gotten into the Salon Paris.)

Well—[if I] when I come to New York this time next year I will spend a great part of my time at George's little Staten Island studio. So I wish while you are getting grand and exclusive you will cultivate<sup>^</sup> those two most exclusive people—George and his wife. It will make things so much nicer, this time next year if after carefully looking them over—you admit them to your inner consciousness. I might as well admit that George is a little hard to jolt out of his rut—but once persuaded he is faithfulness itself. I have written to him to call you up, by this same mail—so I hope you step to the telephone at the same moment. He will be less dazzling than Charles \*Ridgely on the start—and more faithful in the finish. He has been in Everybodys for about four years—Art Editor—I think. But his work doesn't look like that. It is all fairies and angels, and butterflies and rainbows and peacocks and oriflammes, and knights and stained-glass effects. With his brush in his hand he is the king of the fairies. His nearest affinity is Sara S. Stillwell<sup>2</sup> when she has her loveliest<sup>^</sup> fancies and her best color—though in some ways he is allied to G. Wolf Plank.<sup>3</sup> That is—in his cover designs. He generally works in water-color or in oil that imitates water color. He is an excellent and stylish draughtsman—of the kind that Henri<sup>4</sup> and his bunch would denounce as prettyfied—and at the same time so original that he has found it easier to be a stern Art editor than a gushing contributor. In imagination he is the equal of Edmund Du Lac or Arthur Rackham<sup>5</sup>—and in color sense something of the same school. I havn't<sup>^</sup> the nerve to say he can draw that well. Rackham and Du lack<sup>^</sup> are certainly some draftsmen. Rackham's line is like an uncoiled fairy watch-spring.

If my fond imagination has over-painted the excellences of Richards—please excuse the favoritism of a friend.

Also—if possible and all that sort of a thing—make him somehow into a bosom friend of Edward J. \*Wheeler if Edward J. takes to bosom friends. The said Edward stands by me like a little man in his poetry columns—but I feel a commendable hesitancy in his correspondence—as though I were a giraffe—or something incalculable<sup>^</sup> and mysterious. I think Edward J. might sometime in the distant future strike more confident blows for selfish little me if he was thoroughly acquainted with Richards and accepted Richards assurance that us two are just alike—after our years together. Now if you will talk it over with Jessie Belle \*Rittenhouse—and fix up something I will be devastated<sup>^</sup> by your exquisite flattery and extreme consideration.

I don't know a hanged thing about Mrs. Richards except that George is faithful unto death—and when I walked through Colorado Springs met an adoreable<sup>^</sup> chum of hers, with whom I spent a day and a half—her erstwhile bosom frien<sup>^</sup>.<sup>6</sup>

Now you dashing Sara—you have something to really dash about.

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Yes—as soon as I get some money I will buy the Human Fantasy.<sup>7</sup>

No—I have no book coming out in Chicago. If there is one advertised it is by some interesting and reckless thief who doesn't understand that my stuff never sells.

I have so much to say—and here I have written and written.

I think the three little poemlets you send are perfectly perfect darlings. Swans—Moods—and the Sea Wind.<sup>8</sup> I wish all your little pieces were as good as these. I have been saying to myself that you were better line by line in your big pieces than your little ones—and your last \*Sapho in \*Scribners is your greatest achievement^ in the eyes of all my friends. But these Little^ ones give me the same flash of delight—which is something far rarer than the smile of ease and pleasure we give to gentle decorations.

Your work is always so inevitable technically—you sure do speak the lingo. It reads aloud so well—half the music escapes us when we read it to ourselves.

The poem quoted in the Digest this week is just the kind I don't like—Strophon—Robin—Colin and a kiss or two.<sup>9</sup> I infinitely prefer this MOODS. And this “Swans” is lovely—and The Sea Wind could not have been written by any one but the most adoreable^ of singers. It is a darling poem.

I agree most heartily with the Digest—in that we need a new book by you. Call it Sapho—put in the Sea Winds and the Moods, and leave out Strophon^ and company.

I believe that word is spelled Sappho.

Your last letter was somehow very revealing and congenial and human. I began to get a closer picture. In the first place you confess the great truth that St. Louis is unromantic to you. (And so I discover) That's^ why you prefer to meet your friends and have your jinks elsewhere. You'll have to let me explain St. Louis to you. I'll take you out and show you your city someday. Women—sensitive women are so sensitive to the finished side of Civilization—they are after all such shut-ins. It is impossible for them to do any deep sea diving—as it were and come up and they remain on the shore forever.<sup>10</sup> And being on the shore—they like the most elaborate part of it.

When I said your life lacked direction—I meant your literary record. Each piece stands by itself—[but] After all here is only a woman with a heart—and they might have been written by the last Ming Emperess^. And it is the same woman and about the same heart—about all the way through—though that may be direction enough if the song becomes more golden, as it certainly does. I suppose I am just trying to write on your white wall as some kids scribble on the monuments of marble so I will stop.

You certainly are a willful Miss. I begin to get that all right. And a very proud one—in your secret artistic pride—I begin to get that.

Be sure to pick out the nicest people at the poets party<sup>11</sup>—the kind that make friends forever and frieze on to them and keep them for me this time next year. And when you praise my work—pick out some one poem besides \*Booth—and praise it to beat the cars. Then I will wake up next morning with one more established poem.

And to think you have red hair. That is just thrilling, and it sort of keys your personality. I hope its^ real tobacco sort of red—raw tobacco I mean.

And so you too confess to this curious thing called snobbery. Well I used to live in a world—where it did not exist. From my twentieth to my thirty second year I was scarcely aware there was such a thing in the world. I though[t] one never encountered it after childhood. And lo and behold [~~the last~~] this time last year the arrows of snobbery were shot into me, till I almost died the death. I was assured it was my business to trust my honest worth—as the hero in Clara Vere de Vere did.<sup>12</sup> And it wasn't hard—for I had been doing it for some time. And then I was brained with a bag of dollars as it were—(though that was not what happened—ostensibly.) And in the most elaborately snobbish style I can assure you—when we consider all the circumstances. And to think that I of all people should be thus laid low. It was a horrible torture to have these alien and utterly forgotten ideas thrust upon me by the person I loved better than I ever loved living mortal.<sup>13</sup> To find that after all my Diana was one half dollars and clay, just put dollars and clay into my very bones as it were—foreign substances! And I could not blame her. Her folks were that [~~kind~~] sort.

I very well realize that one must have somewhere to put his pride. I reasoned it out when I was a child. (If it is to be genuine, and safe) It must be on his work—and I made up my mind then and there to place all my sense of personal dignity on what I wrote and utterly ignore every other social distinction. And I lived happily by that rule—and always ranked myself absolutely—by the merit of my last drawing or poem. So now in me 34th year—I certainly should be delighted at your affirmation that my work gives me a place with other thorough going workers. But if there is any joy in the strutting—it has been considerably taken out of me by these last two years. I am just about to agree with Abe Lincoln—“Why should the Spirit of mortal be proud”<sup>14</sup> if your dollar pride or your art pride will put a knife between the ribs of any mortal human creature! And I was her dearest friend.

Well—I am just getting moody. I am on forbidden ground. I had best cheer up.

What you say of the Negro girl is very delightful and lovely. I would have admired to see her act. You are right—an accolade—a chance to be ones best self once is great. But I am afraid, dear—, my accolade is past. When the Queen of Bubbles was published in “The Critic” ages ago—and “The Man Under the Yoke” in the Outlook—June 1, 1907 I got those elusive feelings of having arrived (!) that I will never feel again so strongly, or surely, at least not till I am very old.<sup>15</sup>

Now I am conspiring to build a real coral-reef in this dashing Gulf-Stream called the United States—and I have done nothing toward it—nothing nothing and not even the golden haired Sara FIMM can persuade me I have—nor the adorable poets-party. I want to find the core of the heart of God, and man, and America and make them into songs. I want to free myself of every hate, every resentment every bitter regret, every memory of petty trouble. I can almost hear the beating of God's heart sometimes and I only wish the United States was as easy to conquer—I wish I could hear that great heart.

Well—child—I must close.

I think Woodrow Wilson is a wonderful man. I darkly suspect him of being a poet and doing his best to conceal it on small occasions that the large ones may have utterance from him in action, if not proclamation. I wish you and I could write—what he probably

thinks. Have you read “Crowds?” Read the last few chapters—if you want to know what I mean. Hurrah for Gerald Stanley Lee.<sup>16</sup>

(1) Beautiful poet-\*nightengale-goodnight

(2) Pleasant young woman—good evening.

Very sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Earl H. Brewster was a mutual friend of VL and George Mather \*Richards: see “\*Adventures While Singing” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 940) and “\*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 967). VL’s “How the Ice Man Danced,” a story in *War Bulletin Number Five* (published at Thanksgiving, 1909, and reprinted in the \**Village Magazine*, 3rd, 4th eds., reprinted in *Prose of VL*, pp. 116-121), is “just a little story of a Bar Room Riot” experienced by VL, Richards, Brewster, and other friends on Thanksgiving evening, 1907, “in an Italian Bar Room on the East Side [New York]” (Fowler, *Annotated Letters*, pp. 265-66). The official Paris salon, which began with exhibitions at the Paris Academie in the mid-17th century, had suffered a schism in 1890, and it is not clear which of several “salons” VL has in mind.

<sup>2</sup>Sara S. Stillwell or Stilwell was a Philadelphia illustrator best known for her work in \**Harper’s Magazine*, although she also illustrated books, such as Mrs. Mary (Mapes) Dodge’s *Rhymes and Jingles* (1904).

<sup>3</sup>George Wolf Plank was a minor illustrator who, like VL, was from Illinois, although his professional life was spent primarily in New York. He was best known for his illustrations in *Vogue* during the 1920s. A collection of his drawings, *Twenty Book Plates*, was published in Boston in 1917.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Henri (1865-1929) was the principal instructor at William Chase’s New York School of Art when VL was a student (1904-1905). In early 1905, after VL recited his poem “The Tree of Laughing Bells” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 159-163), Henri advised him to concentrate his energies on poetry (see Letter 28). Henri expressed his art theories and love of life in *The Art Spirit* (1923).

<sup>5</sup>Edmund Du Lac (1882-1953), French illustrator, decorator, and painter, is best remembered for his illustrations of famous books, including two that were VL favorites: *The Arabian Nights* (1907) and the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1909). Like Du Lac, Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) illustrated several of VL’s favorite works: *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (1900), *Rip Van Winkle* (1905), and *Gulliver’s Travels* (1909). An American artist, Rackham gained some fame as a landscape watercolorist. See Letter 163: VL sends ST a Du Lac picture from *Harper’s Bazaar*.

<sup>6</sup>According to VL’s diary, he spent August 3 and part of August 4, 1912 in Colorado Springs with Grace I. Smith, friend of George and Gertrude \*Richards.

<sup>7</sup>See \*Wheelock, John Hall.

<sup>8</sup>ST's "Swans," "Moods," and "The Sea Wind" are collected in *\*Rivers to the Sea*, pp. 10, 21, 61.

<sup>9</sup>VL refers to ST's poem "The Look," first published in *\*Harper's Magazine* (January 1914, p. 231) and then in the *\*Literary Digest* (January 10, 1914, p. 72). "The Look" is collected in ST's *\*Rivers to the Sea*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup>For VL's deep-sea diving poem, "The Would-Be Merman," see Letter 17.

<sup>11</sup>Each year, before the annual *\*Poetry Society* dinner, Jessie B. *\*Rittenhouse* writes that she had "an informal gathering at my apartment a night or two prior to the dinner where the visiting guests might meet the local poets" (*My House of Life*, pp. 279-290). The date of this particular "poets' party" was Sunday, January 25, 1914. See Letter 31.

<sup>12</sup>In Tennyson's ballad, "Lady Clara Vere de Vere" (first published in *Poems*, 1842), the "hero" resists the sophisticated Lady Clara, who toys with the hearts of men beneath her in class. She has already caused the death of "young Laurence," but the speaker scoffs at her idea of nobility (VL's snobbery): "Howe'er it be, it seems to me, / 'Tis only noble to be good. / Kind hearts are more than coronets, / And simple faith than Norman blood" (ll. 53-56).

<sup>13</sup>See *\*Roberts*, Octavia. The two warring factions in VL's *\*Golden Book of Springfield* are the "Robins" and the "Snobs": these latter "are out with it, make no quibble about being snobs" (p. 142).

<sup>14</sup>English poet William Knox (1789-1825) authored Abraham Lincoln's favorite hymn: "Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?"

<sup>15</sup>"The Queen of Bubbles" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 37-39) was VL's first published poem, appearing in *The Critic* (March 1904): see especially Letter 28. "The Man Under the Yoke," which is on pp. 243-245 of *The Outlook* (June 1, 1907), is the first story in VL's *\*Handy Guide for Beggars*, pp. 5-13 (reprinted in *Prose of VL*, pp. 7-14).

<sup>16</sup>For Gerald Stanley Lee's *Crowds*, see Letter 1.

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24) "the *\*fireman's* ball is done . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
January 12, 1914.

Goodnight Sara Teasdale.

I am too sleepy to write, but the *\*fireman's* ball is done.

I wish you well, kind maid.

N.V.L.

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25) "Such is life in our big town . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 14, 1914.

My Dear Sara FIMM:

It is 11:30. I have just had a good weekly session with my boys.<sup>1</sup> Real talk. We analyzed all the forces of the town—(1.) the Brewery—(2.) the Dry voters and the Churches (3.) The Old families their banks and the Utilities monopoly (which is all one machine—(4.) The radicals. Also we discussed the possibility of establishing an intellectual clearing house where the action and inter-action of all these forces could be watched and weighed—a type of inner circle public-opinion—committed to none of them and calling them all to account. They are leaders and the children of leaders in various opposing camps—and used to vigorous debate in their High School Societies. They just make life worth while for me, they are so talented and courageous^ and rollicking. And amongst us we can patch up a real picture of the town. Your friend Edward J. \*Wheeler asked me if I was really doing anything to back up my censors.<sup>2</sup> I sassed him and told him no. Yet these boys, one or two,—may do something sometime. I can't be good friends to many, and really get deeply into things. And of course 2/3 of the boys will leave the town forever, when they graduate from High School. But every year there will be one or two left over to take walks with—and it is my hope at the end of ten years or so to have say—six or ten, still in town whose Ideas I have really soaked up and who have a grasp of mine—and with these ten—we will say, we can really start in to change the atmosphere of the town. There has to be lots of waste and lots of waiting, before the bunch is really built up, and I am perfectly willing to take a lot of time to it. Meanwhile they are delightful company.

Next Wednesday evening we have our dress parade—and they bring the little High School queens in the most gorgeous dresses they can be persuaded to wear. Last year I insisted that they bring the kind of ladies that have bulging foreheads and pin themselves together with safety pins. They didn't obey orders. They just brought some pleasant nice little things that created an atmosphere of ceremony, more or less. So if thats^ what we get out of them—lets^ have it to the limit for once. This time I solemnly assured the boys it was a dressed-up-party, and am now waiting in cheerful suspense for the result. I told them the girls had to have 100% brains, beauty and good clothes. Now we'll see what happens. I'll bet the atmosphere will be thick with importance. I shall read them an O. Henry story.<sup>3</sup> First we will go to the dining room—as soon as they are all arrived, about 8:15. Then, getting them all touching elbows around the table, the good cheer and giggling begin, and parlor stiffness is over. Then I read the O. Henry story, while they interrupt with squeals of really intellectual delight. Then I will spring some public question on them for 15 minutes, perhaps derived from the Story. Then Sister \*Joy will bring in the cocoa-urn from the kitchen—and the daughter of \*Lyssipus at the other end of the table will pour it with most accomplished grace. And then the clatter and the joshing and the yelping will begin, till to preserve the paper on the wall I may be forced to start what appears to be another serious argument, but which is in fact merely a fire extinguisher till the silly darling dears are ready to go home.

Such is life in our big town.

I am a fool in a peaceful place. Yessum.

Goodnight—daughter of the Sun and the moon. Send me a lock of thy hair.<sup>4</sup>  
No—not from sentiment. I want to know if it is sun-color. Just curiosity.

Golden hair till I see sample of goods.

Yours—fascinated—N.V.L.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For VL's "boys," see Letter 20.

<sup>2</sup>The reference is to "The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit": see Letter 13.

<sup>3</sup>William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), "O. Henry," was a VL favorite. For another reference to O. Henry, see Letter 28.

<sup>4</sup>The lock will be sent: see Letter 29.

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26) "Oh my dear neighbors—my friends the enemy . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 16, 1914.

Well—here I am 11:30 P.M. Sara's half hour.

Do you realize you are being written to in party-clothes? Sit up and behave. All the men at that exceedingly-bust-yourself party had party clothes more or less, but the poor devils nearly all wore plain business-man's derby's and sneaked into the house as though they didn't want anybody to know they were fixed up. As for me I wore one of these explosive hats.

I will tell you—just for gossip—I was completely mystified by this party. I had never laid eyes on the old dowager that gave it. And here there were just the same bunch that goes to every party and wedding in the town. Why the Sam Hill they asked me, I don't know. Who was I glad to see? Well—I wasn't a-verse<sup>^</sup> to any of them—I see them forever and ever—and never get acquainted with the men—though this time about six of them made a manful effort to get acquainted with me. Poor dears—they are so funny—these business men. Their voices positively stick in their throats when they try chit-chat and leave out business or politics—especially chit-chat with poor me whom they view as a jabberwock, a devil, an ostrich who some how gets a most unjustifiable publicity, considering the murky obscurity of everything he writes, and his most unbusiness like disposition to turn into a "bum" occasionally. Its<sup>^</sup> just awful to have to chit-chat with a confusing person. Two rooms full of Springfields utterly utter—including Governor Dunne and his wife<sup>1</sup>. Just one or two people to represent every family. Well—I am not writing you a novel tonight—but when I think of that company—a novel rushes through me<sup>^</sup> brain—a rich and smiling novel. My good friend Willis Spaulding<sup>2</sup>—who of

course—never gets asked—nor any of his remotest connections—is chasing all these devils with a hot stick, bless him. He will do their complacency good.

Do you know William H<sup>^</sup>. Chenery of the \*Chicago Evening Post bunch?<sup>3</sup> He has been down here today to write up the Commission Government and Spaulding and the great deeds of the Bode-Lee Crowd.<sup>4</sup> I pumped him full from 4 to 8:30 and we take a long walk tomorrow.

He swears Springfield is the place for a novel—and will send down Charles Hallinan to write it, if he doesn't write it himself.<sup>5</sup> Oh my dear neighbors—my friends the enemy!<sup>6</sup> There are a lot of women I think a heap of among them, and one or two men I respect. I mean among the rock-ribbed perpetually privileged<sup>^</sup>. Of course nothing can be done with this generation. But I dearly love some of the children and grandchildren of these robbers. I dream and dream of a real Springfield clan—made up of true hearts, and lovers of fine things and progress—and bound together [~~beside~~] by something beside the iron hand of property. So many of the youngsters are full of beautiful idealism. It seems to me a city with a few dreamers in the heart of it is a wonderful city indeed—no matter what the shell.

Well—I havn't<sup>^</sup> written my letter yet. I have just gabbed.

Your letters are so full of whispers and hints—I can hear the rustle of your pen, you dream-Sara.<sup>7</sup>

Do you know Mary \*Pickford—or know of her? She played “In the Bishop's Carriage” for Belasco, and a moving Picture film of the stage play was here today and yesterday. The \*American has accepted my poem about her.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs. Governor Tanner and I went yesterday afternoon and you just bet it will make the Presbyterians talk, and the Episcopalians. Mrs. Governor's pleasantly sentimental remarks—Oh well—I mussn't<sup>^</sup> [~~analyze~~] analyze—(How do you spell it) I mussn't<sup>^</sup> dissect one lady to another. But I like Mrs. Tanner—I will leave the matter there. Now I am even with you for having Martha Washington on all your paper.<sup>9</sup>

The only way to cease from society column chit-chat is to change my raiment and take off my patent-leathers (AND my tall hat I bought in London!) I am now in that midnight informality known as the pajama stage of civilization and thought breathes freer. And I am not so proud.

\*Wheelock's book hasn't come. Prod him.

Child—my remarks on the wickedness of haughtiness—in my next to the last letter only referred to my lost lady,<sup>10</sup> not to you. Send me a lock of your hair. I want to write a sober scientific essay in coldly and deliberately chosen metrical and rhymed essay-language—showing the sober distinction between your hair and the rays of the sun and moon—also what it has in common with them.

Sara—I so want to see you. You know we are started on so many subjects we just can't write them to the bottom—we must talk them out. I'll just talk your little ears off. And I'll bet you are a chatterbox yourself.

No—I am hopeless when it comes to music. We will have to wrestle with architecture, painting sculpture or Russian Dancing if we want to find a second art in common.

And so I sent you a \*Village Magazine! I don't remember a thing about it. But dear me—what was the use? You were not converted to the village of St. Louis—and all my parade was in vain. Thus regrets the propagandist. But I cannot help but be a little happier to think I was your friend from away back there. It gives us a sort of a head start.

When you get back to St. Louis I will recite for you The \*Fireman's Ball—the \*Kallyope Yell—Yankee Doodle, The \*Congo, and Kansas.<sup>11</sup> I am a regular rouser when it comes to those phonetic imitative-sound pieces—if I do say it that shouldn't. There is nothing on earth louder than a fog horn. We will have to retire to a secluded spot in a boiler factory where they won't notice us.<sup>12</sup>

Sara—it is a wonderful and beautiful and personal thing to me to realize your art is deepening and your soul is growing. I have had so many nobly talented friends but never before a dear girl friend with the wonder and fire of singing-genius. Its^ just as fine as a new Baby in the family. To watch the darling grow and glow is indeed the wonder of life. That is what we feel toward^ all childhood that is kin to us—and yours is a higher childhood, the childhood of Heaven—the beginning of celestial speech.

You are so full of big and noble wonders—you are so divinely young—and I am surely watching the sunrise of your singing.

As for that chatty girl—Sara Teasdale, who happens to be your twin-sister—I bid her a respectful good-evening. I wish her well,

Very sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th.

[P.S.] It is now 1:30. Sara's half hour is an hour and a half, and a lovely one.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Edward Fitzsimmons Dunne (1853-1937) was a Democratic mayor of Chicago and then governor of Illinois (1913-17). He and his wife, Elizabeth J. Kelly Dunne—and their ten surviving children (they had 13)—lived in the Executive Mansion, just north of the Lindsay home on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Springfield. Dunne's administration was responsible for the law allowing Illinois cities and localities to acquire and operate gas and electric plants (see note 2 below).

<sup>2</sup>Willis Spaulding (1870-1965) was Springfield's Commissioner of Public Property and thus a direct beneficiary of the utilities law passed during Governor Dunne's administration (see note 1 above). Spaulding was a lifelong friend and supporter of VL. Known as Springfield's radical commissioner, Spaulding survived many political battles with the city's "stand-patters," that is, "the establishment," and managed to be reelected

time and time again. See Letters 33 and 40; and “\*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons,” pp. 967-968.

<sup>3</sup>William L[udlow] Chenery (1884-1974) was a prominent member of the City Press Association of Chicago and later a New York journalist. His series of seven articles on commission government in Springfield ran in the *Chicago Evening Post* from January 22 to January 31, 1914. In the first article, Chenery reports: “According to Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Springfield’s poet of democracy, a red-headed girl is at the bottom of these profound changes. The people voted for the commission form on January 2, 1911, but the girl began to work twenty years ago. How the inspiration came to her no one knows, but by some chance she read Henry George’s ‘Progress and Poverty.’ She was converted to the single-tax theory.” The “red-headed girl” was Maydie Lee, sister of Willis Spaulding. For Henry George, see Letter 111.

<sup>4</sup>Frank Bode and George and Maydie Lee were part of Springfield’s “radical” scene, along with Susan \*Wilcox, VL’s high school teacher; Duncan McDonald, secretary to the United Mine Workers of Illinois; and several others (see VL’s “\*Adventures While Preaching,” *Poetry of VL*, pp. 967-969). Frank Bode had been a reform candidate for mayor of Springfield. George Lee was a local wholesale grocer who was instrumental in bringing the commission form of government to Springfield. He also served as secretary of the Illinois Initiative and Referendum League. With his wife, Maydie, he was a strong proponent of the single-tax theories of Henry George. Maydie Lee was instrumental in organizing the Springfield branch of the Woman’s Trade Union League. She and her friends were active in many causes, including woman’s suffrage, trade unionism, socialism, and the single tax. See especially Letters 66, 73, and 111.

<sup>5</sup>In 1909, when Floyd \*Dell came to Chicago, Charles Thomas Hallinan was one of four editorial writers for the \**Chicago Evening Post*. According to Kramer, Hallinan aspired to writing “if not the great American novel, at least the great Chicago novel” (*Chicago Renaissance*, p. 97).

<sup>6</sup>Compare the ending of *War Bulletin Number Five* (see Letter 23): “In the name of Ultimate Humanity then, O Friends, mine Enemies—print out your naked souls! Let us have several million War Bulletins!”

<sup>7</sup>See VL’s poem “Concerning Sara’s Pen” in Letter 33.

<sup>8</sup>According to the Springfield newspapers, the film *In the Bishop’s Carriage*, produced by Daniel Frohman (1851-1940) and starring Mary Pickford, played at the Vaudette theatre on Thursday and Friday nights, January 15 and 16, 1914. The theatre apologized for the 25 cent admission fee, explaining that the high price was due to the quality of the picture and the star. David Belasco was Pickford’s manager. For VL’s praise of Belasco, see *The \*Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>See Letter 16. VL has been to the Pickford film with Cora E. English Tanner, widow of former Illinois Governor John R. Tanner (1844-1901). Tanner was governor from 1897 to 1901, defeating VL’s beloved \*Altgeld in the 1896 election. Tanner died just after leaving office; he and Cora, his second wife, were married in 1896.

<sup>10</sup>See \*Roberts, Octavia.

<sup>11</sup>See *Poetry of VL*, vol. 1, passim.

<sup>12</sup>For more on VL's loud voice, see Letter 11. One of the better accounts of Lindsay's powerful bass voice, both on stage and off stage, may be read in Paul Horgan, "Vachel Lindsay and 'The Book of the Dead,'" *American Scholar* (Autumn, 1993), pp. 565-570. Horgan had breakfast with VL and reports: "His words rang throughout the dining room. He had an irreducible bass voice—the kind that makes itself heard above anything else in any enclosed space. I was increasingly embarrassed to be a partner to it."

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27) "If M.K. sends me the check on time I will come . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 18, 1914.

{My Dear Diary—  
My Dear Sara FIMM}

If you and your friend Jessie Belle \*Rittenhouse and your shrewd fellow-committeeman-confidential have by this time smoked out M.K.<sup>1</sup> and have been as wise as serpents and harmless as doves<sup>2</sup>—well you are wonders—that is all.

I take it you have consulted with Jessie Belle over my letter to her. I didn't write one to you simply because I dislike fidgets and diplomacy and all that, and had no special hope of the scheme working—anyway.

But I just love your Jessie Belle. I see she really cares—and that means so much.

I have torn up two letters to you today—verbose and unnecessary. If M.K. sends me the check on time I will come. But I havn't^ the least expectation he will.

Well—we will meet somewhere within a month or so—I know—and just so it is with open minds and serene souls and innocent hearts unharassed by the world! I want to know that poet-lady, Sarafimm. As for Jessie Belle—kiss her hand for me. Here is the kiss: [drawing of a cross].

Good morning—and God be with you.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>\*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>2</sup>Compare Matthew 10:16. See Letter 102.

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28) "Why I am just making discoveries all the time . . ."

Springfield Illinois.  
Jan. 20, 1914.

My Dear Lady Sara:

So much to write—and I will not put down one word hardly.

The boys were here with their fair ladies tonight—and I just adored the whole bunch.<sup>1</sup> And they like me so—and are such free kind friends it just does me good through and through. I really do not do much with them—I am rather like the old woman who lived in the shoe who had so many children she didn't know what to do. We read O Henry's Gentle grafter—three rousing stories<sup>2</sup>—then—after the grape juice and cake we had a long argument on censoring by hissing—all the bad vaudeville in town. At present the only censorship is a silence that is drowned by some lone idiot's applause.

I don't lead the argument half as well as I might—to bring out ideas—I just interrupt and dogmatize like the rest of the kidlets. And I just feed on their youth, like a vampire. And I am sure they really catch my spirit better than some folks who think they have been intimate for years. They are free and easy like my comrades were in College or in Bohemia long ago. And no one else in Springfield is quite like that.

No one really knows anything about any certain stage of youth till he has passed out of it and looks back upon it. I of course am a bubbling youth to men of forty and they see me doing things they would never do on impulse.

Well—I want to talk about other things. I quit that subject without being through.

I got rid of an appalling correspondence today—[and] or most of it—and I feel so virtuous—for I did it in the afternoon having helped Mama and \*Joy clean up all morning—the nigger girl being home sick. I washed dishes for three meals. (Let me boast of my virtues). I always wash the supper-dishes with Joy—since our help is married and goes home at 4 o'clock. It is Mama's solution of the servant problem. Instead of a dubious hired girl in a stuffy dirty room in the back up stairs—our work lady goes home to her husband and tidies up her house and gets hubby's breakfast and supper—and sings at our house—more or less all day—happy and brisk and bright.

Your friend Miss \*Rittenhouse has certainly done her best for me—whether I get to N.Y. or not. Her very kind and clever letter came today.

Do you know—only the other day did I find out that I was a member of the \*Poetry society, and that Miss R. was Secretary.<sup>3</sup> Why I am just making discoveries all the time. Now maybe I did know she was secretary—but I forgot it. I knew she was a grand Czarina—and all—of course. But I certainly did not know I was on the inside.

And to be invited to recite \*General Booth was about the last feather that broke the camels' back. Mr. Yard<sup>4</sup> was no special inducement—since I was deadly bit on a certain mirage in regard to the \*Century, long ago—and all editors look alike to me—I know they are won by slow boring—and no swooping methods—and I have no dream of successfully swooping upon any of them. But to recite to that company really looked like a chance for attack and real impact—a gambling chance at a conquest. About every other time when I recite G.B. I do it well enough to get a good strong physical grip on the audience as it were—. Mr. \*Wheeler only asked me to make a ten minute speech on the \*Gospel of Beauty—practically an impossibility.<sup>5</sup> It would take a long series of careful lectures. But of course it was very kind of him.

I love to recite my loud pieces. When I am in good fettle—and my somewhat uncontrollable voice is not too harsh and hard, I get a certain physical grip on audiences that are rather familiar with my work—or with me. As a speaker in general I am rather thin blooded—a mere talker—and to really get a tight hold on people—with these loud pieces, is a great pleasure and novelty. Its<sup>^</sup> something the pleasure a pugilist must have—after years of drawn battles to really land on somebodys<sup>^</sup> jaw.

Now all this is egotistical, and remains to be proven—and I probably will not come to New York this time—unless M.K.<sup>6</sup> is a wiser man than I think. To give me a chance to bellow—and do it with full swing is giving me a chance that appeals to my sporting blood, and so in a weak hour I listened to the sweet cries from Babylon—and gave a conditional promise to come.

But by this time next year I will have so many more loud pieces—it is still probably the most conservative thing to wait, till I get all possible bawling privileges<sup>^</sup>. The deafest old lady hears—I assure you. Now I have been airing myself most outrageously. Really—I [~~have~~] had written all I should—several weeks ago. Anything more—is just marking time till we meet. Ink is not as red as the slowest blood nor is paper deep as the shallowest eye. I know your eyes must be deep with velvet dreams.

I must not write to you by day—simply because I would write all day—or use myself up till I couldn't write one line of verse. I can't write short letters—even to strangers—let alone the SaraFIMM. And untill<sup>^</sup> I feel my days<sup>^</sup> work is over and done—I feel I must not take too much picnic fare. You are my revelry—as it were—and its<sup>^</sup> many the day I loaf almost all day trying to whip myself to work—but I [~~won't~~] will not let myself do anything else, till my little writing stint is done. But after supper—the struggle is over—I have either won or lost the battle. Then I can give myself to the daughter of \*Lyssipus and her wood fire—and Sara and her Altar fire.

Sara—I feel so guilty—having half-consented to come. But Miss R's letter touched my heart and my vanity. I saw she was really giving me an opportunity out of her generosity—that she really cared—and to have people really care means so much—and then—as I have said—she gave me a chance to do a stint on which I have a gambling chance to win something more than nominal success—and more than alleged victory.

Still—I feel guilty Sara—I feel guilty. I hope \*Kennerley can't spare the money. You know in my best self—I want to talk to you alone. You two have no business to bring out the Babylonian show off side of me.

When you get that picture—send me one. Not Ethel Barrymore<sup>7</sup> either. Send me the one you think is ugly—you don't like. I'll bet it is beautiful. The newspaper cut has such nice curly flowery lines in it.

As for \*Torrence and Zona Gale—I met them long ago—when the Queen of Bubbles appeared in the Critic.<sup>8</sup> Therby<sup>^</sup> hangs a long story—of one of the bitterest disappointments of my life—that made literary disappointments and wounded vanity of the conventional utterly impossible thereafter—though it seems a childs<sup>^</sup> nursery tale now. It was the first and last time I put my trust in princes.

When everybody and everything in the whole world was against me—Ridgeley and Zona overwhelmed me with unsolicited congratulations and told me the \*Century

Magazine was just weeping for my work, that the whole office was afire as it were—and when I went around I received the conventional pass-him-on treatment—that always deceives the youngster—which after two bitter years I learned was merely the New York Publishers’ brand of good manners. And I wrote out at Torrence’s urging the data for some such sketch as \*Macfarlane gave me ten years later last fall, in \*Colliers. But after all the Torrence-Gale Hullabaloo—and I have not given you half—the Queen of Bubbles was all that saw the light.<sup>9</sup>

I don’t blame Torrence a bit, mind you—but it was about my only spiritual Waterloo till Wagon Mound.<sup>10</sup> I had hung my happiness on an external thing—and it had failed me. Torrence was just a confused and busy poet—with many irons in the fire. But his name brings it all back. You may be interested to know that the “Tree of Laughing Bells” was written after receiving his first overwhelming letter of praise and wild prospects.<sup>11</sup> Now that we have gone thus far—read the [it] Tree of Laughing Bells again imagining yourself receiving the greatest possible news of public approval, after having all your drawings denounced and despised by everybody, and even your closest and dearest treating you like a helpless idiot because you write OBSCURE verses. (Victory and vindication in sight—then it was later withdrawn an inch of a time, till it utterly disappeared.[D])

Well—dear lady—you are about the only person in the Universe who can get this tale in all its bearings, etc. Pardon the pronoun I in this letter. It has as many I’s as peacock’s tail, and as much vanity.

Now Don’t be sore on Torrence. I was all unready for success. It would have ruined me. (And now) Of course—I am vain as the devil about being wanted in New York. But (unless M.K. comes across) I take cheerful refuge in Buddha, the Law, the Monastic Order, St. Francis and my ink bottle. I kiss your hand—lady-fair of Babylon.

N.V.L.

[P.S.] I am a blonde! Just about as blonde as Torrence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For VL’s “boys,” see Letter 20.

<sup>2</sup>O. Henry’s *The Gentle Grafter* (1908). See Letter 25.

<sup>3</sup>For the question of VL’s membership in the \*Poetry Society, see Letter 2.

<sup>4</sup>For “Mr. Yard, see \**Century Magazine*. “G.B.” is VL’s poem “\*General William Booth Enters into Heaven” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 148-149).

<sup>5</sup>For “The \*Gospel of Beauty, see Letters 2, 5, and 6.

<sup>6</sup>\*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>7</sup>Ethel Barrymore (1879-1959), American actress, made her professional debut in Montreal in 1894 and starred for the first time on Broadway in 1901. Her first film was *The Nightingale* (1914), the year VL wrote “The \*Chinese Nightingale” for ST.

<sup>8</sup>See Letter 23. Zona Gale (1874-1938) and Ridgely \*Torrence were contributors to and editors for Jeannette Gilder's *The Critic* (1881-1906), a monthly literary magazine and review. Gale and Torrence were very close friends as well, with both involved in New York's "Villa Laura" community. Jeannette Gilder (1849-1916) was sister to Richard Watson Gilder (1844-1909), editor of the \**Century Magazine* from 1881 to his death. See Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 22-25.

<sup>9</sup>Actually, VL's "At Noon on Easter Day" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 735) was also published in *The Critic* (April 1905).

<sup>10</sup>For "Wagon Mound," see Letter 18, and "The \*Gospel of Beauty."

<sup>11</sup>For the story of Robert Henri and VL's poem "The Tree of Laughing Bells," see Letter 23. VL had essentially finished "The Tree of Laughing Bells" by January 1904—several months after arriving in New York.

\*\*\*\*\*

29) "The gleaming head of one fine friend . . ."

Jan. 21, 1914.

Well—since you really want me to spend all day writing I begin the morning so.

I am just as silly over your present<sup>1</sup> as a boy in the fifth grade ward school who has received a big nice lace valentine in the midst of a lot of comics. Oh that valentine-surprise-feeling! And I won't tell a soul. [Drawing of a heart with a cross over it] cross my heart.

As the best return I can make—I ask a favor! I want you to practice singing Yankee Doodle<sup>2</sup> with "\*Jessie Belle" in a slow orotund serious American-Revolutionary-orator style, a Daniel Webster bigness—yet still Yankee Doodle—with a touch of impudence, and Yankee Archness. In short George Washington—plus his rakish ragged rascal continentals.

Bearing in mind also the noble peace policy of Bryan and Wilson—which I cannot sufficiently admire. Also the anti-militarist propaganda of International Socialism, if you please—Sara.

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[5 hearts]      Within the treasure-pits of Heaven  
                     Where covetous angels slake desire  
                     For sight of Heavenly coins and [~~junk~~] gems  
                     For plates of bronze, [~~and gold and~~] for helms of fire

                    Within the treasure pits of heaven  
                     In rooms of gold-embroideried^ vair  
                     I wander—seek [~~peek laugh~~] and peer [~~and I dream~~]  
                             and ponder—  
                     No?.....[~~But~~] Yet I look on her bright hair!

Within the treasure pits of heaven  
 The silly angel-men rejoice  
 And I would sing a kindred [song] strain  
 Though in a feeble human voice—

The gleaming head of one fine friend  
 Is bent above my little song—  
 So through the Treasure-pits of Heaven  
 In Fancy's shoes—I march along.<sup>3</sup>

Now Miss—I improvised that this minute—a line at a time, and only the last line came hard. I had to stand by the radiator and lay down my pen to get it.

Of course I shall copy and fix and revise it. And send it to the \*Smart Smart Smarty Set, (maybe.) Everybody else I know gets in.

With love and sentimentality

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

[P.S.] (I liked your little Jesus poem<sup>4</sup>. But I think you need a row of stars or dashes in between the last three stanzas to indicate the time elapsing. “Little faith were the angel’s keeping” is a most lovely and rare sorro[w]ful line.)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>ST has sent the requested lock of hair: see Letter 25. For VL’s poem on the lock, see Letter 112; also see Letter 143, in which VL sends ST a lock of his hair.

<sup>2</sup>VL’s poem “Yankee Doodle” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 189-190) has just appeared in the February \**Metropolitan*: see Letter 35.

<sup>3</sup>This is the first draft of “In Praise of Gloriana’s Remarkable Golden Hair” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 219-220). Drawings of five little hearts precede the first line. For the second and third drafts, see Letters 32 and 33.

<sup>4</sup>VL refers to ST’s poem “In the Carpenter’s Shop,” published in \**Rivers to the Sea*, pp. 70-71. The “row of stars or dashes” was not added.

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30) “I am awful busy on the Blacksmith's Serenade . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
 Saturday Noon.  
 Jan 24, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

No—this is not a letter. Just to send the clipping.<sup>1</sup> No word from M.K.<sup>2</sup>

Meet meh^ in St. Louis.

I am awful busy on the \*Blacksmith's Serenade.

No—not a letter. Not till midnight.

Good morning.

N.V.L.

[P.S.]That sentence in the review should be This ecstasy^, to those who have experienced it, justifies the very real rigors of the Franciscan Life—and makes them as naught.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The “clipping” is VL’s lengthy review of David Grayson [Ray Stannard Baker], *The Friendly Road* (1913). Entitled “Ik Marvel Afoot,” VL’s review was published in the \**Chicago Evening Post Friday Literary Review* (January 23, 1914). Since Baker was, in VL’s words, “a super-dreadnaught among muckrakers,” VL suggests that Baker changes “his name to Grayson when he wants to be at peace.” VL stresses Grayson’s selectivity and suggests that his next work be “the Unfriendly Road,” in which he is to tell “how a chattering, slobbering idiot, trailing a silly valise, followed him for days afoot, and was as hard to get away from as the Old Man of the Sea . . . .” VL continues and basically writes what he has told ST he will not write: see Letter 20.

<sup>2</sup>See \*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>3</sup>The newspaper sentence is garbled but essentially omits the words “to those who have experienced it, justifies”—causing VL to say the opposite of what he means. The “ecstasy” comes from the “idyls” that dominate Baker-Grayson’s book. VL’s point is that this ecstasy would seem “whiter and more dewey^ by contrast”—if “the very real rigors” of the road were also included.

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31) “I have written you a heap of nonsense—I am afraid . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Jan 24, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Well—I will think of you all and send you my silent blessing tomorrow night.<sup>1</sup>

No word, no apology, no acknowledgement—no anything from M.K.<sup>2</sup> I am not going to write a letter tonight.

Do you know—the principal things on my mind tonight you know nothing about?

The daughter of \*Lyssipus is going to Chicago, for good and all—next week.

I just hate to lose her. She goes there—seeking her fortune almost in the spirit of a brilliant heady thoroughbred young man. It fills me full of such an infinity of strange thoughts.

I cannot go into them with you. They are too complex.

I keep wondering if the monastic road is my blessing or my bane. I cannot bear to give it up. I always say—one more mile—and then I will surrender to the world—to Beauty, [~~the~~] to Woman, to Babylon!

\*Wheelock's book is so strange. I know not how to answer him in the letter I will write, except to say—yes—Here is the Song of Songs. But I take refuge in the Buddha—the Law—the monastic Order—the Christ Crucified and the wounded St. Francis—.

I have written you a heap of nonsense—I am afraid, my Child—in my time. Amid all our pain and weakness and error—let us give our hearts to the things which are unseen and eternal. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth.<sup>3</sup>

There are three dusty pictures—the principal ornaments of my room—and there they have stayed eternal as coral reefs though waves of passion have beaten over me. They are the Kamakura Buddha<sup>4</sup>—the Gandhar^ Carving of Buddha after his forty days fast<sup>5</sup>—and the Nuremburg^ Madonna.<sup>6</sup> They stand for me for eternal and invisible things—self-conquest—Emancipation. One carved by Japanese—One by Hindus—one by Germans. But all stand to deliver me from everything that binds me—and after many days—I come back to them.

God is a Spirit—and they that worship him—must worship him in Spirit and in truth.<sup>7</sup>

I do not want to be Good. But I want to be free—a spirit. And tomorrow—I will be the same wicked loafer—but never never never will I completely surrender to the world—I know that sometime my chance to be my real spiritual self will come—some day I will be strong enough to be a good soldier of the Invisible God.

I know this sounds like vague strange talk to you.

And I feel as lonely as a man on a sea-cliff at midnight.

Goodnight—good lady Sara,

N.V.L.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>ST will be attending the Poetry Society dinner: see Letter 13.

<sup>2</sup>See \*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>3</sup>Compare Isaiah 40:7-8.

<sup>4</sup>The “Kamakura Buddha” is the great bronze (49 feet high) of Amida (or Amitabha) of Kamakura, one of many Buddhas conceived as ideals separate from the historical Buddha. The work was cast in 1252 A.D. See VL's “\*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 972).

<sup>5</sup>The Gandhara Buddhas, created from the early first century to c.250 A.D., reflect Greco-Roman influences, with the Buddha draped in folds of toga-like clothing.

<sup>6</sup>In the summer of 1910, when VL's parents were in Europe, they visited the museum at Nuremberg, where they saw "the Nuremberg Madonna, a wooden figure of exquisite beauty carved by an unknown artist" (South, *Cousin Vachel*, p. 36). VL's mother was moved to write a religious essay entitled "The Message of Nuremberg," and it is likely that VL's picture is a souvenir from his parents' trip.

<sup>7</sup>John 4:24.

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32) "here you have been inviting me to my own back yard . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 27, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I want to thank you most devoutly for the nice good picture. I am sending you one of mine that may divert you and cause you to burble whang and smile. I put yours right by the Nuremburg^ Madonna.<sup>1</sup>

I thought of you all, Sunday night—I mean all of you—and shall think of you all Wednesday evening,<sup>2</sup> I mean all of you—party people. And Thursday I shall begin to guess you, personally are packing for home. If you don't, your name is mud. Yes—mud.

Thats^ no way to talk to a lady. Well—your name is clay then. Clay. Bertha M. Clay. I want to meet and read you—now I have seen the cover.

If you walk in Central Park—it should be with Clark Aston^ Smith—star-treader.<sup>3</sup> You have no business to be there with \*Wheelock. Its^ a short circuit^. Its^ like Laura Jean Libby^ and Hall Caine.<sup>4</sup> Both passionate young things—and no chaperone, not that those two ever met. But if they did—what a meeting.

But far be it from me to josh—or write a humoresque at this moment.

Setting aside nonsense—dear poet lady—I send my kindest greetings to all \*poetry society folk who will receive them without hesitation. No—you did not tell me I was a member. And here—I look over the advisory committe^ and find I know seven out of seventeen of the advisory committee, and in short—most of my correspondents in the world about now are inside the Poetry Society fence—as it were. \*Bynner who has rooted for me for many seasons, Miss \*Peabody who has never written me but one letter—but that a lovely one. It reached me in Los Angeles just as I was writing \*Booth—and \*Sterling—who writes to me to beat the band, and Sara—whose pen is a little dancing woman of itself,<sup>5</sup> and only needs a ruffle to be Pandora, and—wait till I get the folder—yes—Miss \*Branch—with whom I had a most romantic correspondence—(don't say I said so!) She quit when I got a little turtle-dovey—or something! But we are dear friends. And several others I understand are champions of me work, though they have not written. (And) Miss \*Monroe. The next time—Sara—you want me to join something I already belong to, tell me who belongs, especially if they are my INTIMATE friends. I did not know I had been cuddling up against Tammany Hall all this time—I thought myself a wild Independent, a Sulzer—when I was Murphy's nephew all the time.<sup>6</sup>

And here you have been inviting me to my own back yard as it were. I clutch my brow.

Kiss the hands of all the ladies for me—that I know, or that claim to know me. - And as for the gentlemen—tell them to kiss your hand—in my name—as my most intimate friend, among all those I have not met. Be tenderly haughty, barking occasionally like a Jabberwock.

This note is just a note. I am trying to find a jumping off place every minute. Harriet M. writes me all in a glow about her play in the little theatre—the Man Eagle.<sup>7</sup>

Your friend \*Jessie Belle wrote me such a helpful letter. You tell her she must write me one about twice a year like that—at least. The solidity and worth of her personality laid right hold of me, she doesn't appear to be the letter-kind of a person—and I don't want to overwork her. But when I think of that shepherdess letter of her's^, I blat^ like a curly lamb, with a nice pink ribbon and a saucer of milk.<sup>8</sup>

What was it I was going to say? I was going to write about something when I started this letter.

Oh. The \*Fireman's Ball is much improved. Three small changes have given it lots of edge and ginger and I am now satisfied with it. It is in the \*Congo Class now—if I may be allowed to brag. I have just sent off the revision to DeCamp of the \*Metropolitan.

Oh—now I remember. Gold hair poem. Revised.

#### In Praise of a Little Girl's Golden Hair.

Within the treasure-pits of Heaven  
Where angel misers slake desire,  
Amid the Heavenly coins and gems  
The plates of bronze, the helms of fire—

Within the treasure-pits of Heaven  
In splendor's last ensnaring lair  
I wander—seek and peer and ponder—  
Bum line.>For I have looked on her dear hair.

Within the treasure-pits of Heaven  
The silly angel-men rejoice.  
Bum line >And I make shift today to sing  
Though in a feeble human voice.

The gleaming head of one fine friend  
Is bent above my little song.  
So—through the treasure-pits of Heaven  
In fancy's shoes—I march along.<sup>9</sup>

I am starting a poem on \*Mark Twain in the manner of your Poem on \*Sappho. That is metrically and musically it will resemble. Of course not the same plot. Gosh.

With esteem and respect

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.  
603 South 5th.

[P.S.] The daughter of \*Lys. damned the \*Blacksmith's serenade—so it is a dead serenade. On to Mark Twain! Forward!

[Enclosure: Profile picture of VL with a note on the verso:

To Sara Trevor Teasdale  
On whose behalf I  
am devastated^ with  
reflections  
cogitations and  
sentiments—

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th  
Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 27, 1914.]

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For the “Nuremberg Madonna,” see Letter 31 (note 6).

<sup>2</sup>For the annual “poets’ party,” see Letter 23 (note 11).

<sup>3</sup>Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), although very young, was publishing poems in several of the same magazines as VL and ST. Smith’s first book, *The Star-Treader, and Other Poems* (1912), is also referred to in VL’s *\*Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), p. 223; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup>VL imagines a meeting of two highly sentimental, moralistic authors. American writer Laura Jean Libbey (1862-1925) published some 80 novels, most with the same basic theme: a young working girl who retains her virtue (that is, virginity) may expect a husband, fame, and fortune. English writer Sir Thomas Henry Hall Caine (1853-1931), widely popular in his time, authored moralistic works such as *The Prodigal Son* (1904) and *The Woman Thou Gavest Me* (1913).

<sup>5</sup>See VL’s poem in the next letter.

<sup>6</sup>A New York Democratic intra-party fight between Governor William Sulzer and Tammany Hall boss Charles Murphy led to Sulzer’s impeachment in 1913.

<sup>7</sup>Harriet \*Monroe reports that, since verse plays were “unmarketable,” she turned to prose drama, writing “three or four.” One of these, *The Man-Eagle*, had a “little-theatre” tryout, produced by Iden Payne and starring Walter Hampden. Monroe summarizes the story as “the tragedy of simultaneous invention, my hero achieving a successful machine flight

only to learn that the Wright brothers had reached the goal just ahead of him.” In Monroe’s own words, the play “failed to make much of a dent in theatrical records” (*A Poet’s Life*, pp. 181, 199-200).

<sup>8</sup>For the “bleating” lamb image, see Letter 18.

<sup>9</sup>The second version of “In Praise of Gloriana’s Remarkable Golden Hair”: see Letter 29, and the next letter.

\*\*\*\*\*

33) “Sara—its^ no good writing till we meet . . .”

11:P.M. Pajama's etc.  
Springfield Ill.  
Jan. 28, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Just at this hour, I presume, the darling Witter \*Bynner rises and proposes the following toast: “The Poetry of Sara Trevanion<sup>1</sup> Teasdale!” I for one, drink it in imaginary lemonade.

I feel you sending me wireless remarks—such as—“The Salad was pretty good, wasn’t it?” etc. Oh—that sparkling company! Of course I will be there next year.

---

Sara—its^ no good writing till we meet. We are just as acquainted as we can get till that evening in St. Louis. Next week? I want to take you out to dinner at the Jefferson Hotel (Is that the nicest?) or whatever is grandest in the way of an eat-place, and then we will talk and eat and eat and talk from 6:30 till 11 and be miles better acquainted. Then I will take you home and take the midnight train and have something or other to write to you about on the next evening.

As it is—I must just repeat myself.

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#### In Praise of a Little Maiden's Golden Hair.

I wander, seek and peer and ponder  
In Splendors last ensnaring lair.  
Mid Burnished harps and burnished crowns  
Where noble chariots gleam and glare.

Amid the spirit-coins and gems—  
The plates and cups and helms of fire—  
The gorgeous treasure-pits of Heaven  
Where Angel-misers slake desire...

Within those treasure-pits of gold—  
The silly angel-men make mirth.  
I think that I am there this hour

Though walking in the ways of earth.

The gleaming head of one fine friend  
Is bent above my little song.  
So through the treasure-pits of heaven  
In fancy's shoes, I march along.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning Sara's Pen.

Your pen needs but a ruffle  
To be Pavlova whirling.  
It surely is a scalawag  
A scamping down the page.  
A lonely bee exploring  
The hedge: a fountain purling.  
And then that white sweet Russian  
The dancer of the age.

[It is] Your pen's the Queen of Sheba  
Such serious questions [asking] bringing  
The careless court of Solomon  
Puts on a sober face.  
And then again—Pavlova  
To set our spirits singing.  
The snowy-swan Bacchante  
Of High Olympic grace.<sup>3</sup>

Natural History Note.

The grasshopper  
The grasshopper  
I will explain to you.  
He is the brownies racehorse  
The fairies Kangaroo.<sup>4</sup>

I feel like a very weak and slipshod character tonight. All theory—and no accomplishment. I wish I could do in Springfield what \*Yeats did in Dublin. A man with real sand in his craw could do it. The Sangamon County players, etc. Certainly. And playwrights<sup>5</sup>—and all. There is some undiscovered Lady Gregory here—and Synge and all.<sup>5</sup>

The High School kids were here tonight.<sup>6</sup> They are lovely creatures. Glad I am that they are alive. We theorized about getting up some Springfield Players etc.

Spaulding—the radical commissioner—won the referendum yesterday. The woman vote such as turned out was almost unanimous for him—600. The men were

almost tied. He had 43 majority of the men. Total—about 643. It is our first woman vote, and first referendum. His eldest son is one of my boys.<sup>7</sup>

---

Goodnight—Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine—Trevor Teasdale.

N.V.L.

[P.S.] Now young woman—come home, or your name is MUD.

The daughter of . . . . .

...

So you had better . . .<sup>8</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For ST's name, see Letter 6, and note 8 below.

<sup>2</sup>The third version of "In Praise of Gloriana's Remarkable Golden Hair": see Letter 29.

<sup>3</sup>The first version of "On Receiving One of Gloriana's Letters" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 219): see Letter 32. Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) was a Russian ballerina and generally considered to be the greatest dancer of the age. Her American debut was at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in 1910.

<sup>4</sup>Published in *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914) as "An Explanation of the Grasshopper" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 221).

<sup>5</sup>The Irish Players were in Chicago in 1913. Floyd Dell comments: "What a wonderful experience it was to sit in the gallery night after night and see the rich world of Synge and Lady Gregory!" (*Homecoming*, p. 231).

<sup>6</sup>For VL's "boys," see Letter 20.

<sup>7</sup>The referendum was the beginning of the process for municipal ownership of the power company, one of Spaulding's major projects. Opposed by the mayor and those VL identifies as the Springfield "business men," the referendum allowed the Commissioner to buy the first generator for the new plant. Its approval was viewed by VL's friends as a victory for the people, for the new commission form of government, and for the new local woman's suffrage law. See Letters 26 and 40. Spaulding's older son was Frederick H. (born 1897).

<sup>8</sup>A comic "threat," implying that he is receiving favors from Mary Johnson. Compare Letter 36. For "Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine—Trevor Teasdale," see Letter 6.

\*\*\*\*\*

34) "Desire has me by the throat twenty times a day . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan 29, 1914.<sup>1</sup>

My Dearest Sara:

Your letter came this morning—and there is so much to answer in it—and I hope to answer briefly. First—God-speed to the new Poem.<sup>2</sup> We are here to sing—you and I—and the rest is uncertain. But we are here to sing. Let us be about our business, and sing our clearest fairest purest note. I have just torn up the \*Blacksmith's Serenade and started on \*Mark Twain. Thank you for helping me with \*Untermeyer. I send him via you—since I have not his address—a copy of my book. Send me his address and I will follow with a letter.

No I have never met M.K.<sup>3</sup> and don't give a hang for the gentleman—never did. I hope though he publishes my next book of \*Adventures—the \*Forum series (prose). He has them in type—I need the publicity—and its^ God's truth I don't give a hang for the money. If he wants it for his friends all right. That sounds sarcastic—but I really mean it. I have a holy dread of being contaminated with money, and had much rather it contaminate the other fellow. Its^ really a rock-bottom principle—which is back of the \*Rhymes to be Traded for Bread. I am seriously considering a free distribution of my next book of poems. It will save all these M.K. fidgets and vexations. And I know critics enough to start the people writing to me for it. Of course—if a publisher offers—very well. But I shall not sweat my soul hunting one. M.K. came without my asking.

I do hope though \*Kennerley—sometime this year brings out those Forum Travels. It is my clearest, most definitive most aggressive prose, and my most careful propaganda work. If he once gets it out of press—maybe a few of us that are very determined may wrestle a few copies from his hands. I really don't give a hang whether he pays me for it or not. No—M.K. is not a snob. All the snobs I ever knew paid their bills. On that sound virtue—they built their air-castle, and thought it justified everything.

Now—you accuse me of fickleness^ . How shall I reply? I hate to be gabby in letters—yet I want to tell you. Now—confidential like:

In the first place—the lady I lost<sup>4</sup> was the big disaster or shake up or cyclone of my life. In the second place I have nailed up that room in my memory as one would a haunted room in a castle. In the third place—I am never without [a] some one woman friend of some kind to whom I am so attentive that my books, my flowers my candy etc. quite convince that I am “in love”—that is the dowagers and the gossips are convinced. I am presumably as much “in love”—as many men who go cheerfully to the altar. In the fourth place—if you ever met any woman I ever knew—in the dark—in the confessional, she would not only swear I was a Franciscan, [~~but~~] she would always insist that I am the equal mistruster of alcohol, money and passion. Not always the enemy of these things—but always mistrusting—never chained or committed—except once—as I say, and then—to no result, in the matter of Passion.

The only thing that keeps me a Franciscan today is my work. There is no doubt of that. Beauty shakes me like a leaf. Desire has me by the throat twenty times a day. But there is a power that seems absolutely from the outside that almost shouts in my ear—“not yet.” Not till Mark Twain is written. Not till your next walk. Not till you have put society beneath your feet. Not till you have won your battle. Your friend \*Wheelock's book is as beautiful to me as it is to any one who has ever read it. But I could write on the back of it the one word “Mouse trap.” But it is good and lovely in its kind.

As much as I want to give my heart to anyone—I have given it to the daughter of \*Lyssipus. And a more curiously assorted pair never were. She dances four nights with a wild crowd—though of course preferring^ the thoroughbreds among them. Then the fifth or fourth evening we talk on opposite sides of the family lamp—and she has a most insatiable sense of Beauty—for the purple passages of Ruskin, Teasdale, Pater, or whoever you please, and a perfect lady at entertaining two to six men at a time with brainy conversation, with the most proper dignity. Now there you are. Brains—high spirits, exquisite manners and dignity and beauty. But I do not dance. We scarcely have a man friend in common. She dearly loves King Mammon, she cheerfully tolerates King Alcohol, she reveres King Snob, she doubts God, and shrinks from all religionists^—she is a Greek—and I am at least half-Buddhist—and there you have the paradox of my whole life.

Some of them love Beauty. Some of them love God. My doctrine is The Love of Beauty and the Love of God. And the God-lovers refuse to divide their hearts, and the Beauty-lovers refuse to divide their hearts—and so I go on alone.

I kiss your hand lady. Please tear up this letter. I have no right to analyze my friends so. The daughter of Lyssipus is a princess and should be treated as such. I take refuge in the Buddha—the Law and the Order.

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Chénétier (*Letters of VL*, pp. 86-87) publishes a second letter from VL to ST dated “January 29, 1914” (collected in the University of Chicago Library). However, the formal tone of this second letter, especially in contrast to the warm familiarity here, strongly suggests the distress that VL experienced following ST’s marriage to Ernst \*Filsinger. Since VL often erred in dating letters and manuscripts, it is likely that the Chénétier letter was written on January 29, 1915, not 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Unidentified.

<sup>3</sup>See \*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>4</sup>\*Roberts, Octavia.

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35) “my sense of humor begins to arrive on a freight train . . .”

Springfield Ill.

Is it possible? Feb. 1, 1914.

My Dear(est) Sara:

If you don't get home pretty soon—we will have so many things to say to each other on that first interview of ours we will not get anything said. I'll bet we both talk at once and do not listen to each other at all. Just cackle and clack.

What do you think. M.K.<sup>1</sup> sends for final revision—made up from magazine pages—“The \*Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty.” Wants me to insert the \*Kallyope Yell—which I do, in the only right spot—after meeting the Emporia Professor—and just before my discussion of the Santa Fe Railroad. Also wants me to make all final corrections. The type is saved out of the magazine you know, for the book. So I make one or a dozen grammatical amendments and mail back. He utterly ignores all recent events all my letters etc. So I go him one better. I mail him back the corrected book—but with no letter whatever. I wonder if he feels the intense, elaborate sarcasm of the proceeding? Probably not.

But I am pleased that in a pleasant fit of worldliness and enterprise, he wants to put my book on the market more or less according to contract. There are about 50 people in this world who will read it with care—and it was worth writing—just for them. By scrambling—I presume—most of them can get hold of it. Now that reduces the proposition to its lowest terms—and I do not expect to be surprised! Unless he wants me to pay his printers bill.

Meanwhile—The \*Metropolitan do not like the \*Fireman's Ball—and no wonder—poor dears. Why did I send it to them! It is founded on one of the first Khandakas of the Mahavagga. Buddha's great sermon against all the fires of life.<sup>2</sup> In the light of their red cover and their (probably trumped up) controversy over the morality of Paul Manship's excellent sculpture<sup>3</sup>—they want no skeleton at the feast! Bless em^.

Which of our big editors approximates the ascetic? Any Franciscans in the set?

De Camp's refusal was almost peevish—I didn't think anything of it at first—but my sense of humor begins to arrive on a freight train.

Place this language alongside of their decorously spiced controversy:

I once knew a teacher  
Who turned from desire—  
Who said to the young men  
Wine is a fire— ...

Who thus warned the revellers  
Life is a flame—  
Be cold as the dew  
Would you win at the game—etc.

So Beware So Beware  
So Beware of the fire etc.

No no—gentlemen. A sensitive consistency prevents you from giving a full page of a respectable mundane magazine to such awful language as that.

Some one might pause and reflect, and momentarily ruin the noble sport of Puritan-baiting—which is the leading amusement of the present hour.

The Puritan is a myth—a man of straw—but still it is a great pleasure to chase this myth around the block with an avenging broomstick.

Now come back home and I will recite you this highly edifying Fireman’s Ball—the \*Congo—the \*Kallyope Yell—Kansas, God Loves a Gambler-Lady,<sup>4</sup> and then if you are still unmoved—Swinburne’s Ode to Athens and his Hymn to Proserpine. Have you a sound-proof cosy-corner?

The \*Mark Twain poem crawls along. I know it is going to be good, if I do say it that shouldn’t. But I certainly dally over it. (It is to be) In the manner of Sara Trevanion<sup>5</sup> ST’s Poem on \*Sapho. Only more colloquial and—St. Louis-like.

I tore up one silly letter—and it seems I am doomed. This is sillier—. So let us behave—and amend—and meditate.

Put in any meditation you like. The one I had in mind was too long for that space.  
Title—The Judgement Day.

With esteem—

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See \*Kennerley, Mitchell.

<sup>2</sup>See *Poetry of VL*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>The work of Paulanship (1885-1966), U.S. sculptor, reflects the Greek awareness of the human body. VL refers to a brief notice in the \**Chicago Evening Post Friday Literary Review* entitled “Metropolitan Is Censored.” New York postal authorities ruled the February issue “unmailable” until they received special permission from Washington, due to pictures that were deemed to be “lewd, lascivious, indecent and filthy.” This issue of the *Metropolitan* also includes VL’s “Yankee Doodle” (see Letter 29), which is reprinted here in the *Review* as well. Manship is perhaps best remembered for his bronze Prometheus fountain (1934) at New York’s Rockefeller Center plaza.

<sup>4</sup>All are in *Poetry of VL*, vol. 1.

<sup>5</sup>For ST’s name, see Letter 6.

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36) “let me think upon Death . . .”

Springfield Ill.<sup>1</sup>  
Feb. 2, 1914.

My Dear Lady:

They say that the Trappist monks are allowed one word. When they meet in the morning they say to one another “Remember Death.”

Now I think on Death tonight, and it is not that I think on decay or sorrow or skulls. Nor yet on something sublime. It might be called the middle mood.

I think on Death as the apparent end of the illusions that encompass us. They all have a sudden and unexpected end—that challenges any faith we have pinned to their worth. Therefore if one would be above the vexations—above the passionate whirl—above the hunger and thirst of the body—that he may think and judge—in the mood of the Stars—let him remember death.

The mood of the stars is really the mood most worth while. To be cold and gentle and in a sense fixed—and beholding all that transpires—that is the conquering mood. I look at and dearly love this little circle of gold hair—this hint of a sensitive human creature—and then I say in my heart in all gentleness—remember Death. Would I be strong as the stars I cannot lean upon any passing thing—the joy must blow upon my face if it will like a perfumed wind—but God keep me to remember death and be fixed and gentle as the stars though friendship come or go.

The free spirit is indeed pitiful and weak—but he may somehow possess<sup>^</sup> himself sometimes—but he who surrenders to the whirl of life is drowned drowned drowned.

When a flattering notice comes of my work—when some new Editor sends a little intoxicating praise—when my overardent friends here, my too kind partizans<sup>^</sup> overpraise me—let me think then of Death and the stars and be not drunk with the wine of my own flattered blood.

When I feel the people shrinking from me as a curio, an alien—an Ishmaelite—let me think upon Death and the Stars and be content.

When they speak of money as the one thing worth while—and when I see that all the chief sweets of life for which I grow almost frantic are to be purchased with money—for which I am to sell my soul—let me think upon Death and the joy that glitters in the eyes of the stars—and be content.

When the pleasure lovers tell me that it is not worth while to worry about Humanity—that all men are greedy and marauding thieves, that corruption is inevitable and reform a delusion—and Utopia the last folly—let me think upon Death—hoping that some day the old order will die, laboring to bring about its death, in some small way giving my sword stroke. Let me think upon Death—and let me watch and hope—as the stars watch for sunrise.

The most beautiful friendship may end in bitterness—or a sort of grey dimness, or a parting that is a slow and painless death. I pray God to keep all my friendships strong and honest and vital as possible—as for the women friends—neither denying passions

existence—nor putting too much faith in it—and even if I cannot put all faith into friendship God keep me brave enough to fill every [one] friendship with tender hope—let us still hope great things of every friendship—but—lest we be doomed to some day stand alone in the cool strange night—let us prepare our hearts for that loneliness and think on Death—and the Stars.

I have much delight in the thought of you, my child,—and though I had three times the delight—still I would say in my soul—let both of us make the Eternal God our lonely and certain goal—and though I kiss your hand again—Let us think on Death and the Stars.

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

[P.S.] Harriet has a rose poem in the Feb. \*Forum.<sup>2</sup> Please read my Moon Poems in the Feb. Forum. Correct the Shield of Faith Poem. It should be OUR goal, not out-goal.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>With minor differences, most of this letter is printed in Carpenter, pp. 171-173, in order to illustrate VL's "profoundly serious side." The context of the letter, however, is important in understanding VL's intent. He is struggling with his feelings for the coquettish Mary \*Johnson (see especially Letters 31 and 34), as he has struggled many times before with similar feelings for other girls. In most instances, he attempts to invoke the coolness of distance and isolation—the theme of "Section Three" of "The \*Firemen's Ball." The fear of rejection is an important aspect in all of VL's relationships, and is very much a part of his intentions in this letter to ST, his new heart interest. For VL, who was rejected by a number of women, it is a fear grounded in experience. See especially Letter 223.

<sup>2</sup>Harriet \*Monroe's poem "The Model" in the \**Forum* (February 1914, pp. 161-163) depicts "Beauty" as a sunset rose that overcomes all human strife. The poem is collected in Monroe's *You and I* (1914), pp. 88-91.

<sup>3</sup>VL refers to his poem "The Shield of Faith" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 252-253), where the passage in question reads: "I know that Shadow has its place, / That Noon is not our goal" (ll. 5-6).

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37) "I am as jealous as a little green worm . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 2, 1914.

My Dear(est) Sara:

Please hurry home. Of course I will stay overnight with your folks if that is handy.

I have reached a lull in my work, and wish I could see you this minute.

Call me up long distance the minute you are ready to see me in St. Louis—I will begin looking up trains today.

I have an engagement not definitely fixed—to speak in Terre Haute this month. That meets my travel expenses—so I can come to see you in good Conscience. Just about enough to get to St. Louis and buy you a rose.

I think I can cure you of your Anti-St. Louis feeling—unless there is some very real Jabberwock in the woods I don't know about. And even Jabberwocks can be slain.

Now hurry home—before I get to writing again. When I have a full head of steam on I will not be half so sociable as I am now when I am groaning with my no-accountness, and want to forget it, and chatter.

I am just about as industrious as a snail at present.

Maybe I can start that interlude at your house—make the rough draft—but I will need the Whip of your enthusiasm to make me work. My Big Champion Macfarlane<sup>1</sup> in the same mail orders up a poem on the Copper mining strike in Michigan. Two months ago Walker<sup>2</sup> one of the big labor leaders asked me to do the same.

Its^ easier to want to write a poem than to write it.

Of course—I would like to write a song for all strikers—to be sung at every strike everywhere—till all men's incomes are equal—and the only caste distinction is between poets and dubs, but.

Read Macfarlane's article in next Weeks Colliers and be prepared to pump that dream into me. Beat it into me—"A \*Song for All Strikers!"

This Town has gone Tango Crazy and my best friend<sup>3</sup> is whirling around among the spenders and bacchanalians and I am jealous as a little green worm. I don't dance and am barred out. The way of the Franciscan is hard. If I wanted to be a real devil—I know my resources—I could reduce their bunch to pulp by a steady campaign—but who wants to be an expert moth whirling in circles round the flame—jumping through the hoops of fire? Even though the downiest moth of them all is there? The silly things do not know I could make them eat from my hand.

Sooner or later her wings will be singed—and then maybe she will be willing to let me save her from the hop-toads under the street lamp.

I see a deadly parting sometime—I hope—not a quarrel. Her ways are not my ways. Where is my wandering girl today?

This is to be a particularly wild week—I understand—.

And her mother is indirectly abetting the whirl.

No—lady. The Gold-haired poem is all your own. If it had been black-haired you might well have been suspicious—(I should write a book on Brunetts^ I have known.)

[Drawing of a book with the title: "BRUNETTS I HAVE KNOWN."]

Once—long ago—to a certain leddy I wrote

“My soul sleeps in a castle black  
 The castle of your unbound hair—  
 My soul had travelled many a mile  
 Before it breathed that tropic air  
 My soul had toiled through stone and briar  
 Before it climbed that winding stair—<sup>4</sup>

And so forth. I forgit^ the rest. She has the one and only copy. A good and helpful and noble lady I have not seen for ages.

Now this is confession. You will think me a flirt pretty soon. But all that was in the far past. My ancestry is to blame anyway. [Drawing of an arrow pointing backward—to his past and to the marginal note below.]

When we meet—we must just talk BUSINESS. That is POETRY—and refrain from anything that looks like anything more than an expression of ESTEEM. At least on the first visit.

Yours with esteem,

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
 603 South 5th.

[Marginal note: “(Before we meet I must tell you of my family tree. St. Augustine that holy priest who converted Britian^—so my mother says—was one of my remote Great Grandfathers—in a weak moment. Gradually the family name was changed to Austen. That pleasant old maid Jane Austen was my great great grandmother. It isn’t everybody has an ancestry like that.)”]<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Peter Clark \*Macfarlane published three articles in \**Collier’s* during February 1914, but VL is referring to “Issues at Calumet” (February 7, pp. 5-6 ff.), which discusses strike issues in the Michigan copper mines.

<sup>2</sup>John H[unter] Walker, miner and labor leader, worked with John Mitchell and Mother Jones in organizing the miners of southern Illinois and West Virginia (1897). He served as President of District 12, United Mine Workers of America, Illinois (1905-1913) and as President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor (1913-1930).

<sup>3</sup>Mary \*Johnson.

<sup>4</sup>The poem was written for Nellie Tracy \*Vieira on the evening of December 1, 1909, and is quoted in full by Fowler, *Annotated Letters*, p. 311:

My soul sleeps in a Castle Black—  
 The Castle of your unbound hair—  
 My Soul had journeyed many a mile

Before it breathed that tropic air—  
 My soul sleeps softly like a child  
 Of [Or?] Fairies in a Cloudland car  
 My soul sleeps softly caring not  
 Tomorrow looms the Torch of War.

Sorrow may come tomorrow dear—  
 My soul may never sleep again—  
 Oh wake me not—but whisper low  
 “I hold him dearest among men—  
 Ye shadows here—are all his own—  
 Gather to guard him, shadows all—  
 Sing him the Passionate Soul of Night—  
 Dark whispering love—the all in all.”

VL adds: “Now you are the only person in the world that has this poem. I have torn up my copy here, and it is absolutely yours” (p. 312).

<sup>5</sup>For the Austen story, see Letter 13 (note 8).

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38) “I am always jealous of my yesterdays . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
 Feb. 3, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I will probably write you tonight—but this afternoon am mailing the ball<sup>1</sup>—since you really care to see it.

The Please Do not lend sign—means just to keep off butinskis. Read it to any of our immediate darlings that want to hear it, if you want to. But remember I am still peddling it.

You have a grand little notice in Feb. \*Current Opinion<sup>2</sup> that filled my heart with joy. Getting popular! Everybody loves Sara!

If the \*Metropolitan sends back my last revised copy of the \*Fireman’s ball—which they probably will—I believe I will try it on Harriet \*Monroe. I would just love to have three or four big show pieces in her magazine this year—and some one of them count as much as \*Booth. Of course that is a wild dream, but I am always jealous of my yesterdays.

I suppose before I can write another Booth I will have to walk another two thousand miles and meet the Devil in the desert and incidentally break my heart and go bankrupt spiritually, all again. You have no idea of the mortification and despair of those weeks in Los Angeles when I wrote that rhyme as a sort of desperate vindication of myself, and my pilgrimage that was all gone to pieces.<sup>3</sup>

Well—we will talk about it sometime. It sounds like nothing much, in a letter.

Who did me that grand write-up in the Feb. \*review of reviews?<sup>4</sup>

And our friend Joyce \*Kilmer doth couple our names in the New York

Times as the [~~one~~] sharp contrast and anti-thesis in \*Braithwaites Anthology.<sup>5</sup> It is rather amusing. I wonder—if we know each other really well for ages I will turn into Euripides and you will turn into Miss Annie Oakley the little sure-shot—the Broncho Busting Queen of the Modern Muses? It will be great to change characters. I am beginning. This \*Mark Twain poem is in the style of your [~~Sappho~~] \*Sappho.

Thats^ an awfully hard word to spell.

Well—I must rush to the P.O. I must get some candy too. The boys come tonight and I always pass a box of chocolates—as the cheapest and cleanest refreshments—and then there are no dishes to bother Mama and \*Joy afterwards. And the kids are satisfied.<sup>6</sup>

Hurry home—Sarafimm. Here is the C. and A. Time table on top of my papers.<sup>7</sup> I am all ready to look up the first train to St. Louis.

God be with you—Miss Nonsense-and-ink.

With esteem

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See “\*Firemen’s Ball, The.”

<sup>2</sup>In quoting ST’s “\*Sappho” from \**Scribner’s*, the editor, almost certainly Edward J. \*Wheeler, asserts: “Sara Teasdale is one of our younger poets who never becomes jaundiced, and the fine, wholesome spirit with which she views the world is fast making her a general favorite” (\**Current Opinion*, February 1914, p. 143).

<sup>3</sup>For the end of VL’s 1912 tramp, see Letter 18 (note 12).

<sup>4</sup>VL refers to the laudatory but anonymous article “Poems of Lindsay,” in the *American Review of Reviews* (February 1914), p. 245.

<sup>5</sup>VL is amused by Joyce \*Kilmer’s review in the *New York Times*, “Last Year’s Verse, Mr. \*Braithwaite’s Interesting Anthology for 1913” (January 18, 1914). Kilmer writes that Braithwaite “is wise enough to include poems widely different from each other in theme and spirit; to include, for instance, so classical and stately a composition as Sara Teasdale’s splendid ‘Sappho,’ and so buoyant or rather boisterous a bit of enthusiasm as Nicholas Vachel Lindsay’s ‘The \*Kallyope Yell.’”

<sup>6</sup>For VL’s “boys,” see Letter 20.

<sup>7</sup>That is, the Chicago and Alton, the railroad between Springfield and St. Louis.

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39) “You should be here with a whip—SaraFIMM . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 5, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Isn't it curious we wrote our letters on Death at about the same hour?<sup>1</sup> And they crossed on the way?

I am not thinking of anything more important tonight than self-respect—. If I do not write tomorrow I should be tied up and whipped. I have not written a thing since the \*Firemen's Ball. I have just loafed. Just sat here and looked at my table. Or took four-and-a half-hour naps on the cot. Just dog lazy, and sleeping to forget my own self-scorn. If it was prose now—I might drive myself to it—but somehow I do not feel like driving myself to poetry. Yet the inspiration-part is all over. Here is the sketch for a \*Song for All Strikers, all done, in about 20 minutes. And the Notes on \*Mark Twain, accumulated through about six months—all pretty well sketched in. The rest is just work. Craftsmanship.

About two nights ago I retired early and woke at midnight and wrote down the Song for all strikers. This getting up at night is worse than getting up in the morning to start the furnace. But I just can't remember a thing overnight—and I can't polish a thing in my head as you do. I just get the refrains, the key-phrases, the outline and mood of the thing—sometimes the rhymes. But not the polish. It takes weeks to polish a 20 minute sketch—that is written down with all its fire—that is—all the fire it ever will have. Its<sup>^</sup> just a question of filling in the low places between the high places—and keeping the high places intact. I have sheaves and sheaves of sketches I could bluff people into thinking were poems, if I were allowed to read them aloud, and supply the tone-of-voice and the mood. But to get them to the point where they will make that impression on the person who sees them in cold type—requires endless labor. In a long poem like the fireman's ball—the first two or three weeks of polishing is a groaning labor, most exhausting to the will—the last two weeks, a delicate delight—almost as pleasant as the brief pleasure of the first sketch, and lasting of course, much longer. And so I sit here—and look at this Mark Twain and this Song for all strikers—and keep postponing that first two hard weeks of elementary filling in and polishing. You should be here with a whip—SaraFIMM.

It is about the first time I have set myself to write verse exclusively, that is, for six months or so at a stretch, and my prose-habits of steady work are going to smash. Yet it seems to me so much more important to get my principal pieces of verse in shape—than any prose I have in mind. They're all writing prose—and there is such a bable<sup>^</sup> of voices. I must sing if I would be heard, and there are so few presistent<sup>^</sup> singers.

It is a strange trade, this poetry trade. For every poem I complete I think up or sketch out a dozen, just as good, and utterly different. I think that is one reason I am happy alone in Springfield. I could keep ten poets busy, if they were patient polishers.

Well—dear lady, this is not what I intended to write. I was just going to say “Come home soon, and lay on the whip.[”]

With love

Nicholas V. Lindsay.

[P.S.] Please set the date you arrive in St. Louis so I can mark it down on my calendar.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>See Letter 36. ST's letter on death likely included her new poem "I Shall Not Care," published in *\*Rivers to the Sea* (p. 38) and quoted approvingly by VL in Letter 51. The poem begins: "When I am dead and over me bright April / Shakes out her rain-drenched hair . . . ."

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40) "I can bellow their heads off . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 6, 1914.

[Headnote: "I have been taking quinine tonight and it seems to have filled my letter with broken sentences."]

My Dear Sara:

The queerest thing has happened—and I cannot tell you without boring you to death with an endless letter—because you do not know the people. But something really dramatic. Its^ one of these small town dramas. Let me begin at the beginning.

The stand patters of this town (—the corporation lawyers and leading Mammonites generally) once a year, for about six years, have given a Lincoln Banquet in the Arsenal. More and more the progressive element has become hostile and what I might call our great middle class is hostile. In the first place—it is a ten or twenty-five dollar banquet—and Lincoln was a poor man. In the second place a lot of [~~them~~] banqueters get soused, and Lincoln is the patron saint of the temperance people, having been a temperance agitator in youth. In the third place the drift of the choice of speakers has been in the direction of Bailey of Texas and William Howard Taft.<sup>1</sup> In the fourth place the black man for whom Lincoln died is seldom in any way shape or form recognized, except once Booker Washington spoke (no other niggers allowed).<sup>2</sup> In the fifth place—Lincoln the idol of the plain people is made the excuse for the grand big eat and rally of the standpat element of the town. Once, about three years ago—while I was East Lecturing, they used a Poem of mine for a souvenir.<sup>3</sup> It was before I had such a definite picture of the organization in mind. I have felt guilty about it ever since. Now—this same Lincoln's Centennial Association I and all my friends have roasted in season and out has invited me to recite a long piece for them. The Arsenal—to our minds is ram Jam full of flags and blasphemy that night. We have talked of getting up a 25 cent banquet for the plain folks, etc. Or a dollar banquet—anyway.

Well—this same gang has just been thoroughly trounced in a referendum election—in which they were downed by Spaulding—one of my old friends—a Single Taxer and a man of my sort. They hate him like pizen.<sup>4</sup>

Well—a committee composed of the Corporation-lawyers he fought—the newspaper editor that shot the most mud at him, and so forth—have through their chairman requested me to recite me^ long and noisy poem The \*Congo—a study of the negro Race, on Feb. 12—at this banquet I have roasted in season and out! Only two members of the committee have heard the Congo. They want it. But they are not my personal champions by any means. And the rest are violently hostile I understand—but have left it to the chairman.<sup>5</sup> He approached me gingerly—as my friend the enemy as it were—told me of this hostility, which plainly glittered, in his eye. Also that I was likely to be hissed by a great many of the banqueters as I rose—but since some of the ladies in the gallery had heard me—at literary clubs, etc.—I would likely get some cheering hand from them. You know its^ the American fashion for the BUSINESS man to scorn literature, and for his wife to pretend to like it.

Well—I give my final answer after dining with the committee of my friends, the enemy, tomorrow. Its^ funny and dramatic all through. I don't want to truckle an inch, and they know I have little use for their (ye-)party. But their big speaker has failed them. I think it was Woodrow Wilson, and they are desperate. At the same time they know me principally by rumor, and outrageously sentimental tales, and imaginary eccentricities. And they think poems like “Yankee Doodle” very obscure—and since they run the town—they must be right. And a poet is an ass anyhow.

Well—my answer is ready. If they will guarantee that every man in that audience of 1500 will hiss me when I rise—I will speak. Then it will be perfectly understood I am their friend the enemy. I know mighty well—(what few of them know) I can bellow their heads off and make that old Arsenal boom. The silly things think I am effeminate, (among other things) simply because they have never gone to the radical meetings or the literary clubs or the mothers clubs etc. or the church clubs to hear me. That would be belittling their grand business dignity. Well Rabbi Wise<sup>6</sup> and Gutzon \*Borglum are the out of town speakers—and I'll bet I make a louder noise than both of them put together. And the folks will do all their hissing when I rise—for when I sit down they will not be in the hissing state—(not to brag or anything like that)—[but] I have tried the Congo on the Hostile before.

It is

“A Roaring epic, rag-time tune  
From the mouth of the Congo  
to the mountains of the moon.”

About three times as loud as the \*Kallyope Yell!

Well—Sara—tis a village drama—I hope I have not boasted in vain. No—I will not make a hit. They are my friends—the enemy. But they will not hiss when I'm through with them. They will retire with the honors of war as it were.

I went around and consulted Spaulding as to whether it were making concessions to the fleshpots of Egypt to perform for these folks, and he said—"Go to it, with my blessing."

The curious thing is the wives and daughters of so many of these old reprobates are my good friends—its^ the unfortunate dualism of American Society—which I hope—"votes for Women" will cure. These women get together to hear distinguished speakers the year around. Their fat hubbies get together—only once—thus—at 15 dollars a plate—and have to get half soused before they will listen to anything. Well—maybe I am a little hard on the gentlemen—but I think my little group of High School boys do more thinking in one evening—aside from finance—than they have done all their lives.

One thousand stand patters in dress suits assembled—in the Holy Name of Lincoln—who went into the White House still a poor man. I do not want them to like me too well. But I sure will pound them over the head with the Congo—till they think they hear a noise. I infinitely prefer the bracing tonic of their suspicion and hostility [~~than~~] to their demoralizing favors.

God help me to keep them my friends the enemy, with all possible courtesy. [~~Their~~] The very thought of their friendship gives me a feeling of smothering and suffocation. If there is an encore, I shall recite \*Altgeld (without consulting the chairman.)<sup>7</sup>

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

603 South 5<sup>th</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Texas Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey (1863-1929), who served from 1901 to 1912, was the main speaker for the Lincoln Centennial Banquet on February 12, 1913. William Howard Taft (1857-1930), 27th President (1909-1913), was the featured speaker on February 11, 1911.

<sup>2</sup>Booker T[aliaferro] Washington (1856-1915), a racial conservative and organizer of Tuskegee Institute (1881), addressed the Lincoln Banquet on February 12, 1910, perhaps the result of the Springfield establishment's attempt to atone for the city's ugly race riot (August 1908). In 2010, when this note is being written, the race riot is fully documented, with many photographs, on several internet web sites. Simply enter "Springfield Race Riot 1908" in an internet search engine, such as Yahoo or Google. Also see notes 5 and 6 below, and Letter 138.

<sup>3</sup>VL's "The Heroes of Time," an early version of "Litany of the Heroes" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 435-441), was printed on the menu for the 1910 Lincoln Banquet, as reported by Springfield's *Illinois State Register* (February 13, 1910). See especially Letter 196.

<sup>4</sup>Reporter William L. Chenery (see Letter 26) asserts: "Spaulding was a successful merchant. His yearly income was estimated by his friends to have varied from \$7,000 to \$10,000. Spaulding, however, had come under the influence of Henry George and Tom Johnson of Cleveland. He felt that, having accumulated a modest competency, his service

was due the community . . . . So he gave up his business, let go a large income and accepted a city job which paid \$125 a month” (*Chicago Evening Post*, January 24, 1914). See Letters 26 and 33. Also see Massa, *Vachel Lindsay*, pp. 42-48; and “\*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons.”

<sup>5</sup>The annual banquet, sponsored by the Lincoln Centennial Association, is held each February. In VL’s time, it convened in downtown Springfield at the State Armory, a building often referred to as the “old Arsenal.” Judge J. Otis \*Humphrey, then President of the Lincoln Centennial Association, arranged for VL’s participation. The hostile editor referred to is Frank O. Lowden of the *Springfield Record*, the paper that the “dry” VL felt was the voice of Springfield’s substantial brewery interests. Since Rabbi Samuel Wise (see note below) was also one of the scheduled speakers, it is likely that VL has been asked to recite “The Congo” because the Springfield establishment is still attempting to atone for the 1908 race riot (see note 2 above).

<sup>6</sup>Stephen Samuel Wise (1874-1949) was Rabbi for New York’s Free Synagogue, which he founded in 1907, because he wished to promote freedom of speech in the pulpit. Wise had been actively involved in founding the NAACP (1909), one of the efforts that emerged in the aftermath of Springfield’s 1908 race riot. Known for his liberal causes (he was also involved in forming the ACLU), Rabbi Wise’s presence at the 1914 Lincoln banquet is evidence that the Springfield establishment was still trying to make amends for the disgrace of the race riot (see notes 2 and 5 above).

<sup>7</sup>VL refers to his elegy for \*Altgeld, “The Eagle That Is Forgotten” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 136-137). Since Altgeld was a Democrat, the poem would be particularly out of place at the Lincoln banquet and, according to newspaper accounts, it was not recited.

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41) “Everybody is going to the devil Sara . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 8, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Please set the date of your home-coming at once.

Now let me tell you why I like you so. One reason.

Last summer I wrote to my lost lady everyday and she replied just three times. I was the more inclined to write being alone in this empty house all day and by nightfall being the quintessence of lonesomeness. She was preoccupied, raising high jinks with her friends in camp.<sup>1</sup>

Last fall I turned to the daughter of \*Lysippus for counsel in dark hours, and she was kind enough except when she was out of town about a month. I wrote every day—and she wrote twice—the skimpiest kind of letters. Dancing, I suppose.

Now being a letter-answerer is not a great moral virtue in a lady, but to find a person with the same weakness for ink that I have is indeed a delight. To find the conversation coming back like a well-served tennis ball as it were—back and forth over

the net of distance and mystery that separates us—so far, so strangely—is one of life’s glories. But I have reached the point where I am so very hungry indeed to see you—that letters are more like marking time than playing tennis. So some nights, when I feel like that, I don’t write any more.

If you are staying over for that \*Yeats dinner—I weep great weeps.<sup>2</sup> Karl \*Vrooman (Senatorial Candidate) takes me as his guest to the big state democratic-rally (banquet) tomorrow night at the St. Nicholas. He probably intends I shall recite the Eagle Forgotten and the Dew the Rain and Moonlight to that assembly.<sup>3</sup>

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There are to be nine kinds of drinks at that Lincoln Banquet—and I shall be strongly tempted to pour them down the shirt front of the toastmaster. I feel as though I have sold my soul by going. I told the committee I wanted them to be sure the audience hissed when I rose. It is one grand rally of the Bankers the Brewers and the stand patters in Lincoln’s holy name. I shall take the greatest pains to be polite without being civil. Just to rebuke them I shall not even drink coffee. The hissing will be stimulus enough. I really had the funniest subtlest kind of a session with the committee—that couldn’t be understood at all—unless you had lived here for years with them all—it amused me like a novel. But I can’t give the fine edge of it. You should have been an angel listening.

Everybody is going to the devil Sara—everybody. The daughter of \*Lyssipus is dancing her little feets off, and never sees me any more—and its^ hel^ ain’t it? She is on a perfect social rampage—and I’ll bet its^ a man-hunt, though I don’t know who. Well—as Buddha says “Change and decay are inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence.”<sup>4</sup> I take refuge in Buddha, the Law, and Sara the Letter-writer.

Every letter that comes from you lasts me about six hours starting out with little invisible jumps of enthusiasm when I see it. And the letter, in about two days, the poor little dog eared thing, has done its whole duty, and cries out for a substitute and a successor-letter. There is a whole lot in the fraternity of a common craft and a certain similarity of fortune and future. And I am awfully sensitive to your words. They are like words spoken.

And never did I have within me so many untied tangled strands of expectation and curiosity and damed^ up pent up good humor in regard to a person I have never seen. I think we will have to spend the first two hours telling each other jokes out of the funny papers so the listening gods will know—or think they know, what we are laughing about. We certainly have one laugh and one weep on the programme and it does not matter much what the excuse. I shall bring one copy of “\*Life” and one copy of the Appeal to Reason.<sup>5</sup>

This is Sunday afternoon. If you are the Sara you should be—the answer to this letter will be in Monday morning’s mail, having passed this one on the road. I answered your letter on Death before I received it. And this letter—being in general a sort of a YEARN, the answer will be the proper and discreet response to a yearn. So see to it Sara. I send you the message into Yesterday, by spiritual wireless.

With esteem and esteem  
and esteem and esteem

603 South 5th.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Octavia \*Roberts had been at Camp \*Olive with the Lindsay family during the summer of 1913. See Letter 1.

<sup>2</sup>In spite of VL's pleadings, on February 10, 1914, ST joined some 200 members of the \*Poetry Society at a formal luncheon in New York in honor of William Butler \*Yeats. Interestingly, VL is not aware that, in less than a month, he will be attending a Chicago banquet honoring Yeats. Moreover, with the encouragement of Harriet \*Monroe, he will perform "The Congo" —with resounding success.

<sup>3</sup>For "the Eagle Forgotten," see \*Altgeld; "the Dew the Rain and Moonlight" is VL's "A Net to Snare the Moonlight" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 165). For details of the banquet, see \*Vrooman, Carl.

<sup>4</sup>One of the basic reasons for Buddha's withdrawal from the world was the pain inherent in the vicissitudes of life (*anicca*), that is, "change and decay."

<sup>5</sup>*The Appeal to Reason*, published in Girard, Kansas, was the socialist paper of Julius Augustus Wayland. Beginning August 31, 1895, the paper appeared under various titles until 1951. Wayland committed suicide in 1912, but the paper continued under his assistant, Fred D. Warren.

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42) "here you have Dr. Lindsay in essence . . ."

Springfield Illinois.  
Feb. 8, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

This little circle of gold hair means one of two things—fine intimacy and the privileg<sup>e</sup> of delicate confidence—or careless sentimentality. I insist it means the former.

This night it is my guarantee of the right to tell you all about somebody, because we are fine friends as intimate and sensitive as this saucy circle of fairy silk.

Just as I was wrapping up Papas<sup>^</sup> shirts with mine at 11 P.M. tonight and marking them for the Chinaman to take from the door tomorrow morning—the new Phone rang and Mama called out to Papa who jumped up and ran for it in the dark—downstairs—. <sup>1</sup> "Now don't you make that call tonight with that bad eye. I forbid you to do it." And Mama speaks like Napoleon. And he answered the new Phone (none but dubs and no accounts and the God forsaken ever use that new phone.) And he said something like this "Yes. Lazer. 14th and Kansas. Wife sick? All right. Ill<sup>^</sup> be there." And he hung up the receiver and made for the bath room to dress. And I said [{"D}] in my fiercest loudest tone "Don't you go out to 14th & Kansas and Break your neck." And he said "Git<sup>^</sup> out of my way." Now I made my choice. I could have licked him and put him to bed, and spoiled his other eye. I could have nailed up the barn door and cut up the harness. But I decided

not to scrap. I let him go. I get even with him by telling you. It is a slippery icy night—and mighty cold. About two months ago in that part of town full of railroads and ditches—some people telephoned at midnight to know why he had not arrived. He had started at 9. I presumed he had smashed his buggy, as he does once a month—on the railroads and ditches. He is a half-blind man and a reckless driver. He has smashed his buggy once a month for 40 years. So I walked all over that part of town—and returned about 2:30. He had returned just ten minutes before—with a smashed buggy. But he had made his call. He had gotten into a ditch and unhitched the horse and wriggled the buggy out by hand. An old man—half blind—and with an internal strain from previous heavy lifting that should absolutely forbid exercise. Well—he hitched up—and made his call and was home all right. Now tonight he is out again. If I may be perfectly frank—it is probably a case of confinement. He hasn't lost a mother in 40 years. Or at least so it was several years ago. I havn't^ asked his late record. Well—he has [~~sat~~all] been sitting all evening groaning with his bad eye. His father died blind and he has been fighting half-blindness for 17 years. We used to think he would follow his father's course—but I rather expect to find him some day with his buggy on top of him and his gentle horse standing questioningly in broken harness. He will not die blind. He will die smashed.

He is what you call a man who dies game—a man who dies with boots on. Several times in his life when he was doing as he oughtn't I have offered to lick him—and once I did knock him over into the Gladiolus bed. I think when it was over he rather approved of my action. Some night I have got to lick him to make him stop his night-practice. Its^ the only possible way. Of course I don't mean just that. But—anyway—here you have Dr. Lindsay in essence. 70 years old, with the spring all out of his step—peeping out of half-blind eyes—nervous—restless as a tiger—weak as a sick cat and working like a beaver—and he used to work like a whirlwind. Old—melancholy, drawn in from all his old friends (there comes his horse—I hear the buggy rattling like an old-iron wagon, so the little stranger is here I presume!) [Marginal note: “Child—you come with a conquering shout!”]<sup>2</sup> all his church activities and social activities and political activities are over. But day and night his buggy is on the go to the grandchildren of the people he treated in 1868. The only way to break up his practice—is to lick him or send him to China. Its^ like burning down the house to Roast Charle's^ Lamb's pig.<sup>3</sup>

So Mama and he are going to China in April just after \*Joy is^ married. The only place he will not work is on shipboard. The captain—of course—will not let him run the vessel—so he has to sit still all through the voyage and breathe sea air—that soothes his eye and rests his tremendous fidgets. The Pacific being broader than the Atlantic—we hope for a proportionately more benefical^ trip. And we hope that in six months all the people that ever heard of him will have picked out another doctor. If he tries to practice medicine when he comes back from China—I will put on my fighting clothes. I will lick everybody that comes to the office—and if he doesn't like it—I'll just have to take off my coat and pound the tar out of him.

Well—dear Sara—I have been very very confidential with you tonight. Lets^ both acknowledge that.

Do you know the poem that made the biggest hit with me in the \*Braithwaite collection aside from your own?

Just for family reasons—the thing that went to my heart like an arrow—was George \*Sterling’s Night-Sentries:<sup>4</sup>

“To all alert and faithful in the night—  
Let there be LIGHT!”

To My Present from Sara.

Oh [~~sauciest~~] saucy gold circle of fairyland silk  
Impudent intimate delicate treasure  
I am alone—tis a ring for my finger  
Here in the midnight it sings me a measure:—  
A tune that is fine as the wind by the casement  
Wind out of Nowhere—singing her fineness  
Saying her pulses are music transcendent  
Saying her soul is all daring and kindness—  
Saying her spirit all feminine gameness—  
Trusting its insights—ardent for living—  
Praying for friendship that moves firmly onward—  
A thoroughbred joyous receiving and giving . . .<sup>5</sup>

With esteem

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

[Drawing of a heart inscribed: “TO MY SARAFIMM,” with a note beneath:  
“Keep till feb.^ 14!”]

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For more biographical information on Dr. Vachel Thomas Lindsay, see Letters 14 and 162.

<sup>2</sup>VL quotes Louis \*Untermeyer’s poem “On the Birth of a Child,” first published in the *Independent* (June 5, 1913, p. 1281), then included in \*Braithwaite’s *Anthology* for 1913, and finally collected in Untermeyer’s *Challenge*: see Letter 116. The first two lines read: “Lo—to the battle-ground of Life, / Child, you have come, like a conquering shout.”

<sup>3</sup>The reference is to Charles Lamb’s essay, “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” (1822).

<sup>4</sup>George \*Sterling’s “Night-Sentries” was first published in \**Harper’s* (February 1913, p. 408), then in the \**Literary Digest* (February 22, 1913, p. 414), in \**Current Opinion* (March 1913, p. 238), and included in \*Braithwaite’s 1913 *Anthology* (see above, note 2).

<sup>5</sup>Early version of VL’s “On Suddenly Receiving a Curl Long Refused” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 218-219).

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43) “I do love to complain of one woman to another . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 13, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

This letter is to welcome you to St. Louis—the Middle West and all that and all that. A kiss for your hand . . . . [Drawing of a five-point star inscribed: “KISS”]. A rose for your hair. [Drawing of a rose].

There is really not much news I can think of this time of night. I have engagements here the 25th and 27th. I hope you will find it perfectly convenient to see me next Week.

The daughter of \*Lyssipus has handed me several sisterly brickbats lately. The more she dances—the crosser she gets with folks that don’t. Also, dancing from 3 in the afternoon till 3 in the morning—the more slenderly beautiful she becomes, and the more popular with those in the whirl. Smart, intellectual spoiled, hog-selfish and sweet!

I shall not go to her and ask to be forgiven for not dodging her brickbats till I have come to you and told you on her. I do love to complain of one woman to another. This week’s little private personal comedy has certainly been “more fun than a goat,” as the Irishman said.<sup>1</sup> Haw haw haw!

Really—the main thing on my mind is to get some work out of myself. I am not working for two cents worth. \*Mark Twain just crawls along. But I am going to finish him if it takes all summer, and if I have to loaf till my trousers turn to socks. I swear it.

[Drawing of stick man with hand stretched over the “HOLY BIBLE,” with note: “Picture of me swearing it.”]

When can I come?

Tell me the very minute!

When can I come?

Tell me the very minute!

Please preach great deeds into me—and bigger poems.

Please preach great deeds into me—and bigger poems.

With esteem and

esteem and

double esteem

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

### Note

<sup>1</sup>Twenty-sixth President of the United States, Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt (1901-1909) was famous for his fun-loving administration. His Secretary of State, John Hay, purportedly claimed that Teddy’s administration was “more fun than a goat.” See Nathan Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994, p. 339.

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44) “The Congo temporarily landed the town . . .”

Springfield Ill.

Feb. 15, 1915<sup>^</sup> [1914]

My Dear Sara:

This is Sunday morning. You must be home by now. Welcome to our city! And to your city!

Would you like to have a morrocco<sup>^</sup> bound copy of Lincoln the Lawyer by Hill?<sup>1</sup> Or do you ever read? I have several to distribute to the elect—swag from the mammonized Lincoln Banquet, of which I am secretly proud I suppose, but certainly view with mixed emotions.

Sara—its<sup>^</sup> very hard to know just how polite to be to reactionaries when you love all the daughters and are conscientiously opposed<sup>^</sup> to the doings of all the fathers and half the sons. Its<sup>^</sup> a result of this confounded cleavage in American Culture—the arts and progressive ideas being cultivated<sup>^</sup> by the best of the women and abhorred by the business men, good men or bad. And so I can’t insult these men as thoroughly as I would enjoy—for their wive’s and daughter’s sakes who have been loyal to me and fought my battles—and on the other hand it is brought to bear upon some of the ladies—as a final crusher—that the really substantial business men have no use for such. Since they never read anything there is no particular reason why they should begin with me I am sure.

And now when they do begin to be civil—bullied a little by outside publicity, I am as squeamish as a trout about being caught. They are nearly all on the other side in local and national politics and I am just enough of a Socialist to utterly abhor their fundamental ideas of right and wrong, success and failure. And where courtesy should end and outspokenness begin I do not know. They want me to join all the men’s clubs now, and all that. The town is full of petty bank clerks who are beginning to imagine themselves treating me with civility pretty soon—Springfield my dear—is a provincial town after all. Why do I worry about these bank clerks? Because the ladies I adore think their opinion is important. They refer to them as THE MEN!

Well—when I get on this silly strain I am never through. I am a perfect idiot about it. There is one thing sure. The \*Congo temporarily landed the town. They are for me once more—till they find I still retain my opinions. Of course now I am RECOGNIZED I will not take the road again or anything shabby like that. Or talk Socialism or temperance.

Well—Father Hickey<sup>2</sup> and I turned our glasses down at the Banquet by Gosh, and we were the only folks that did at the speakers table. We were ten feet above the audience so some of them got it. And when I came to the word “Guzzling” in the Congo—I came down strong!

Did you ever read a sillier letter in your life?

What was I going to say? I certainly did not intend to say any of this.

When I get to your house you must pump some good resolution into me. I take notes on poem after poem, all as good as the best I have done—and rouse myself over

none of them. \*Mark Twain drags along. I want that one to be big. I think I am the most outrageous loafer on the face of the earth. And when I roast these other folks—that get things done, it looks to me like sour grapes on my part. No wonder the ladies and the poets and the reformers can be good and sit around and idealize. The other fellows get out an^ hustle and do their robbing for them. Unless I am willing to plough corn or dig ditches I have no business roasting my fellow-parasite.

Oh Sara—if your folks Pa and Ma will like it, please maneuver to have me recite the Congo for them early in the game—by accident. It will break the ice to smithereens, if there is any ice to break. It sure broke the ice here.

I hope that our meeting will count much for our work. Praise and success greatly increase my strut but don't make me write a bit more. But a nice little good resolution party organized by you and me—"Song for Song's sake," ought to help us both. We must do everything we can for each other's ink bottles—if anything can be done. We must be stern with each other. You must not allow me to give up Mark Twain or let him be below par. Tell me anything you know about him when we meet. Really we have no other business together but literature—it is the real reason we understand each other—and to go off on a side picknick^, is just stealing Jam between meals!

Never did I know a poet lady romantic—unattached^—and me^ own age and period and stage of ambish. I peep down in the St Louis direction filled with speculations, thoughts and esteems and cautions. I lift up me torch and look South-West.

Believe me—

I am devastated^ with  
anticipation  
and remain

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th.  
Springfield Illinois.

[Drawing of a torch with smoke rising across the page.]

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Frederick Trevor Hill (1866-1930), lawyer and author, published *Lincoln the Lawyer* in 1906. VL likely noticed that Hill and ST share the same middle name.

<sup>2</sup>The Very Reverend Father Timothy Hickey (born 1841) was Vicar General of the Diocese of Alton and pastor of Springfield's Immaculate Conception Church, one of VL's favorite places of meditation. See, for example, the close of Letter 96 and Letter 109. Also see VL's poem, "In the Immaculate Conception Church" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 273, and Letter 141). VL's drawing of the church is included in "The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 201).

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45) "I will arrive in your town six o'clock Wednesday . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Feb. 16, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I will arrive in your town six o'clock Wednesday evening—and get to your place as soon as is convenient and then we will go out to some place where it is nice for poets to eat—you choose the place—being deep in such matters—and we will converse till the orchestra quits.

My sentiments to your family, and I accept gratefully the opportunity to stay under your roof and see how you smile in the mornings. We will take an early morning walk—then I will bid you a tearful goodbye till the next time.

I am yours sincerely

N.V.L.

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46) “we will get each other on the installment plan . . .”

Springfield Ill.<sup>1</sup>  
Feb. 19, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Being now in the bosom of my family: I sit down to address you with sentiments and observations.

Sing till you shake the city!

So much went into our little visit. It is a new starting-point for both of us. We can think it over now, and see what it all amounted to.

I should say that coming home on the train my feeling about you was that you were a bearer of the atmosphere of the old New York Bohemia around 56 and 57th St. where I used to live.

The Art-Student atmosphere and the \*Poetry Society atmosphere is something the same I believe, now, though the theme of conversation is different. I have been through so many other stratas^ of Society since, you jerk me back to my youth—when I was writing the Queen of Bubbles,<sup>2</sup> and all that. It needs such as you to remind me there ever was such a world. I feel infinitely *old* when I think of it—I have to look back through such a vista.

You are much more accomplished than I ever was in such an environment—such a medium,—and quite wise I am sure. But dear me—it is so alien from my habit now—and I cannot help but think what I have been through since—what different *stripes* and terraces of society I have crossed. Everywhere but in jail almost—and in a way hardened to it all—or at least looking it all in the face, and getting some sweetness out of it—enough.

You have the most remarkable eyes child—the velvet of the Gods—the eyes of your genius. All the rest of your face shows your talent and blood & your culture—but I certainly have to get back to those eyes— watching watching me—to get you.

Your face is so much *longer* and more sensitive than in your pictures that they are an utter disappointment to me now—I have to look & look into the dark and see your Jewel eyes. I do not want to live in your alleged heart. Every one does (!) But in your eyes. They are more exclusive.

You are certainly an intense egotist, and have a most sharp tang and savor to your egotism, and a great delicacy and charm to it as well. You are a sharp arrow and I want you shot straight into the heart of America.

This world is *such* a wilderness—we go groping for each other through it—we mortals—it will be a long time before you and I, separated by so many things of time and sense and custom, and experience—will achieve the complete story of our friendship. Even Living in the same town and seeing each other once a week—it would be hard to completely learn each other in a little while. We are going to be like a serial story in a magazine—we will get each other on the installment plan. [~~though~~] Once a month installments take a whole year to cover a little silly story—and our installments separated by God knows what intervals—will not soon complete the novel of friendship that our knowing each other should be. In the half light I saw the glory of your eyes and in the morning I read your force and ambition in your eyes—and I am with you in it—I want the noblest Song ever woman sung to be uncoiled from your soul—I want the noblest noblest art and glory and dream from you.—Of all the high hearted women you celebrate I want you to be the emperess^.

You are one of those anointed and set apart—I never knew a woman who impressed me with it so surely—and I want you to be true to the Holy Ghost within you. Sing till you shake the city.

With love,

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This letter is in Carpenter, pp. 174-176.

<sup>2</sup>For information on the publication of “The Queen of Bubbles,” see Letter 23.

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47) “I just see where I am going to write to you endlessly . . .”

Springfield Ill.<sup>1</sup>  
Feb. 20, 1914.

My Dear Velvet-Eyes:

In the first place—keep the umbrella till I come again. I do not need it now, and besides it isn’t mine. It was left at our house at a party and no one ever came for it.

In the second place—I have been tempted to telephone to you several times today, and the only thing that deterred me was I would have to borrow a dollar from Old Doc

Lindsay to do it. And my method of economizing is to tell Papa just what I want it for, every time I ask him for 5 cents. He's just that unsentimental he would think a two cent letter would do just as well. But I am going to telephone to you some time this Spring and surprise you. It will be early in the morning—about 8:30 and I will make you come down stairs in your Turkish slippers, your wrapper and your curl-papers. I want to be dead sure to catch you, if I have to wake you up.

I have a more virtuous feeling today than for many days. I read \*Mark Twains life all day, and answered twelve letters after supper. I have been so dog lazy of late I havn't^ even read.

You in St. Louis and I in Springfield are a whole lot alike in our family circumstances—lone chickens in the hands of good watchguarding Orthodox old folks. The situation is almost humorously paralell^. If we should go to New York we would be just absentee Landlords as it were—that is—far from our real roots and our real soil. But I do not want to make you weary of that theme. I am quite sure that the ripening of your own disposition will make the change.

Sara—I just see where I am going to write to you endlessly and I hope you do not mind. By being able to get so much out of letters—you and I beat nature, and Political economy as well. It is written in the books of fate that the consoling presence of Woman is only to be had by all days^ toil, by winning her from other men, by giving her velvets, by putting her in a hut. And here I get a season of refreshment from you, evening after evening—a renewal of my spirit, the hand of Woman on my forehead, the thought of Woman in my mind,<sup>2</sup> and I do not even take you to the theatre, or spend my (non-existing) weeks salary on tickets to the charity ball! I am a cheat to steal so many cherries—hanging over the wall into the road.

Velvet eyed lady—I can see in you the same art-egotism and ambition that I know in myself. I can see you value your kingdom, I can see you wish to more strongly grip those that like your songs—the great game of successful singing occupies all your capacity for selfishness, and most any real test of your generosity would be—how much of the real genuine singer's-game you would give up for a private unselfish cause that would hobble your song. That is the boy-side, the daylight-side of your velvet eyes. And to really see and understand a fellow-conspirator against the imaginations of men is a real adventure. Also my dear, you make me think of Grover Cleveland's phrase—the “cohesive-power of public plunder.”<sup>3</sup> We are bound by the cohesive-power of public dreaming. How to dream in public—sincerely—with just dignity—is indeed a problem, settled of course—by being true to ones own innate instinct of delicacy and pride.

But I detect you—fellow conspirator. I apprehend one half of why you like New York. You get more fish lines in your hands, you rascal, you fight a merry little battle for your dream's sake. More friends, more listeners!

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I wasn't half-decent to your poems on this first visit, but then I wasn't anything like as nice as I might have been in many ways. Its^ easy enough to be awfully at ease and all that—when our parlor is just this piece of paper—8 1/2 by 11 inches. Then I can be limber and gallant and patronizing as little Charles \*Ridgely himself and toy with your

shawl<sup>4</sup>—and all that. But, when our Parlor is all St. Louis as it were—unless I assemble my reserves as it were—I ain't the dashing stranger I quite want to be, on the first visit.

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Our first evening in your study was such a pent up thing—*so* much unsaid—and I getting the sense of you the notion of you clearer every minute—and your particular quality of personal dignity—which means everything—and your pride's anchorage—and all that. I felt the sure pride of the artist in you—deep deep down in you—established like granite—it did not escape me. And I felt—Oh so many things—that sent me to bed with my head buzzing and woke me up at six reflecting. There is a lot more force in you, and yet more social dependence than I dreamed. I feel how keenly you are at present dependent on Literary society, and I judge from your present state of the nerves—your field of success and happiness depends more and more upon conquering that dominion. Once I felt just that way about my pictures, so I can understand. But since then, as a poet—I have been Robinson Crusoe so long I am used to my goat-skin clothes and rather view these Chicago Parties (for instance) as alien curios—especially at 11 o'clock at night—here in my childhood room. I will go to Chicago and enjoy it—but I really won't feel like I am in a real place till I get back here where I can be patronized—and get mad about it—in the good old human way. Do you know the latest?

Vachel Lindsay wore a CELLILOID<sup>5</sup> COLLAR at the Lincoln Banquet! And then my friends rush forward and say—if I did “it was only for a joke.” A poor defense. There I was—in plain sight of 1000 people and one of them was so blind as to say my collar was celliloid—and I suppose by next week my dress-suit will be changed into a Chinese Mandarin Robe. And of course that proves the \*Congo was no good.

Now a nice spiteful town like that is real. I just enjoy it. And sit back and imagine the millennial<sup>6</sup> state of my nerves, arriving some sweet day, when I will beat them all to pulp by just being serene!

Well I'm off the subject. I was writing about Sarafimm.

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Sara—I want a place to live, in your virginal and untouched night-dreaming eyes. That boasted heart of yours, your alleged affections (!) have nothing to do with the eternal life to which I aspire. The kind of mutual fire and friendship I want to weave and achieve with you, burns in your eyes, though your songs be exquisitely beautiful they do not equal your eyes. It is your eyes that justify all the blind faith of my letters to you, and the spiritual dependence I have sent in your direction. It is your eyes that hold my “diary that talks back.” The lines of your lashes sweeping back with such marked and strange drawing toward<sup>7</sup> your temples, speak the language of genius and personality—the untouched personality that no sentimental adventure has the least invaded, a fire that burns perpetually without ashes.

And in your night-dreaming eyes I see far more of fantasy—Tree of Laughing Bells fantasy<sup>8</sup>—than blood-beating human imaginations. That is in your speech and your ways, but I see in your eyes something cooler safer and more permanent and yet more tender—the velvet of the Gods—the blackness behind the stars, and the eternal dream-garden of Mab.

As a singer-of-love—I have little to say to you. The kind of love you sing about—realized or desperately attempted love between man and woman has never brought me

anything but desperate sorrow—a house burnt down as it were. And even what men and women lisp about and call “Friendship”—has a simper in it—or a restlessness that sometimes bodes no permanence. As a fellow warrior and untamed Spirit I greet you—I want to be a permanent part of what is permanent in you—the unsubdued-fighting soul.

Yet—if you were not a woman—I know I would not be writing to you. I am stealing a man’s consolation from your womanhood by writing to you—and yet—I hope that which I see in your eyes outlives these loves that come and go you speak of so lightly & beautifully. If the Holy Ghost has laid hold on you to make you a singer—of passion—very well— you are the veritable \*nightengale at your best. Let them all (all the rest) drink of it—since it is their wine. But some day you will go back to the Good God that made you and these fires will have passed with the world that holds them. I would think of him with you—and of the eternal stars. I want to wake up tomorrow a fighter—warring against my inertia—and all the demons of my world—and do my work.

Just because you are lady-confessor—Oh velvet-Eyes. I can fight better, I hope.

God bless you, Sarafimm.

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Selected paragraphs of this letter are in Carpenter, pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup>For more on woman as “a Consoler,” see Letter 18.

<sup>3</sup>If Grover Cleveland (1837-1908) used the phrase, he likely had just heard it, thanks to Mississippi Senator Anselm Joseph McLaurin (1848-1909). In a speech before the U.S. Senate (May 1906), Democrat McLaurin jeered: “There is always some basic principle that will ultimately get the Republican party together. If my observations are worth anything, that basic principle is the cohesive power of public plunder.” Others used the phrase even earlier. John Bartlett (1820-1905), in *Familiar Quotations*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (1919), suggests the ultimate source was a speech on May 27, 1836 by John Caldwell Calhoun: “A power has risen up in the government greater than the people themselves, consisting of many and various powerful interests, combined into one mass, and held together by the cohesive power of the vast surplus in the banks” (p. 529).

<sup>4</sup>VL would soon associate his feelings for ST’s silk shawl with a poem he began while hiking during the summer of 1912—“My Lady in Her White Silk Shawl” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 237-238). Soon after VL’s marriage (May 19, 1925), ST gave the shawl to his new bride, Elizabeth \*Conner as a wedding present (see Carpenter, p. 265, and Letter 227).

<sup>5</sup>See Letters 40 and 44. In “Rules of the Road” (*\*American Magazine*, May 1912), VL advises would-be literary tramps: “Retain a tie and collar. I have done very well without either for hundreds of miles. Nevertheless a celluloid collar is a convenience. The more you are rained on, the sprightlier it looks. It brings a smile to the cheek of the farmer, who has not failed to read the celluloid collar joke in the newspaper” (p. 57).

<sup>6</sup>For information on VL’s poem “The Tree of Laughing Bells,” see Letters 23 and 28.

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