

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

Chapter 4 (Letters 83-106)



(See Letter 98)

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

83) "I not only like Sara—but I like her a heap . . ."

Springfield Ill.
April 14, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

The minute you begin to read this letter you must be thinking your answer back to me, whether you can write your answer at once or not. It isn't^ much of a letter—either.

This is Tuesday night—the boys have gone.¹ They are on a big debating team that goes to Chicago and they must catch up on lost sleep and be fresh and bouncing.

My table is a perfect Chaos. Scads of people have sent me stamps for my "Tracts" as a result of the notice in the Poetry Review.²

I know it looks self indulgent to write you two letters a day—but I just must write of an evening or I go to sleep feeling that I have missed something.

Just putting a pen to paper seems to bring you near—you do not seem much more than five feet away, for that few minutes.

Your first note since I saw you last in St. Louis came this afternoon—and I answered it at once. But one thing in it I have not answered.

Sara goes so far as to say "I like you" and in reply I venture a statement I have deeply weighed and pondered. I not only like Sara—but

I like her a heap—and turn toward^ her more and more with an unharnessed and unbridled heart. Now answer at once—if just a note as teeny as this [Drawing of small envelope].

With many happy thoughts

N.V.L.

(over.)

A PRETTY THOUGHT FOR US. [A copy of VL's poem "Love and Law," cut from **Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread*, is pasted to the page.]³

Notes

¹For VL's "boys," see Letter 20.

²*The Poetry Review*, a monthly published by The Poetry Society (London), began in January 1912, under the editorship of Harold Monro. Stephen Philips was editor during the years 1913-15, when the *Review* was often cited in Harriet Monroe's **Poetry—A Magazine of Verse*.

³See *Poetry of VL*, p. 111.

84) “I don't just want to call you Rachel Jane . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 15, 1914.

Have been writing letters all day—and there is not another in me. It will take three more days to clear my desk.

I want to write to your *Louis and your *Jack for instance.

Tonight I saw the same picture-show news film we saw together—and heard your comments every minute.

Wouldn't you rather be called Lady Saraph Trevor Trevanion of Tremaine¹—as a heading for the Mirror poems? Or Jane Austen Browning? Or Elizabeth *Nightengale^ Stuart? Or Hypatia Genivive^ Gray? Or

Malinda Clarinda Clark?

Or Ruby Amanda Prout?

Or Alice Van Golden?

Or Marilli Van Duyn?

Or Blossom Prudence Trevor?

Or Lark Faith Hawthorne?

Or Thrush Prunella Van Smith?

Or Saphrona Mattie Carter?

Somehow or other—I don't just want to call you *Rachel Jane.

How about Christina Rossetti Clark?

Or Vittora Callona Lincoln?

Or Laura Juliet Marlowe?

Or Sara Siddons Garrick?

or Martha Washington Prudence Sterne

or Jezebel Semerimis^ Pricilla^ Mather?—

The last is a Joke.²

[Marginal note: “Or rearrange portions of these titles into new names.”]

With love and happy thoughts

Nicholas Vachel.

Have just sent my Bread and Butter letter to O'Neil.³ Its^ a good thing I asked you for that address. I had clean forgotten the necessity.

My table is full of scads of interesting letters.—I can't begin to tell you about them.

Notes

¹For ST's name, see Letter 6.

²This playful list reflects VL's sense of humor, but also his knowledge of mythology, literature, film stars, and history.

³Likely St. Louis writer George O'Neil, whom Zoe *Akins recommended to Harriet *Monroe in the fall of 1916. See Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, p. 417.

85) "Literary Immortality is the wrong thing to strive for . . ."

Springfield Ill.
April 16, 1914.

Dear Sara—whose other name is Companion-in-Happiness:

Your letter this morning was a jewel.—I shall take your criticism on "The Anglo Saxon Language.["]¹

I have reduced the "Darling Daughter of Babylon" to five stanzas—and the poem is now all in the spirit of the Introduction and the Pagentry[^] is a third instead of a first consideration.

[Marginal note: "I formed the idea of introducing the *Rachel-Jane—from the bird in the park—but just from the way I felt that bird Sara involuntarily shrink and quiver from my noises. The real Rachel Jane I encountered in my walk across Missouri two years ago."]²

As to your little poem—it[^] so delicate and lovely it gave me little delicate thrills of happiness all day. I just love the little stranger.³

"I who was content to be
But a silken-singing tree
But a rustle of delight
In the hungry heart of night"

is as rare a four lines as I know. Now for criticism.

The second line seems too long, and it takes too much experimental reading to adjust its music to the rest.

And I am not sure that Hungry is the right adjective for heart of night. Maybe it is. Think it over. Musically it is perfect—and I read several times before I felt inclined to ask myself now what does hungry mean there? Hungry for Happiness? If so the thought should be clarified by another couplet. I expect that is the best way out. A [stanza] couplet on what night hungered for.

Also I think another couplet is possible—showing what the a[^] [the] tree looks with—since leaves blinded its eyes. That may seem too absurd to be so specific—and maybe there is a way out—but The[^] forehead—the face—the head—the thinking-center

perhaps—of the tree should be vaguely pictured. Why? Because you keep one [figure of speech] metaphor all through—and there should be a delicate adjustment everywhere. And the climax is a climax of beholding,

The owl that was my soul saw not
 The night-lark was my soul and saw to see made blind
 The Or bird by

Well—write the poem yourself. It is a perfect love of a poem—be sure of that—the music and the delicacy is wonderful.

My white-birch face looked up reached and down
 Yet But Blinded Blindfolded by my fair leaf-crown—
 My white-birch forehead caught the rain
 But all the stars shone down in vain—

[Marginal note:

My white-birch forehead caught the rain
 But all the stars shone down in vain—
 Blindfolded by my fair-leaf-crown
 My white-birch face ~~looked~~ reached up and down—]

Now I don't recommend^ any of those couplets.

But you need (1) one to develop hungry, (2) one^ to introduce the idea of sight rather concretely.

I am SO tired I just warble on. My eyes are nearly shut.

It really is something very lovely to have a poem like this fresh from your hand to love and to cherish. It puts a certain thrill of delicacy into my daily life that is far rarer than red passion, and much more quiet and wonderful—(though a second cousin to it, I know that.)

Don't worry about your ruder correspondent.⁴

(1.) He is too poor to come to see you if he would.

(2.) He is breaking the postal laws which is a serious offense and it will not be hard for me to tell him so, if necessary, and scare him into fits. Uncle Sam is stern.

(3.) Every editor on earth gets ten crank letters a day threatening to blow him up. But none of them ever do get blown up. Your letter is the equivalent. He will never show his face—. You are too sensitive, perhaps. Though I like you for it.

The approval you give of the *Santa Fe is very much happiness to me—But the most happiness is the leaf poem and the little star.

I have written letters all day—and if there is anything silly in this remember I am ded^. But still alive enough to just be obliged to write to you to end the day with peace. You are the lady happiness and long may you reign.

Oh yes—I had a thought tonight. Literary Immortality is the wrong thing to strive for—as deceitful as a reputation of the hour—for every song will die in time. To sing songs that will last 75 years—that is a better motive—or 20 years—that is a sensible and

conservative and self-respecting one. I want to sing not for my day and hour, but for my age and time.

I would come to see you at once—had I a new poem done. A star for thee.
[Drawing of a star] And another [Drawing of a star]

With love and friendship—

N.V.L.

Notes

¹For more on the poem, see Letter 81.

²See **Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*. “After supper the old gentleman [VL’s host for the night] told me a sweet-singing field-bird I described was called the ‘Rachel-Jane’” (*Prose of VL*, p. 167). The bird was likely a vireo.

³ST has sent two poems: “Leaves” and “The Star,” both published in **Rivers to the Sea*, pp. 106 and 66. In “Leaves,” she changed “hungry” to “wistful.” She apparently made no other changes.

⁴ST was receiving somewhat graphic (but not “messy,” in her estimation) love letters from a New York bricklayer named Charles Cummings. Her reaction was more ambivalent than negative, and she was tempted to answer him except for “the gulf between us.” See Drake, p. 124, and Letter 87 below.

86) “Isn't ours a strange bond . . .”

Springfield Ill.
Saturday night.
April 18, 1914.

[Headnote: “This is an awful lot of material to send one^ mail. I hope you don’t mind. Say that you don’t!”]

My Dear Sara:

First I send you my love. Next let me say that if I had five dollars for car fare I would come to St. Louis instantly. All other sentiments are now deferred—till I catch up a little bit on the news.

1st. Miss *Monroe writes that Mrs. Charles P. Pettus may invite me to St. Louis,¹ and entertain me a day or two. Now write me who Mrs. Pettus is. Her address is 33 Westmoreland Place St. Louis. Get some third party to see to it that Mrs. Pettus don’t forget she dreamed of asking me down there, if it can be done without absolutely landing on her with a barrel-stave^ as it were, or an avalanche or something. And the sooner the quicker.

I have written to our mutual friend *Reedy asking him to print 42 poems on the moon in one issue of the Mirror as a sort of stunt—so the Critics can get them broadside. 12 of them have never yet seen the light. If he don't want them all—I offer him the 12 that have never been published.²

I am afraid I have just smothered you with letters.

[Partially-torn newspaper clipping attached, advertising clothing made to individual measure. VL writes: “Every week The Menace—the Anti-Catholic paper³—contains this advertisement. Up to date! My! Wonderful. I have just wanted to send it to you so long. Now I make the plunge.”]

I have spent the whole day straightening out the 42 moon poems. I do not want to get them out in Book form right now—still I want to get them all in print in one place—so I can try them out on Sara and a few others. Reedy published about six pages of a single essay the other week—so he ought to let in 4 pages of so noble poems. He is the only person I know with the nerve to print them all—and maybe he won't.

I have so many new poems coming—and so many long poems to write and to peddle—I want to get the old ones into some kind of circulation and print, and give them a chance to get going.

Now I lay my hand on my heart and tell you the solemn truth. I think of you with friendship for many things—but the rarest little surprise and pleasure you have ever given me is this little poem on leaves.⁴ It is delicate and sweet as fairyland—and though there is no word of caress in it—there is something in its magic that is all woman, very much Sara—and very dear and caressing to the fancy. And somehow it came just the right moment. I just sat here and said to myself “I have a little friend that can sing sing sing! And her song is one third honey and two thirds crystal mountain-spring-water.[’]” There is a curious personal delicacy in the words, as though braided from your own hair—not that I am ranking it as a critic. It just came to me at the moment I was ready to fall in love with your singing voice. I want your serious, severe scrutiny of the Daughter of Babylon⁵ here enclosed, Is it a complete artistic whole—does it convey a definite expression of baffled love? Writing out ones wrath does not cure it altogether.

I may tell you the Lady is Back in town for a whole month,—she was asked to *Joy's wedding and asked me to come to see her. I hate this little feeling of bitterness I have about her—I want to get it clear out of my soul—yet I know if I go once she will cure me too well—and temporarily persuade me she is a saint! So I am not going till the very last of the month—once for manners sake.

I have torn up most of my bitter poems about her—and feel much better for it.

Do not bother over the moon-verses—unless you are just full of steam. They are extras I ran into in todays revising. But if you are interested, I will take any criticism.

I am not going to write a bit more letter—but I must say a word to the velvet-eyed Sara—and this I will say—she is my lady Happiness and the thought of her makes every day and every evening very much worth while—and one could endure much hardship and still be most light hearted—with such a song-bird to think about.

I am very eager to clear up all my odd literary jobs—and write a new poem—a real poem—so I can deserve to come to see you.

Isn't ours a strange bond—we who hold each other dear—and know so much and so little of each other—and are so separated? Only writers could achieve it.

With friendship and love,
 With love and friendship
 and friendship and love—

Vachel.

I will gladly draw that poem-portrait of you sometime, but I must know you better. I wish I could come to St. Louis.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—

April 17, 1914.

[Enclosure: Handwritten draft of “*Darling Daughter of Babylon,” followed by a note: “This is the poem—Darling Daughter of Babylon—as it stands today—and submitted to Saraphim Teasdale for her final criticism.”]

Notes

¹The invitation is the result of VL's “scheme” outlined in Letter 77. The scheme will play a part in several letters to follow: 88, 101, 105, 108, 109, 110, and 112.

²*Reedy published the twelve new poems in the *Mirror*, June 12, 1914, commenting that VL “is probably more akin to William Blake than any poet America has had. Implicit in his simplicity is a mystic attitude toward things. He sees the sun shouting ‘Holy, holy, holy!’ The world of sense to him is fused with spirit—he is otherworldly when most observant of material things . . . In his singing there is a rural clarity.”

³The rabidly anti-Catholic *Menace* was published biweekly by the Free Press Defense League, Aurora, Missouri (1911-25). See the close of Letter 99.

⁴For the poem “Leaves,” see Letter 85.

⁵See *Roberts, Octavia. VL's visit with Octavia is recounted in Letter 91.

87) “Lots of times we are not as smart as we think we are . . .”

Springfield Ill.
 April 20, 1914.

Charles Cummings—(Copy)¹
 Rosetown—New York:
 Dear Sir:

A friend of Miss Sara Teasdale's requests me to inform you that she is not the author of "Home" in the *Century Magazine.

If you wish to write to the author of "Home" address your letters this way:

"The Author of "Home"
Care of the Century Magazine
Union Square New York City.

The Century Magazine will then hand or mail your letter to the writer of the story.

Very Sincerely
William Holmes
Springfield Illinois

325 West Edwards—

My Dear Sara—:—

Lots of times we are not as smart as we think we are—but I have just sent the smart letter on the other side to your friend.

He may not quit—but we have divided his fire. He will now waste some ink—at the worst—on the imaginary William Holmes—and spend some confused hours on the imaginary mutual friend, trying to get his address from Holmes—and yours through him. It will turn out to be Mrs. Holmes—if he keeps on. For^

Our next move will be to tell him, if he keeps on—to send all letters to you, care of Mrs. William Holmes. Then they will be either returned to him, (if he puts his address in the top corner of the envelope) or if not—sent to the dead letter office. I can just see him chewing up the wicked Holmes, and Mrs. Holmes and all the little Holmeses.

Of course there is no such person.

But I'll bet we have fixed him this time. The Author of "Home" is probably a fat man who smokes big black cigars. He is in for a letter from Cummings. If he deigns to reply he will reply quite a few, mor'n likely, that Author of "Home." The situation begins to amuse meh^.

The Leaves-poem is now one grand little verse.² Perhaps leafy makes one too many leaf repetitions. That is a matter for your own ear, not mine. Some synonym for rustling—perhaps. But on the other hand—the very repetition makes for a sort of juvenility^ of manner. Whatever word is used—it ought to picture leaves.

Saraphim—the view out of my window—looking through the great lacy budding elm to the blue sky makes me happy beyond words. I wish you were here to wave your hand at that sky—as though it were your most intimate friend.

Lots of funny little things have happened—but I havn't^ time to write them.

I was asked out to dinner last night most unexpectedly, by four of my friends the enemy as it were. Ask me about it sometime. And the fifth person to turn up—was the daughter of *Lyssipus—whom I took home. Ask me about it sometime. The mysterious

dinner. Please let me gossip about it when I get to St. Louis. Appomattox for them, unconditional surrender for them.

I wish I was coming to St. Louis this minute! How soon can I come? Encourage me. Overpersuade me! Please.

N.V.L.

Notes

¹For Charles Cummings, see Letter 85.

²For the “Leaves” poem, see Letter 85.

88) “Lets^ both be brave—heroes—and slay Mister Bashfulness . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 21, 1914.

My Dearest Saraphim:

Watch the *Metropolitan. It comes out tomorrow.

Maybe it contains the *Congo.

So many things to write—and I am torn with conflicting emotions (1.) A passion for Sleep. (2.) A hunger for Sara. (3.) A desire to tell the news. (4.) Dead tiredness. (5.) A Headache. (6.) A Happy heart.

Be sure to pick out your nickname. This is important. Send it at once.

As for Mrs. Charles Parsons Pettus¹—the generous *Harriet rather overstrained her credit in approaching her I fancy—she was so moved by my unconsciously emotional note. Harriet was. She met her at Weekwetonsing or some such place. Harriet expected to work her own dear St. Louis Standard oil cousin, but said cousin had left town. But I think Mrs. Pettus took Harriet in quite good part.

Mrs. Pettus sent Harriet word—(I have [~~des~~] lost or destroyed the letter—Harriet sent it to me confidential) well—Mrs. Pettus sent Harriet word—very briefly but affectionately that she would send me \$10. for car fare and have me give an entertainment, and take care of me in her house. Those were my terms. The character of the note was that of consent easily given and easily forgotten—I fear—a light hearted light footed affectionate woman.

But I will wait till Harriet gets back from N.Y. and ask her to use some real devilish device to remind the dear Pettus again.

Meanwhile there are moments when I am positively squalling to see thee. Why do I always feel so bold in Springfield and so timid in Saint Louey? I cogitate on this problem meantime. I vow the next time we meet I am going to grab you and hug you in

front of your own mother—the very first thing. Will you faint? Or call mama to the rescue?

Your friend *Untermeyer has produced a lovely poem in “The Shell to the Pearl.”² It is a rare thing—rare indeed.

Have I told you how well I liked “The Human Fantasy?”³ I am not through with it. I have put many hearts all through it to mark the good poems. The spirit of the work is the finest kind—and I think Love and Liberation would be infinitely stronger as a book if every other poem were the Human Fantasy sort. For the Human Fantasy involves the whole man—we can judge and enjoy him as a citizen. Love and Liberation could have been written by any two butterflies or any two doves in the spring—any dainty delicate ardent creatures.

The affection for Humanity is strong indeed [~~strong~~] in the Human Fantasy.

If I told Papa and Mama just how much I wanted to see you—it would be the most natural thing in the world for them to send me to St. Louis. But they, imagining it only a lightfooted laughing whim—as they do—and I just too bashful to say plain and straight out I really care—I suppose I ought to wait till I get some cash somewhere else.

Really—I do believe that is the secret of family economy. Is what you are doing a heart-necessity to you—or is it a mere idle and thoughtless waste? And when our necessities become too sacred to do anything but joke about them and the things most necessary^ seem least so—to parents—then we are in a quandry^.

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

I come next to St. Louis on just one incentive. That is I want to collect at once, before any foolish conversation, all those wise promissory stars. [Drawing of star] If I act bashful—sieve^ me at once by the ear—and star my brow as it were. This hesitation must not be allowed to go on. Lets^ both be brave—heroes—and slay Mister Bashfulness.

I suggest that frigid little parlor in the north West Corner as a nice place for him to die.

Please state your views.

[Enclosure: "A *Kaleidoscope."]

Notes

¹For “Mrs. Pettus,” see Letters 86, 101, and 105.

²“The Shell to the Pearl” is included in Untermeyer's *Challenge* (April 1914, p. 61). See Letter 116.

³See *Wheelock, John Hall.

89) "I shall compile it at once 'The Congo and other poems' . . ."

Springfield Ill.
April 23, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim—

It is midnight and I have been all day getting clean copies of my three noise-poems—for Jessie *Rittenhouse—The *Congo—The *Ball—and the *Trail. See Card.¹ This is the first time I have let a copy of the Congo out of my hand. But when the Queen speaks—The noble *Harriet has, unsolicited stirred up *Macmillians for me. They ask for my next book of verses—. I shall compile it at once "The Congo and other poems.["] The Chicago Bunch know it (the Congo) already—and the New York group will get it in private the 28th. So all will be ready, and as soon as it appears in the *Metropolitan—the book can be released—with the critics already primed on the title-poem. I have 42 moon poems—and a lot of others—including some of the best of the *Rhymes to be Traded for Bread—and those you like in the *Tramp's excuse—as yet in no book. You see I constructed my first volume strictly to avoid the one charge of obscurity which had tortured me all my days. Now I can print "The Hearth Eternal"—for instance—and "The Bush of Burning Spice."²

I have more than enough for a second volume, twice as large as the first—and, no padding.

And wasn't it grand of Harriet. She just wanted to get me Car-fare to St. Louis I'll bet—the romantic creature.

I am just swamped with letters. I can't turn around.

I will spend the next week or so cleaning up everything in sight—for this book. It will be some sized book now—believe me. They shall have it this time—obscurities and all. I shall start out with noises and finish with mysteries, gradually getting more and more like the end of the Kansas Poem.³

Saraphim—I love your letters—every one.

Yes—I have read *Untermeyer's Book. I liked many things—and type wrote off "The Shell to the Pearl."⁴ I shall return *Wheelock's soon. Next time we meet—we will read both books again. I have not near done them justice. I will return Wheelock's soon. I had a lovely letter from him, yesterday.

Margaret *Anderson sent me Untermeyer's Book and *Yeats' to review but I just havn't^ time now—though it would delight me. I promised a review of Kindling two months ago that is still waiting.⁵

*Cawein has sent me another book of his—and a grand long letter. Jens *Jensen is beseiging^ me to write a crab-apple poem.

I spent two afternoons in delightful but time-wasting conversation entertaining Sculptor *Borglum—for Mary *Humphrey—because her dad—who should have done it,

was out of town. So it goes. They are trying to get me to speak (for car-fare and keep!) in three or four places.

Well—thank heaven for the soothing thought of Saraphim.

*Reedy flirts a bit—with the idea of a moon edition of the Mirror. I must get them ready. Then compile this book.

With love

N.V.L.

[P.S.] What do you want to be called in my book? You shall have a corner. [Drawing of two entwined roses and note: “No—this is not a kiss. It is much more proper. It is two twined roses, and stands for a hug.”]

Notes

¹VL neglects to enclose the card: see Letter 92.

²See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 123-125. VL does include “The Hearth Eternal” in the *Congo volume but not “The Bush of Burning Spice.”

³Here the “Kansas Poem” is “The *Santa-Fé Trail,” not VL’s “Kansas” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 250-251).

⁴For Untermeyer’s “The Shell to the Pearl, see Letter 88.

⁵Charles Kenyon (born 1880) finally published his popular play *Kindling: A Comedy Drama in Three Acts* in late 1913. The drama debuted at New York’s Daly Theatre in December 1911, and thereafter toured the country. VL saw *Kindling* in Springfield during the winter of 1912-13. For VL’s review, see Letters 109 and 116.

90) “Lorado Taft and Gutzon Borglum both called on me . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 26, 1914.

My own admirable Saraphim—it is now Sunday morning—and I have not written you since I don’t know when. Your perfect love of a poem came friday morning—It just made me happy to think of it—. You may be sure you stir up your own special corner of my fancy forever and ever—for I have never had lovely little ladies write me their own lovely little songs—hot from the ink Bottle before in all the world.

The main reason I have not written is just—work. The first part of the week—I polished up a miscellany [~~twelve~~] 10 poems for Margaret *Anderson—which I called The *Kalidoscope. I sent it to you—I remember now. And the last part—I worked on the 42 Poems on the moon till 5 P.M^ Saturday evening—then mailed them to *Reedy.

Whether he broadsides them or not—it [is] was worth doing, for I now have a scheme for the whole set that will make them presentable in my book. There are four sub-heads—

1. Fairy stories for the Children.
2. The Moon is a Mirror.¹ [Drawing of star in margin]
3. Moral stories to Plague the Ladies.
4. The Full moon is the Shield of Faith.²

The next time we meet—the trees will be green—and the birds will all say—

Dew and glory—love and truth
Sweet sweet sweet sweet—
Sara Sara Sara Saraphim.

I liked your poem to Eunice and the poem of Eunice to you. Both are most beautiful in my memory from yesterday's reading.³

I was under all kinds of pressure getting my desk cleared this week—and enjoying it—lady—enjoying it, and tired as a dog every night.

Next week I begin to get the *Macmillan book together—and you just bet I'll enjoy that. If for no other reason—it gets my work on file and record—and its^ the greatest nuisance in the world to me to see that I keep duplicates of everything and all that. And my pigeonhole of duplicates is so jammed I have to run over everything to find what I want in it. Now I can get these all in a book—and empty that pigeonhole.

And I have so many fancies coming—crowding me every day and hour I don't like the old ones hanging round my neck like the albatross.

The birds are just singing their crazy little heads off this morning. I am sitting here in my room—right by the window where I always write to you—and listening to them with all my might, and wishing we were on one bough a minute—just little birds!

Lorado *Taft and Gutzon *Borglum both called on me unexpected and unsolicited, yesterday, in a body as it were and I was flattered and surprised as punch. They are both old enough to be my parents as it were. And the joke of it was the man on the committee that brought them in his electric was a local architect who has refused meh^ proffered friendship many times and never set foot in my house, just because he was too grand or something. He had to bring them or let them come by themselves. Oh—the silly man. All I ever wanted of these Springfield people was simple plain friendship—and they apparently don't want that from anyone. If you are not willing to join the fraternity that acts real chesty and proud—pooh pooh for you.

You must show all the earmarks of a real foxy person, who has something to conceal—you must act real snappy and worldly minded b-gosh, if you want people to converse with.

Well—Taft and Borgy (thats^ what we called him in New York) were very jolly indeed. Taft may come down often—on the art Commission. And (while I well know he is a Prince of Publicity and an Advertising sculptor—) I was surprised at his sensitiveness yesterday, and I think—if we have a little time together—we can be friends. He struck

me as much less artificial than I used to think him. Possibly being in Springfield with no other artists made him human when he met a person with a scrap of art training.

Of course I have known Borgy a long time. He is very comradely when he undertakes to be, and faithful when he begins. Or at least so I have observed him in New York Ten years ago with my chum—Jack Jones. Now that he begins with me—he will probably stay put. I really love his work.

His “conception” and “The Mares of Diomedes—” stir me deeply with sweetness and loveliness and spiritual power. I lectured on the mares of Diomedes in New York. It is in the Rotunda of the Metropolitan Museum.

Taft's giant Indian is the only thing of his that gets me except the lowest of the figures of the Great lakes—with the shell in her hand. The head and arms and breasts of that figure would make you happy with their nobility and grace.

Borglum is a concentrated little man—with no great utterance in a parlor or platform way. Taft exudes all varieties of civilization at every pore—and is two thirds appreciation and only one third punch—and creative power. He is a most fitting layfigure—the ambassador of Art to the World—he looks the part—. And reproves the cross by the very power and grace of his presence. I could imagine him flabbergasting the bad taste of a whole room of bullying bankers—and doing it with quietness and grace. And on the other hand—I can realize the idea of art they thus acquire—is only the primer lesson—and I can easily see how the younger generation of artists with their intense coteries can be vexed with him for not riding their fire-winged hobbies.

Borgy came back to New York from Europe with all the honors there were, about twelve years ago. He is still in the fight for American recognition. He gets lots of publicity in the East. He has just landed the contract for the *Altgeld statue and will probably use my poem. Another man, a friend of Jens *Jensen tells me the same thing through Jensen. Somebody will really do the statue some day I suppose—and maybe my poem will be used!

Why should I stop writing to Saraphim? I who am going to write her a *Blacksmith's serenade? It is Sunday morning—and I love her dearly and want to tell her on this piece of paper also. Take that [drawing of an arrow pointing to a star]! The Serenade comes in a week or so.

Last night walking about I met another of the sacred four who are fighting Sullivan for the Senatorship—Frank Comerford.⁴ And he and Fitzgerald, a cousin of his—and your servant sat in the Illinois Cafe till nigh one-o'clock—in glory and discourse. I thought it at least ten—when I quit. Well however that may be—whether his elegant discourse or mine—passed the hours so swiftly, I was so all in when I returned and faced my watch—I couldn't write last night.

As for the Spring Poem.⁵

Shining meadows is just right—for apparent simplicity, yet great refres[h]ment.

I am in doubt about windy—the next line. There is not enough beneath the simplicity of it. It is a little too expected.

River is too expected also, it is the one word I am sure I don't like.

“Swept [Hik] as a mer-child through the sea” is too novel on the other hand—perhaps. But get half-way to something like that.

Word-magic is certainly a puzzling study. I cannot tell you why “*Rivers to the Sea” is a strong and characteristic title to your new book—and *Lost as a River in the Sea* is almost hackneyed. But it is so. The extraordinary delicacy and crystal clearness of the thing up to this point requires a touch more of ecstasy^ at this point. My suggested line brings in fancy—rather than happiness.

This poem is more a part of you to me—than the curl you sent and I can look on the lines threaded over the page as an^ something very Saraphim as it were. It is reading poetry as I never read it before—to have it fresh from your hand. Better than hot-cross-buns!

I think Sara the Poet—and Sara the witty pretty Oliver Hereford^ drawing I met in St. Louis—are at last merging into one composite figure and one does not challenge the other any more.⁶

The minute I get this book off to Macmillians I am coming to see you—with a clear conscience. It (the book) is a definite task—and I certainly will need to relax afterward—I will enjoy it so—and therefore work so hard—I will need all your arts to untangle my snarled up nerves. I just delight in a chance to clean things up—and take a fresh start. But I will be a rag when I get to you—I'll bet—though I may not show it!

I am certainly glad of the excuse of work that lets me come to you at the end of it for an hour of paper roses miss.

With love and friendship

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

With a trifle of crinkled paper
I twisted a paper rose:
Out of the little programme—
Twisted a paper rose—
With a hair-pin and bit of green ribbon—
Finished that nonsense-rose—
And she pressed me a cold little kiss
In the heart of the paper rose—

And she is a writer of songs—
And her real heart—no one knows.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

To Saraphim the lovely.

Notes

¹See *Poetry of VL*, “The Recreant Queens,” pp. 736-737.

²See *Poetry of VL*, “The Shield of Faith,” pp. 252-253.

³VL refers to two poems, “To E.” (by ST) and “To S.” (by *Tietjens), published in the second issue of Margaret *Anderson’s *Little Review* (April 1914), pp. 17-18.

⁴For the Sullivan campaign, see *Vrooman, Carl. Chicagoan Frank Comerford (1879-1929) was elected to the Illinois state legislature as a Democrat in 1904, and then expelled in early 1905 for criticizing the corrupt practices of his colleagues. He was reelected a few months later as an Independent. Comerford had been the Chicago Chief of Police under Mayor Edward F. Dunne (see Letter 26); he eventually became a Cook County Superior Court judge.

⁵VL refers to ST’s poem “Morning,” which is collected in **Rivers to the Sea*. ST did revise the poem, among other things changing the final line to: “Swept as a sea-bird out to sea.”

⁶Oliver Herford (1863-1935) authored and illustrated light verse in works such as *The Bashful Earthquake* (1898) and *A Child’s Primer of Natural History* (1899).

91) “A friend is such a wonderful thing . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 26, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim:

Tonight I made my politeness-call on my lost lady.¹ To stay away altogether would look forced. I waited till her visit to Springfield was 2/3 over.

Well—if I got started—I would just fill the letter with conflicting emotions. But If I did myself real justice I would never speak of her with bitterness. I had no right to call on a person of whom I have spoken so bitterly. I kept saying to myself—

“Here I sit—after all the things I have said.” Yet every one hurt me as I said them—as though some one not myself were saying them, and I always felt ashamed after. Yet I know I will say them again. We must always love each other—dear heart—dear Saraphim—in soberness and righteousness[^]. I want to always have you forgive me—and I want to always forgive you. And I pray there will be little to forgive.

This world is so full of sorrow we havn’t had our share yet. Let us pray for any kind rather than the sorrow of losing our mutual understanding, and good cheer at the thought of one another.

I mean it in no roseleaf sense when I tell you,² you have been my heart’s delight—our common business gives us an understanding—we would be comrades through our work—if we were both men or both women—and lived in the same town. So don’t you dare admonish me about roseleaves.

A friend is such a wonderful thing—and brings delight so simply—a very small poem from you keeps me chirping all day. I can lean back and think of you the minute I am not writing.

I am not going to write any news. It is 12 o'clock and Sunday is gone.
 Songbird songbird songbird Sara—Lady happiness—!

Goodnight and goodmorning.

N. V. L.

Notes

¹Octavia *Roberts. See Letter 86.

²VL is likely alluding to the first stanza of ST's poem "Dew" (from the "Love Songs" section of *Helen of Troy*, 1911, p. 38): "I dream that he is mine, / I dream that he is true, / And all his words I keep / As rose-leaves hold the dew."

92) "I do not want to climb onto your honey island . . ."

Springfield Ill.
 April 27, 1914.

Dearest of Saraphims:

I am sleepy tonight, and this is just a note. I have routed out more and more poems by N.V.L. One particular one I almost forgot—completely forgot I mean.

I will have about 130 to pick from. And this time I will not be so afraid of being called obscure. If the book makes any argument at all—the debate will be about the *Congo sort of a thing—certainly obvious enough. I will put all these rackets in the front. Then taper off—massing the most mystical, like *The Hearth Eternal*¹ in the back of the book,—and making the transition step by step—just as I go from noonday to moonlight in the Kansas poem itself.² About five noise poems—and 80 of the garden variety.

Your friend *Wheelock's letter is torn up—but well and gratefully remembered. He praises two poems *Altgeld and *Booth with equal fervor and more than I deserve. I shall write him soon. Meanwhile let me say I shall mail his book to you in a day or so. I can't gobble anybody's poetry.

Is this Untermeyer³ that receives the *Poetry Society for its final session any kin to the sugar trust? And any kin to your friend the poet?

I am afraid I have quite smothered you with my stuff lately. What do you think of the *Kalidoscope? Which ones shall I leave out of my book?

I cannot think of a shred of an excuse to get me to St. Louis or I would come. As soon as this book is in order—I will come—if I have to walk.⁴

I tell you dearest of Saraphims—I have been so desperately whirwindy^ in love sometimes I know I am not in love with you. I am not spinning around in that desperate distressing cyclone manner—not in the least. This by way of preliminary and vindication!

BUT I think of you and toward^ you as a fellow-spinner of dreams—most every minute—and the thought of you is good society, it is companionship and happiness and calm and smiles. It is so good to have a playmate that plays the same game—and understands the same world of words.

There is one very very great objection to you. You are [~~naught~~] not a daughter of the soil. My mother has more culture than any woman I ever knew—and more talent—and essential civilization, yet she is still a Farmer's daughter. She has spoiled me in a way—for none of the Darling Saraphims have any of the Kansas Harvester in them.

My only real fear in loving you—(if I should ever come to such a fire!)—is that I would be so far from that Embrace with the green earth which is my natural goal. I have been thinking of it a lot lately. If I have a destiny it is to give voice to the six feet of black earth beneath us—yet the more I know of you the more I want to do the usual man's part to keep you from treading it.

I want to keep your feet out of the mud. Yet the only place I would have a legitimate right to kiss you would be on the edge of a wheatfield—the thermometer at 108 degrees—but I fear me you will never wear the necessary sunbonnet. Or in a pouring rain forty miles from anywhere. But you would be scart—that far away.

I do not know whether you like the rude truth or not—but these are things I have been thinking. And a hundred like them, but worse.

Life itself is always as curiously complex as our little fraternity of two—delicacy at war with desire—and the simplicity of the soil at war with sophistication—in both of us, but in me the most at war.

To have been a farmers^ daughter would probably have kept you forever from those final delicate influences that make your song such honey in my fancy, yet the lack of being one is what I fear in you most. Suppose I take a two-year's tramp, and then come and put you in a hut?

And yet I would not want to drag you through one of the rough things I have been through—I do not want one harsh breeze to ruffle one hair of your head. And you would hate to be a peasant in a hut—really.

Man's first civilized instinct is to lift his woman out of the furrow and away from the plough—and then she locks the door so he will never get back to the plough as soon as she can. Woman is the perpetual sophisticater and civilizer and over-civilizer.

And yet—on the other hand I have seen without admiring, the other thing.—Perfectly appalling adobe ranch-houses where there had been no women for four or five years. The quintessence of the Human hog pen. Man sure does go to hell without his pardner. Child—I mean it most deeply—I want all America to flow through my veins—like the sea washing through Suez as it were—. I do not want to climb onto your honey island—I want to take you down into the deep with me—a mermaid under my arm as it were. I want you to be my conscience to whip me back to the road and the Earth—and not the power that makes me forget them.

Jens *Jensen—the landscape architect was here today—and my talk with him is in my mind, I guess.

You delicate lovely singing Sara—If I ever kiss you—it must be in the hottest tallest cornfield or wheatfield the summer brings. Or in the thickest possible swarm of grasshoppers: You must whip me back to the earth where I belong—offer—yourself as a prize to the true harvester—or the successful tramp, or factory worker. You must think more of me after I have worked three months in a factory. Or better—three years.

But all this is after while—if time does fulfill itself—and if we do not quarrel, and if and if.

At present the whole duty of man is to get a book of poems ready—~~[and the]~~ for *Macmillians and the whole duty of woman to send him little stars, and little words of kindness.

Goodnight—dear heart—dear Saraphim.

N.V.L.

[Enclosure: Postcard from Jessie B. *Rittenhouse asking for unpublished poems that can be read at the April 28th meeting of the Poetry Society, specifically referring to “The *Congo.” VL writes at the top: “Card I forgot”—as he intended to include the card in Letter 89.]

Notes

¹See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 123-124.

²That is, “The *Santa-Fé Trail.”

³VL has received an invitation from “Mrs. Samuel Untermeyer,” who is hosting “the May Festival of The Poetry Society” on May 9, 1914 at her home at “Greystone-on-the-Hudson.” VL enclosed the invitation itself in an unpublished letter (May 14, 1914) to his “Aunt Fannie” (see Letter 4), adding: “Untermeyer^ is a very grand New York Lawyer.” This Untermeyer should not be confused with Louis *Untermeyer’s uncle, Samuel Untermeyer, a prominent New York actor/producer and a close friend to Charles Frohman: see Letter 96, and Untermeyer’s *From Another World*, p. 14.

⁴A substantial part of the rest of this letter is in Carpenter, pp. 191-192.

93) “We certainly think alike asthetically^ . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 28, 1914.

Dear Saraphim:

I have just answered *Wheelocks very kind letter—and I am dead. It is midnight. I forward you The Human Fantasy—without reading the “Other Poems” in the back.

Let us solemnly engage ourselves to read it together when we meet. I honor you for liking the author just as I honor him for his high strung and gentlemanly-admiring

attitude toward the New York mob—and the most uncombed of humanity—if it be clean and gentle, or vital and full of clean fire. I'll have to admit a person with a soul such as this book shows is a credit to any young woman. If he isn't a thoroughbred—I am much deceived.

Now git out of here—Wheelock. I want to talk to Sara alone.

Now that that fellow has gone we can chat.

I find in clearing up the clutter—that I have about 108 poems to make my book¹—unless I find some other old well-forgotten, and this means leaving out anything[^] *Kennerley has printed in any form.

Now I will probably cut the book down to about 90—say—and let *Macmillians throw out ten more if they are so disposed.

Final session of the *Poetry Society tonight. Reading “The *Congo” b’gosh—and maybe the *Santa Fe Trail and *Firemen’s Ball besides.

I wonder if *Harriet is there?

I am so sleepy I don't know what's what. My boys had their last session here tonight.²

I love you dearly—and I wish you well

Lady Happiness—
 Lady Good Cheer—
 Lady Songbird—
 Lady-Saraphim—
 Lady-Gloriana (your new name!)
 Lady-love,
 from

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay
 603 South 5th
 Springfield Ill.

To

Sara Trevor Teasdale—
 Saint Louey,
 (over.)

Wednesday Morning.

The Spring Song is now O.K. and so a star for thee.³

[Drawing of a star.]

I have already taken from my pile of candidates all the *Rhymes for Bread poems—you question—except the Bottle Volcanic. I have a special reason for that one. “The Leaden Eyed” shows some folks think alike. Herbert Quick⁴ has had a perfect fit over it, as have one or two others. I am delighted you like The Perfect Marriage. And I shall retain in the Book “The Woman Called Beauty.”⁵ You praise it a little too much for me to suppress it. [Marginal note: “I have kept 12 poems and thrown out 14.”]

I am afraid I have mussed up your little poems quite a deal. I am humbly sorry. They are almost all too rare to lose. When your pieces fail—it is only that some one line flattens out a little. Really—though there are a lot of marks—when you get down to it you will find my suggestions very slight. Every one I have corrected I love dearly—just the same.

We certainly think alike aesthetically! I cannot object to one of your criticisms on the Rhymes to be Traded for Bread.—And now will you return—roasted—The *Kalidoscope?

N.V.L.

[P.S.] I am on the Point^ of Putting^ all the Kalidoscope in the book unless you come to the rescue.

Notes

¹That is, *The *Congo and Other Poems*.

²For VL's "boys," see Letter 20.

³For the "Spring Song," see Letter 90 (note 5).

⁴[John] Herbert Quick (1861-1925), mayor of Sioux City, Iowa (1898-1900) and editor of *Farm and Fireside* (1909-16), authored several historical novels (often serialized) and many articles for periodicals such as the *Reader*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. Quick's *One Man's Life* (1925) is the autobiographical story of his Iowa youth. Quick had published six VL "Proclamations" in *Farm and Fireside*: see Letter 134.

⁵VL poems referred to here are in *Poetry of VL*, volume one.

94) "Go at—it—cut and slash . . ."

Springfield Ill.
April 29, 1914.

Dear Love-and-Friendship:

I do not think the world will be set right till everybody has a Saraphim to write to at 11 P.M. Its^ going to be in my Socialist Platform. "There oughta be a law!" etc. That everybody has a Saraphim! The world weeps for lack of them.

I have now winnowed my book down to about 90 poems.¹ Now your book Helen²—held 78. so—90

78

12

So you will have twelve to take out if you want to cut it down to the size of yours. My book (*Booth) had 59. So . . .90

59

31

so you can take out 31 if you

want to cut it down to the size of my Booth. I will take at least 9/10^{ths} of your advice on the matter. Now dearest beautiful Sara—please see me through on it. This is what I propose. Listen:

By tomorrow night it should be ready to mail to you. It ought to arrive Friday or Saturday morning. Then please set aside everything but matters of life and death (and the dressmaker!) and go straight through it twice. A lot of my first battered or rough copies will be included. I am going to do my copies after you are through. Go at—it—cut and slash. You need not fuss over the *Kalidoscope now—for that set will be scattered through the book—. Be your very sternest with me—, but please go over it twice and mark it all up—just as you did the *Rhymes for Bread. Anything you want shortened, for instance I will shorten.—But of course it will be mainly a question of what whole poems to include [~~or wholly leave leave out~~]. I want you to be censor of the Beauty-quality of the book. I am more interested in the architecture, classification, order of the table of contents—after you are through.

The effect of my work depends somewhat on the way one poem associates with the one before and after. So a first rapid reading would be a pretty good thing I fancy. Then a detailed butchering. Now as soon as you are through—mail back—and I will go right to work clearing up and eliminating—and taking at least 9/10^{ths} of your most delectable, adorable, and sovrein[^] commands, and that will mean—all day Monday likely. Or Tuesday—if the book arrives Tuesday A.M. Then—Wednesday for Typewriting and mailing off to *Macmillians. And then I will take me winter's overcoat to the pawnshop—and sell it—no—pawn it—thats[^] what they do—pawn it and come to see the Saraphim, and correct her book under her eye³—mine being gloriously off our minds. I expect I'd better not promise to come to see you next week. I broke one promise already. I can only say I will sweat blood thinking up ways to get there.

Do you see The Mirror? Maybe the 42 Moon Poems will appear in it Friday. You can be making up your mind about them—if they do. No—it will have to be a week later. *Reedy will hardly have time to get them in. He is deciding on them this week. Somehow I feel that he will catch the humor of the thing—and print the whole bunch. It will be some stunt, b'gosh.

I send a star for thy forehead. [Drawing of a star.]

With loveandfriendship and
Friendshipandlove

N.V.L.

Notes

¹That is, *The *Congo and Other Poems*.

²For ST's *Helen of Troy*, see Letter 3.

³**Rivers to the Sea*.

95) “the world will fall to pieces if you and I don't tend to it . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 1, 1914.

My Dearest Sara:

I am indeed sorry for your father and for your distress—and indeed I will pray for you, little lady.¹

Do not for a minute bother with my book. Send it straight back. (But maybe you had better pass on the Gloriana department of the Christmas tree).²

Give your father my best wishes and greetings and earnest hopes he may soon be well. Tell him I said you are fortunate to have such a grand old gentleman to care for.

I was most ready to weep a minute yesterday when I found Mama did not know who Josephine Preston *Peabody was. Never heard of her! though she has heard a hundred times. This is ominous^ in Mrs. Lindsay, the thundering literary oracle of our hamlet. To find the oracle fading to a murmur, and not caring, shows she is indeed old. I have always said she was younger than ever—though Papa was breaking. And she can't keep the new people I write to and write to me—straight—to save her soul. Ten years ago she would have known them to the last feather, entirely aside from the accident of their writing to me.

And so proud of her little Sunnyside literary society too.³ I have been raised to believe their weekly meetings were conferences of the Gods. And she was all confused and her lifetime pride abated when I asked her what they really talked about nowadays. Ill^ just bet they put their books aside and talk about their grandchildren. There is something sweet and strange about it all.

Its^ just come to this point—the world will fall to pieces if you and I don't tend to it. The old folks are abdicating. So brace up little Sara, and carry the world on your shoulders.

I have wanted to send you this clipping from Blunt—many times. It seems to me today is the day.

Charles *Ridgely has quit literature and gone to selling Bonds for Hallgarten and Co. Bankers—5 Nasseau St.

Yesterday afternoon and last evening I was completely mad over my new Poem—a sort of Paralell^ of the *Congo “The *Chinese Nightengale.” A San Francisco fantasy.

Just when I wanted to clear up my correspondence—here comes this new Poem.

Sunday Evening—May the 24th—amid Grand Ceremonies—including a trained quartette^—singing “Are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb”—and appropriate scripture-readings in between—I am going to recite at the Methodist Church here 1. The *Building of Springfield, 2. The *Congo, 3. *General Booth. This at the instance of the Methodist minister.⁴ If he knew my mental reservations!

I have not told you to put the “Thoughts” poem written April 20 in your book—just as it is. A most charming poemlet.⁵

As for the “*Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty” I havn’t^ seen or heard a word about it—and M.K. will not write.⁶ There was a passing mention—one line—in the Post two weeks ago, thats^ all. You shall have the first copy.

Who is Mrs. Samuel Untermeyer^?⁷

Maybe I am getting old as Mama.

The Gloriana department that closes the Christmas tree section of my book—you should pass upon because it is personal. Its^ all about you. You begin as a toy and finish as a Sibyl—if you choose.

Let the rest of the book go.

Good morning—good lady. My best wishes and greetings to Mr. Teasdale.

I do not like to have you unhappy one minute. But if you are unhappy—I want you to [be] very strong of spirit, very noble, and very big hearted.

With love and a little prayer for thee—
Nicholas Vachel Lindsay
603 South 5th

[Enclosure: Newspaper clipping of verses on the nature of happiness by, in VL’s handwriting, “Wilfred^ Scawin^ Blunt.”⁸ The final line reads “And lived with Esther the world’s gods among”; VL has changed this to: “And lived with Saraphim the gods among.”]

Notes

¹ST’s father had suffered a stroke: see Carpenter, pp. 193-194.

²See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 218-220. These poems were written expressly for ST.

³For the Sunnyside literary society, see Letter 14.

⁴For “Pastor Piersel” and the Methodist Church recital, see Letters 105 and 111.

⁵ST’s poem “Thoughts” is collected in **Rivers to the Sea*, p. 85.

⁶*Kennerley, Mitchell.

⁷For Mrs. Samuel Untermeyer^ (Untermeyer), see Letter 92.

⁸Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) was a minor but prolific essayist and versifier. *The Poetical Works of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: A Complete Edition* was newly published (1914) by The *Macmillan Company.

96) “I actually speculate on ways to make money! . . .”

Springfield Ill.
 May 1, 1914.
 Midnight.

My Dear Sara:

Having written once today—it is indeed an inexcusable excess to write again—except from one standpoint—I enjoy it.

I have been thinking of that *Chinese Nightengale—taking notes on it—writing letters all day. Besides putting in the screens. The coming of Miss *Peabody's Autograph copy of the Wolf of Gubbio—fills me with thoughts of St. Francis and the road. I am wondering if I ought to take a lot of little plunges this summer—or wait till the folks return—and then make one more real plunge a Leonidas Charge against all the demons of Mammon.¹ I rather think the latter. I must undertake the impossible once again. The probable and the feasible has no charm. A series of little half weeks^ trips is nothing. You have no notion how this hunger for the road stirs me. I hunger for it in almost the same way I have a Springtime desire to be kissing your hands, with deep devotion. Yet, I would approach the road—as I would you—clean and whole—with no looking back or qualification. Yet—you and the road are exact opposites—and some day I must forever give up Woman for the highway—or the highway for Woman, I suppose.

I am haunted by the conviction that the next time I plunge on the highway—with all my force and determination, I will either be killed outright or I will make a conquest over myself—and some of the lions in the path that will determine my life forever more. I sort of feel the great Rubicon is ahead of me—not behind—I keep saving myself saving myself—for some spiritual Rubicon—I know not what. I can almost see something very large—in the dusk ahead.

Yet—on the other hand—I actually speculate on ways to make money! That is—some day I may just be obliged to make money. Certainly my books will make me none. My only chance is that vulgar shoddy thing (artistically) the Chatauqua^ platform—or else to get a regular Charles Frohman of a manager.² And that would take as long a battle working up as in any other [~~lecture~~] new business,—for one cannot carry the prestige of one field completely into another. But every year I postpone (the road or the platform) and say to myself—“You have still a roof over your head. You can still write one more song! [”]

Dear Comrade—I give you my love and good wishes. I hope your father is much better by now.

I have just about talked myself to sleep—as it—were—and so—goodnight.

I was in the Immaculate Conception Church³ this afternoon at 5:30 and thought of you before the Virgin. I often go there alone. She is beautiful in the right afternoon light. And her altar was all burning candles and lilacs brought by the faithful.

World-religon^ was in my heart—but I prayed for you in that special place.

Goodnight child—

N.V.L.

Saturday morning—just before sealing up this letter: [Drawings of four stars.]

The girl is away and I help Mama with the dishes this morning.

Do you like to have boys help you wipe the dishes? It is one of my household accomplishments!

Notes

¹Leonidas (died 480 B.C.) was the great Spartan king killed with 300 of his men at Thermopylae.

²Charles Frohman (1860-1915), younger brother of Daniel Frohman (see Letter 26), was one of the great New York theatrical managers.

³For the Immaculate Conception Church, see Letter 44.

97) “Some day I am going to quit roasting my neighbors . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 3, 1914.

My Dear Lady:

“Running to Paradise” in the May *Poetry—by *Yeats—is charming.¹

And did you notice the May *Current Opinion? It contained your masterpiece of the little ones: The Amalfi.² Really wonderful music. There is something in that music that sends a little asthetic^ throb straight through my spirit.

Next—there is [“Judith the dancer” by yours humbly. That in itself is sufficiently romantic. But Lucy *Bates—for whom it is written is named right out. So one or two of Lucy’s friends—and they are all my friends the enemy) will tell her about it—Lucy never getting into a magazine before. Really the situation is perfectly delicious. Several of The Tango-mad will have to read that Lucy poem—my friends—the enemy. Lucy was their little heroine and fashionable select dancing teacher for all the women—untill^ this new tide set in—from the Bear dance—on—and now they want to have her become just one more mundane dancer—or else take a second place.³

She is a deeply devout Christian Scientist—and now they will have to reflect they praised her Christian Science dancing two years ago—. And Margaret *Anderson who runs the Little Review has many local alliances here—among my friends the enemy. And since this is one of her first breakings into [review] Current Opinion print—some other people will be called upon to thrust their unwilling noses into the back of Current Opinion. And so—when I go around to the Happy Occasion—(see enclosure) I will be poked in the ribs by long index fingers at least four times by people with mixed emotions—dear people who used to take particular pains to come around and assure me how unpopular and obscure my writings were—even “*General Booth” a little obscure. Of course they liked them, but that was after they had read them several times for

friendships sake—and made allowances. They will be obliged to mention the Lucy Poem, and chatter and gab.

They would dearly love to heroize me now—and claim me—but they still have a dark suspicion I might be a mite sarcastic. The Tango set in particular—were so dead sure—beyond all peradventure that I did not know my business and could not carry on an intelligent human conversation. And the Country Club Baby Plutocrats in general disposed of my literary career six years back!

I made a politeness call last night on one of them last night in return for a dinner.⁴ The rapiers were half drawn several times—but on the whole it was a pleasant evening. I was assured I was an old family. But I bit the assertion in two, briskly.

Why should I dwell on these wasp nest issues? They are perfectly absurd—just like *Harriets bristling at the *Dial—in the last number of Poetry.⁵ Now I would be so amused at the Dial—I couldn't bristle one hair. But my Achilles heel—is found in my old neighbors that passed me for thirty years on the street with curt nods—who now want to make me just like one of themselves—or torture me for not being such. I must give up—it has been suggested—by one or another “prominent” man or woman, (1) Temperance. (2.) Galahad. (3) serious views on Religion. (4.) serious views on economics. (5.) Respect for my father and mother or deference to them. (6.) The disciple Church (Episcopal hinted at!) High Church! (7.) I must join The Country Club. \$150 a year! [~~Of~~ ~~the~~] That is—the first year. (8.) I must learn the new dances. (9.) I must quit having anything to do with the Single Tax group—⁶ (10.) I must at least hint that I belong to an old family. (11.) I must join the Sangamo Club.⁷ (12.) I must not write poems like The Trap.⁸ This with artistic solicitude from gentlemen who patronize said trap. (13.) If I am broke—I must not say so. I must pretend to have money. If Poetry brings no particular income I must bluff about it. (14.) In short—I must retain my brains and command of the English Language—but alter in every other respect. Now that I have “arrived” as they allege—I must quit doing or being anything that got me there and kick down the ladder I climbed on.

Why do I go to the “Happy Occasion” and hob around like a globule of oil in a stormy puddle of water? Simply because the fair authoress might say it was unfraternal in a literary way—to refuse to see her play. And so I go. And everybody will make friends with me that has the nerve to eat his words of the past. And the play will be pretty in a Marie-Antionette[^]-doll fashion, maybe.

Why do I stand off so? I think the essence of the matter is here these people do not trust human nature to rank and arrange itself naturally. They are full of a thousand intolerant unhuman distinctions. They cannot trust the kind people to find each other—and the brainy people to find each other—and the happy people etc. but must be putting up a thousand fences of scorn, and if you are not just reeking with scorn yourself—they have a deadly mistrust of you—and will never forgive you. Springfield has 60,000 inhabitants—but it is their profound conviction that there are 60 humans—and the rest are animals or shadows. To be compelled to admit that their neighbors were human—would really drive some of them insane—I think.—Their one abhorrence above all others is the idea of equality. And in every city we see this little desperate group of the self-elected surrounded by a weltering sea of democracy. My only trouble is that I have loved

one or two of them so well—I cannot forget them in this life—and so I go into their buzzing nest.

But last night's call has been taken too seriously, away with it. Here I go gabbing along—because it is Sunday morning and nothing to stop me. These are not the things I had in mind to say. I confess myself a silly old grouch.

I was just going to say that nearly every poem in that *Current Opinion I dearly loved. I liked that one about Prayer—by Dora Singerson^ Shorter—and the Babylon Poem—by A.E. and the one by Charles Hanson Towne.⁹ I enjoy good poetry more every day.

This letter has been silly. You would think I am unhappy—and I have been happy every minute yesterday except when I thought of your distress.

I have been altogether absorbed in The *Chinese Nightengale. I am afraid I will be talking it now in my letters till you are completely sick of it.

You must grant me absolution. I walked round and round the Square yesterday with the most wonderful unworded music going through my head—hunting for words that would even hint at it—and watching the Saturday crowd. There is a poem on the Public square I want to write sometime—the mystic heart of the little town. It is really a very deep and strange matter. It almost has a soul—if it does not have one—and this half-presence of a soul is the baffling bitter-strange sweet dazzling thing about it.

When the Chinese Nightengale is done I want it to be a bird-song 100 times sweeter and longer than the *Rachel Jane. And holding in Solution a Chinese Pagent^ the paralell^ of the *Congo. Can it be done? It looks sufficiently impossible to tempt meh^.

Sara—I do hope your Papa is better by now. I can in a sense grasp what you have been going through with—my people have meant a heap to me the last few years—and your anxiety to make all well and right will haunt me till all is well again. But I want you to be happy every minute—and that is the plain unsuppressed truth—and anything that stops you—I cannot help but be jealous of it—though I wouldn't have you stop worrying either—or be heartless. I want you to be the gentlest daughter there is, of course.

Send my book home at once, and remember I have imitated your grand device of stamps on the inside of the wrapper. Don't stop to mark it if you are busy with your Papa.

I hope if you are still doctor and nurse—this is a proper letter for such a one to receive. I have just sat and warbled away. Some day I am going to quit roasting my neighbors. They are a whole lot kinder and finer than I am in the sight of the Good God, no doubt.

The sky is such a most beautiful blue I wish you were with me right this minute to sing to it and wave your hands to it and read Poems by Sara to it.—

A Professional tramp came in last night to see me. He had read every word I had ever written about—it was amazing how alert he had been, and I envied him his yesterday and his tomorrow—for he just burned and blazed with the road. I will tell you about him sometime. Mama said he looked so disreputable she was afraid to let him in. But he looked pretty good to me. A thoroughly educated fellow with a quick tongue in

his head—and full of temperament—but a physical wreck. It was nevertheless a purely literary call—and we had close converse on high matters—

He said he might come again.

With love and friendship and
Friendshipenlove^.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay
603 South 5th.

Late Monday afternoon.

Dear Lady:

I have just torn open this letter before I mail it to tell you the sorting is done. I have thrown out 28 leaving 67. That is still eight more than the *General Booth Book.

I will probably have the Chinese Nightengale ready for the book by the time it is ready for the press.

You are a very darling friend. And When it comes to English we drive abreast like your own team of black horses, I believe.

Now for the Underwood Typewriter rooms.¹⁰

If necessary to get the car fare—I shall tell Papa you are my most estiamable^ friend.

With friendshipenlove

N.V.L.

[Enclosures: (1) Invitation to “The Illini Country Club” for the presentation of “a One Act Farce entitled THE HAPPY OCCASION by Octavia *Roberts Corneau” on Tuesday, May 5, 1914. (2) Unidentified newspaper clipping with two parodies of VL’s poem “*Aladdin and the Jinn.” The first, said to be from the *Chicago Record*-**Herald*, closes: “I want—get this down, and no errors—/ At St. Louis [a] team which will win / The world’s championship in the autumn—’ / ‘Waddy mean?’ said the Jinn.”]

Notes

¹“Running to Paradise” is included in Yeats’s *Responsibilities* (1914).

²ST’s “Night Song at Amalfi” is the fifth poem of “Vignettes Overseas,” in **Rivers to the Sea*, pp. 130-131. The poem was first published in **Harper’s Magazine* (April 1914, p. 737) and then reprinted in the “Voices of the Living Poets” column in **Current Opinion* (May 1914, p. 383).

³The May 1914 issue of **Current Opinion* includes VL’s “How a Little Girl Danced,” reprinted from *The Little Review*. The editor announces that the poet “dedicates” the poem “to Lucy Bates, and terms it ‘a reminiscence of certain private theatricals’” (p. 382). VL’s reference to “Bear dance” alludes to William Holbrook Beard’s well-known

picture “The Bear Dance” (ca. 1870). Beard (1824-1900) was famed for his satiric scenes in which animals engage in human activities. “The Bear Dance” is one of several that satirize conservative stock-market investors.

⁴The repetition is VL’s.

⁵VL refers to *Monroe’s essay, “The Enemies We Have Made,” in *Poetry—A Magazine of Verse* (May 1914, pp. 61-64).

⁶For Springfield’s radicals, including the “Single Tax group,” see Letter 26.

⁷The Sangamo Club was (and still is in 2010) one of Springfield’s exclusive private dining clubs.

⁸“The Trap” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 138-139) is VL’s poem denouncing white slavery.

⁹In addition to poems by VL and ST (see notes 2 and 3 above), the May 1914 *Current Opinion* (pp. 382-383) published Dora Sigerson Shorter’s “The Prayer” [which includes a reference to the “seraphim”], A.E.’s [Irish poet George William Russell] “Babylon,” and Charles Hanson Towne’s “Nevertheless” (see Letter 102).

¹⁰Although VL owned a typewriter while a student at Hiram College (1897-1899), he was without a machine until April 1917. In an unpublished letter to “Aunt Fannie” (see Letter 4), VL types: “The Underwood came this afternoon, in excellent repair, as you will note by this letter I am now writing upon it. I never dreamed of anyone giving me a typewriter. I thought that perhaps when I was old and toothless, I might afford to buy one for myself. And here I am with one right before me. It has been my custom to go to the Underwood office to typewrite off small jobs, and to rent a machine for large ones. This machine works much better than any one I have ever borrowed or rented. I have been using an Underwood for years and years, but did not suppose anyone in the world knew it. It certainly comes as a surprise and a delight, and a reminder of my dear auntie every time I sit down to work” (April 11, 1917). Also see Letter 176.

98) “I suppose this is an awfully frank letter my dear . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 4, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim:

Thank you for your most industrious and delectable criticisms—you voiced almost every misgiving of mine—yours might be a carbon copy of mine—on the same typewriter—with one or two exceptions where you were too lenient. You have helped me to be firm on the very matters in which I was uncertain—but darkly suspicious.

I shall include the *Kallyope Yell at your suggestion—and take out the Sweet Briars.¹ Putting them in was an oversight.

It is such a pleasure to feel you have really been over every inch of my book. So many people think they know all about a thing when they give it a kind of a slap dash

snap judgement. I shall weigh carefully everything you say—none of it is wasted—and I will take most of it literally.

While you have been so unhappy—to tell the truth, child, I have been very happy. The *Chinese Nightengale has been singing in my heart till it was like to burst, all the long days. Only a few broken phrases on paper to show for it.—I havn't^ had quite such an experience since I wrote The Last Song of Lucifer (!) perhaps. (Well—I will omit it!).² So—as I say—the nightengale has almost drownd^ out the Universe. If I get the poem within a thousand miles of the enchantment that holds me I will have a good one. I will venture the refrain.

A ghost nightengale—thousands of years old—sings in a Chinese Laundry for the night-shift—about 4 o'clock in the morning. Sings of the most ancient possible days of China.

~~["But one thing]~~
 "I remember I remember
 That Spring came on forever
 That Spring came on forever"
 Said the Chinese Nightengale.

His memories get dimmer and dimmer as he goes back through the ages—verse by verse—but always from the Beginning—Spring after the sorrows of winter—.

It may sound strange—but I said to myself yesterday—this happiness has made my whole life worth while. It was as though there was a bough in my breast—and there the bird sang as though his throat were a river or a fountain.

It is something utterly beyond me—I hardly know what to do with myself. Certainly the poem may turn out a third rate thing. But I will never forget that ghost of a bird.³

It is your business to be just or tender with your folks as you can—but not to believe everything the doctor says—till you must. When I was seventeen years old my father was alleged to be dying of diabetes—and every Summer and almost every winter my mother was either sure he was dying or going blind. I learned—long ago—that things do not happen to old folks till the[y] actually happen. In many ways my father and mother are spryer than I am this minute. Don't believe what you don't see. That may be bad enough—of course.

I hardly see how it is proper dear lady for me to come to see you with sick people about, certainly I must not stay at your place. That ought to flabbergast things the more—if ordinary rules hold good. Getting right down to details—I would just have to ask Papa for the money—too—and he is having personal financial fits at present. Mind you I am - not scalding him or roasting him—. He is half sick and battered, and almost stupid now, and his affairs weigh on him like lead. And in his present morbid mind—which never alters there is not one laurel-crown I could ever win that would be worth as much as my working as a life-insurance agent we will say—with ten dollars a week sure income. Every time I ask him for a cent—it means to him I am deliberately postponing the day when I am a real grown up man. And so lady—while I am just cold blooded enough to

ask for it—once in awhile, when I feel I have been a fair credit to the family in this matter or that—still—I like to give his harassed financial feelings breathing space—if I may say, in between times—and I don't like to ask him for more than I can possibly help. Half the family income is from Rents—~~but~~ which the office girl collects—but Papa still thinks he earns it all. My theory is that as long as I behave I am just as much a credit to the family as if I were a life insurance agent. And of course Papa brags to beat the cars to outsiders about my grand exploits. But these apparently are just sort of picnic extras—have nothing to do with the family working-machine as a whole—. Mama isn't a life-insurance agent—and she is presumably an ornament to the firm without bringing in cold hard dollars. But Papa is really too old and tired to be argued with. He is a very lively and jumpy but very battered rattling rusty human engine. He has denied himself everything for his family—has to be positively driven to spend a cent on himself or take one hour of recreation—perfectly morbid on the subject of hustle at this very minute.

[Marginal note: “Every other day he has a fit about going to China—says he can't afford it!”]

For instance some rather stately lifelong friends of the family gave the whole family Papa Mama and me a farewell Sunday noon dinner at their place yesterday. Would Papa ride out in their machine? No. He had some alleged Important Calls in that part of town—and came along in his old buggy after us—arriving almost late—and making the hostess feel—well—she has know[n] us thirty eight years as it were—so he could do as he pleased. After the meal, had he a minute to sit and converse? Not 5. No Sir. Off and away in his rattle-rattle—and this time Mama must ride home with him—though she could have had an afternoon in the Country in their machine—if she had not awfully important and busy about something or other too, which really wasn't anything much.

Well there you have V.T.L. So near-blind at last—he has no business to practice medicine^ an hour, and the family with cool management—and shrewd retrenchment—could live on its rents, or nearly so. But like all families—we have no system—but a system of periodic family spasms on finance—seldom precipitated by your's^ truly as I have intimated.

I suppose this is an awfully frank letter my dear. Maybe I have explained all this before.

I am coming to see you, coming soon—and coming cheerfully. I am coming as soon as the book is typewritten and off—if I can possibly do it. But remember I have a fidgety affectionate rather queer old daddy to manage—and I do not like to hurt his feelings or make him think once more for the millionth time that I am “no account.”

I think very seriously (this may sound wild)—of moving to St. Louis—if I could only get a factory job or something. I know that sounds perfectly absurd—and I would be so tired at night I couldn't call often. But some day I would like to go through the motions, at least, of a man who fights his way up through the terraces of society—and since I have known you—I wanted to do it—I have often though[t] of doing it, with you near by to report to and recuperate with. I would be the most battered scalawag you ever saw. You would hate the sight of me. I wish there was some way I could be with you as

often as I pleased—and not draw on the family funds. You are more than worth it—if I could devise it.

It used to just break my heart to ask the family for one cent—it just about drove me raving crazy. But gradually I have come to the place where I feel I am just as much a credit to the combination as any of the rest—with all their fidget and hustle—and I go serenely about my business, and as long as what I do is in the accepted routine—there is no family objection. But railroad fare—dear me—whats^ this about? And not only once—but again? What can this mean?

[Marginal note: “Don’t think I am complaining. My family are really the very best friends I have—and we are as one in most things.”]

I am afraid this is a silly letter. All but the thanks for your adoreable^ assistance. I am coming—b gosh.

With love
Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

Notes

¹VL’s poem “Sweet Briars of the Stairways” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 28-29), had already been included in **General William Booth and Other Poems*.

²VL’s poem “The Last Song of Lucifer” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 361-369), written while he was a student at Hiram College (1897-1900) and embellished while he was an art student in Chicago (1901-1903), had been published only in pamphlet form. ST obviously vetoed its inclusion in *The *Congo*, and it was finally collected in *The *Golden Whales of California* (1920). For the history of the “Last Song,” see especially “*Adventures While Singing These Songs,” *Poetry of VL*, p. 942.

³This and the above paragraphs on “The *Chinese Nightingale” are included in Carpenter, p. 194.

99) “But I have a scheme . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 9, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim:
Thou would’st be starteled^ little fawn, did I tell thee
how I loved thee.

This is Saturday morning—and on the whole—since you cannot get this letter till Monday I will send it to your home. I suppose you will be ready to go by then.

Enclosed find \$1.00. For this relief, much thanks.

I cannot take the time for a letter this morning.

But I have a scheme. Why not ask Mary *Humphrey down to the *Pagent instead of me? In the first place it gives her an excuse for going. In the second place—gadding about—at a Pagent you girls could really Learn^ each other. You are both Baptists by Heredity, Puritans in morals and blood, and magnificent in your Florentine efflorescence—especially is Mary a Florentine.

She is the logical person to entertain you in Springfield, and I wish you girls could love each other for your own sakes so well it wouldn't look forced.

She is the good and beautiful daughter of the Judge. You mussn't ever let her know what I have said about the Judge—either!

And she offered out of a whole heart to entertain you—and she has Jessie B. *Rittenhouse's Anthology—which she has solemnly read, and *Braithwaites Anthology—which I gave her, and she has just about enough spending money to go to the Pagent—or to New York—if she really wants to—and she is the only one of the Springfield bunch I am dead sure you will like, and she knows all the rest. She really thinks she is a hereditary Princess—but all you have to do is to tell her you are one, and then she will be good and warm hearted.

And if I know her secret soul, she just aches to have a real, and not a forced claim upon the Jessie B. Rittenhouse kind of people. Therefore this Bringing^ of *Borglum to Springfield and all. She desires all the appertunances^ of Medician magnificence and patronage—on a small allowance. And she knows all my friends here but the radicals—and so far as I can make you out—you don't give a hang for such as the radicals.

I am just loving you enough dear, to think you are THE woman, and I am just hopeful enough about it to want you to have one friend in the town. I shall put the matter of getting acquainted up to Mary this afternoon—not confessing all—discreetly if possible, and ask her for suggestions. She probably has mutual friends in Saint Louey, and is going soon or late, anyway.

Also—she is the good and brilliant daughter of the foxiest politician this district ever knew. And she is as foxy and driving in her own fashion, and will amuse you to death with her ways—for after all she has no sense of humor, absurdly idealizes all her friends, and your shrewd eye will detect many innocent grandiloquences, and false heroics in regard to the world.

Your most lovely letter found me this morning—all happy and thinking of you and ready to receive it, and now I must seal this letter.

Papa and Mama go Monday. I must help today—or offer to help.

On the whole—I believe I will mail this letter to Sulphur Springs.

Good luck to the *Sapho Song. And the one thing I remember most—the three stars and the shower of gold—at the top of the hill—well worth waiting for.

N.V.L.

[Enclosure: Clipping from *The Menace*¹ urging **Everybody's Magazine* to join in the crusade against “the pope and the Roman catholic political machine.”]

Note

¹For *The Menace*, see Letter 86.

100) “I love the kind of souls that sit down to read King Lear . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 9, 1914.

My Dearest Lady:

Mary *Humphrey tells me this evening she is likely to go down to the *pagent—and I do not want you to fail to give yourself a chance to like her. She will stay with Mrs. Eugene S. Klein 5504 Cates Ave. St. Louis. Now please make some kind of a date with her and begin your path to Springfield.

She and I had a long walk tonight—and she says she is going to telephone to you and make the date, when she gets to Saint Louey. I assure you I have not urged her in the least—you will find your acquaintance coming along in a perfectly natural way, if you plunge. I hope neither of you wait on ceremony, but get the preliminaries over at the start. The pagent would be an ideal basis for getting acquainted. You could take her asthetic[^] measure very quickly. In matters asthetic, Mary never quite hits the exact center of the bulls[^] eye—but is awfully interested in the target, and gets in the inner rings, through sheer force of interest, as a general thing. And you will find her awfully interested in the civic and citizenship side of it. She is really the leader among the stand-pat young women of our town, and a strong and admirable character.

Now don't let her know you know too much about Springfield. You will find her opinions and mine on many of her friends, quite at cross purposes, but diverting.

If there is anything you want to bid her to, using my name as an excuse—her address is 725 South 7th—Springfield Ill. Mary Humphrey.

I hope I am not too forward about all this—my dear—I just couldn't rest satisfied till I had sounded her about it, and urged you on.

I myself cannot come to the pagent. I just haven't the cash. I MUST PAY MY DEBTS.

I do not know where we are going—lady—but I have gotten this far. I want to know if you like Springfield and Springfield people—or if it appears a hopeless place to you. I want to know if such a set would wear you to the bone or if you could enjoy them.

Maybe I owe my town only a nominal allegiance—maybe I owe more to you—wherever you happen to be.

These things cannot be arrived at in a hurry. At present the town is very much a part of me—foolish little place that it is. In a sense—you do not know me till you have seen it.

And yet—the road calls so loud—I sometimes think my destiny may weave me in as a sort of thin silk fiber all through the warp and woof of the dreamers of the United States—. I feel myself as it were—a shuttle going back and forth to make strong cloth of dreams. Whichever I am: (1.) a man of the Road, (2.) a man of Springfield or (3.) Sara’s man renouncing all other allegiances—I love you dearly—and I must henceforth keep thinking thinking on your real place and mission in my destiny, and [~~you~~] my real place and mission in your destiny.

I have much more to say—but it is late.

You certainly were nice to write a note so quickly after me. And I love the kind of souls that sit down to read King Lear.

The *Congo book is mailed to *Macmillians, with what I hope is a proper letter. I will take up the *Chinese Nightengale—Tuesday. The folks leave Monday. I reached Springfield at 1:30, since you ask—and there was still lunch on the table for me.

I can think of you writing your poem—and dreaming—and I can almost see you—and here’s good fortune to your red-bird song.¹

With love and friendship

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay
603 South 5th.

[P.S.] As for that *Literary Digest column! It was by Louis *Untermeyer. It sure was a long poem.

[P.S.S.] And that is the one that your ma says—writes every day!

Notes

¹ST’s poem “Redbirds” (in *Flame and Shadow*, 1920) concludes: “Redbirds, redbirds, / Are you singing still / As you sang one May day / On Saxton’s Hill?” With her Potters Club friends, ST liked to escape St. Louis at Saxton Farm (Sulphur Springs, Missouri): see Carpenter, pp. 81-83. Compare VL’s poem “To Gloriana” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 228), which is included in the next letter and begins: “Girl with the burning golden eyes, / And red-bird song”

²The May 2, 1914 issue of the *Literary Digest* (pp. 1053-54) includes a review of *Untermeyer’s *Challenge* (1914), beginning with the long poem “Summons.” See Letter 116.

101) “I just had to write a love letter for [Papa] and for Mama”

Springfield Ill.
May 11, 1914.

My Darling Saraphim:

I have just finished—or started—a love letter you will not grudge—a love letter to my Papa and Mama who are in the sleeper which just this minute starts from the station.¹ I put them in it an hour ago—after a strenuous—but NOT argumentative day. Which as you know—is a family triumph. I have been just full of the feelings that make little girls cry and sometimes little boys ever since I put the dears on the train. It seemed to me never were my people so fine—they have been unusually themselves this last week, and unusually mellow—if I may put it so crassly. And my poor old Papa showed a lot of his old self of twenty years ago tonight—some of that old manner that has left him so long—returned, and I can't help but cry when I think of it—and remember what he was. So I just had to write a love letter for him and for Mama—. They have just spoiled me to death—and he tried so hard to be his old managing self about the baggage and the tickets and all—and could hardly read the tickets two inches from his eyes. Any rat of a brigand could do him up—he is as helpless as a paper man in a way, yet there he and Mama start on the longest and most adventurous voyage of their lives and the Good God send them safe back to me. They have had all sorts of farewells and little presents—and the poor dears were loaded down with two extra baskets of lunch that some one would give them, and they would carry. And they will carry them valiantly, you just bet.

I have seen them start out on so many many expeditions—and this one reminded me of them all—way back to when I was in dresses.

Mama had everything packed and off for the train that was to be checked this afternoon—and there was a heap—and presents and presents from everybody for the folks in China and all that sort of a thing.

Then my valiant Mama started in to clean up the house and pack all the closets etc. and was through by just 10:30 P.M. I helped every minute she would let me—but she wouldn't let much, so I just kept standing around asking to help, and going back to my ink bottle for 15 minute spells.

The Roe family—who appear to be pretty steady people, are going to take six rooms of the house.

Good night—sweet lady.

It is morning. Breakfast is over (I eat across the street.) I rose at 5 this morning with the cooperation of the alarm, to let the farmer into the barn to take the horse out to pasture.

It is settled that I go to the *Vrooman's Monday the 18th—giving a talk in the library there for car-fare. I have quite an ardent little following in Bloomington. I venture I will have at least 40 people to talk to.

Just what is the name and address of that Mrs. Pettus I was supposed to work?² Evidently by *Harriet's last letter she expected me to write to her—and this Vrooman episode gives me courage. Mrs. Charles Warren Pettus?

Harriet gave me quite a shaking up by asking me, very kindly of course, to revise the *Santa Fe trail. Mrs. *Henderson did the same. Also the copy I loaned Jesse *Rittenhouse came back with faint lead-pencil lines through the same passages. Some of the same. I felt so happy over your approval of it, and quite conceited.

Well I spent my odd time yesterday chopping at it, and it was like cutting off my own fingers—simply because I have taken so much outside revision already, and thought it was done. But maybe they were right. Mama says it sounds just as good—and I have cut out fifteen lines.

And now comes a letter from the pretty Sara, I will answer—at once. First I answer the outside. It was indeed good of you to carry your letter to the Post Office special. And all congratulations on launching *Sappho. Unbind her hair and give her one star on the forehead, one on the cheek and one on the throat for me, right at the top of the hill.

No—I will not go to the *Eunice party. Just can't afford it.

No—I did not dedicate the moon poems to Sara Teasdale. I wrote a prologue to them, on the train—I am awfully vain about. So I sacrificed your fame to my vanity.

Here is the prologue. Coming right after the Gloriana section:³

Well dear—I will mail this letter at once—and finish it another time.

My very best good wishes to your Papa and Mama and hopes for your father's speedy return to health.

Enclosed find stamps to pay for that zealous and ardent special delivery of my book.

Yes—we do have strong wills. And we havn't^ ever had a tussel^ yet!

With love to Saraphim
from N.V.L.

Notes

¹Dr. Lindsay's financial situation remained tenuous during much of the early 20th century. In order to travel to China to see their daughter Olive and her family, the Lindsays rented six rooms of their home to a family named Roe—for \$25 a month. Meanwhile, the room directly to the south of VL's room had been rented for several years to a high school teacher named Harriet Bouldin, as we learn in Letter 106. VL, who was no cook in any sense of the word, ate his meals at a boarding house across the street while Mama and Papa were gone. VL's love letter is extant, collected among the Catharine Blair papers at Springfield's Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Dated "May 11, 1914," the letter reads in part:

My Dear Papa and Mama:

Before I go to bed I must write you a love letter, before I write my night-letter to Saraphim. I just want to say I love you both very dearly, better than ever in all my life, and it was very hard to say goodbye, whether I showed it or not. The horse is in the barn, the alarm is set—and I am going to bed in a minute.

I want you to have the loveliest of trips, but I won't be quite myself till you are both back home again, safe and sound.

You have been the very best of parents to me, you have spoiled me to death, and I know it, and I shall think of you every day and miss you a great deal.

²For “Mrs. Pettus,” see Letters 86 and 88.

³VL’s “prologue” is his poem “To Gloriana” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 228), included at this point in the letter, with the variant title “Once More: To Gloriana.” Except for minor changes in punctuation, there is only one variant reading: “snowy” (l. 5) is “little.” See the previous letter, note 1.

102) “But Lord—warming up a cold poem! I’m glad its^ over . . .”

Springfield Ill.
Tuesday
May 12, 1914.

My dear lady—dearest of Saraphims:

I have thought so many thoughts toward^ you today that you must have felt a spiritual wind blowing upon you from the north.

I suppose you are about home by now.

I have just finished another love-steamer-letter to Papa and Mama. They visit in Seattle Three days before they start. Papa said I could keep forwarding things till Friday.

The Roe’s have a lot of noisy company down stairs—noisy as I am when I am company.¹

This morning I accepted an invitation of Alice Corbin *Henderson to lecture on the movies for the Drama league next October—as an excuse to make my next Chicago visit. I hope,—and assume, I will have enough new poems by then to amuse my Chicago friends. This afternoon I slept from 1:30 to 4 catching up from the combined strain the day before of seeing parents off and correcting the *Santa Fe trail by little fits and flashes. It is curious how I couldn’t get my mind easy about it—every minute I was in my room for anything my eyes just glued themselves to that paper. Well—I have taken out 25 lines and put back in a little different order—14 lines. This makes it 11 lines shorter.

I took out—in short—the last six lines—and there are five less of the funny satirical grotesque-horn lines—too strong for the *Poetry Magazine. I will have to admit it is improved. I tried it on the Logan Girls this evening.² Yes. It is improved.

Well—this afternoon 4 to 6:30 I cut all the grass in the front yard—it was three to 6 inches high and I was getting mighty ashamed of it—and built a fire in the furnace of the flats we have in our back yard—since it is getting colder—and hid the harness in the store room and did one or two other things like that.

And aside from a little homesick spell for Papa and Mama I have been very happy.

But Lord—warming up a cold poem! I’m glad its^ over. Its^ like waking up a foot that has gone to sleep.

Your dear long letter is before me—and here I sit gossiping instead of answering it. The point is—while I was doing most of these things—I was thinking of the thoughts in your last letter. (1.st) Just to amuse me, sketch the Sara your Papa would prefer—and the Sara your Mama would prefer. Give me the imaginary types of person. (2nd). I have been thinking of the critical ground on which we stand today. We stand where we must pledge ourselves to take thought. I certainly do not want passion to grow wild in our garden like a weed. We cannot deny that we are man or woman—but to weave a man-and-woman friendship takes as much art and watching the steps as skating or dancing together. We might dance the dance of friendship [~~like~~] as Pavlova and Mordkin³ danced the Bacchanal—if we were only wise as serpents and harmless as doves.⁴ One thing I know I shall dance with you in spirit and do my best to keep it fine—till some very great reason puts us in jail and makes us stop.

You have misgivings about marrying—(anyone!)

My main misgiving is insuperable—but practical not psychological^ like yours. If I stick to my ideals—I will never have the coin. I am quite satisfied that if I had the coin I could make a fair working partnership, even with a strong-willed and tyrannical maiden!

But I admit it would take scads of money—and scads of money is the last thing I will ever turn my hand over to get. So there you are.

And yet you make me so happy I beat my wings against the cage and peep out at you every minute and try the bars, and wonder and wonder—and wonder. If we can't have a courtship—and—marriage—we must have some kind of a lovely adventure, like bringing out a book together or co-laborating^ on a play or something. Or we must get lost in a snowstorm together or I must rescue you from drowning, or you must nurse me through a great sickness on the edge of a desert or something. We must have some kind of a mutual-living-and-breathing—before we part—before the book of friendship “softly closes.”⁵

Sara I enjoy you so—you stand in this very room at my side—I can see you there by the door. You are such a good gift and you have brought no pain or ill thoughts or calamity, you are my dear fellow-dreamer, my sister-and-playmate in fairyland. We must write each other many beautiful poems.

Say—if we don't have a big fight in two years—lets^ publish a book that will just be a sort of conversation in rhyme. Gloriana to Nick—Nick to Gloriana, and lets^ leave out everything of the roses and rose-leaf variety—just a good friendship between femininity and male beliggerency^ as it were—so people that read it would feel just as they feel when they see Pavlova and Mordkin together or Southern^ and Marlowe, or when they saw Irving and Terry.⁶

And I could put in the portrait of you—and you the portrait of me. Now that would be more interesting than a wedding—and take longer. And it would sure take shrewd editing, buy^ the time it suited us both. Almost as many comprimises^ as housekeeping!

We ought to just write what we please—and then at the end of two years—alternate the pieces in some sort of fairly logical order without forcing them.

Anyhow—lets^ weave some kind of a basket—sometime—if we cannot make a birds nest with birdies.

I want to keep you my playmate a long time—at whatever appears the lordliest game.

Goodnight—dear heart, dear Saraphim.

Very Sincerely

N.V.L.

[P.S.] Do you know how I remember you best? And most gladly? The picture of you the last morning at Saxons,⁷ among the white Fleur-de-lis. Your face so spirited and beautiful.

Notes

¹For the Roe family, see Letter 101. For VL's reference to noise, see Letter 11.

²Elsie and Marjorie Logan, younger daughters of Caroline B. Mahoney and Dr. Thomas Dale Logan (born 1851), pastor of Springfield's prestigious First Presbyterian Church, were lifelong friends and confidantes of VL.

³For Anna Pavlova, see Letter 33. In 1910, Pavlova danced at the Palace Theatre, London, and at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, with Mikhail Mordkin as her partner.

⁴Compare Matthew 10:16. See Letter 27.

⁵VL alludes to Charles Hanson Towne's poem, "Nevertheless," which is published in the May 1914 issue of *Current Opinion* and collected in Towne's *Beyond the Stars and Other Poems* (1914). The poem suggests that lovers are unaware of potential tragedies in human relationships: "And she forgot the thorns amid the roses, / Forgot that sometimes Love's book softly closes" (see Letter 97).

⁶In 1904, Julia Marlowe (1866-1950) and E[dward] H[ugh] Sothern (1859-1933) began acting together in Chicago in *Romeo and Juliet*, commencing a long stage partnership; they were married in 1911. Dame Ellen Alicia Terry (1847-1928) had an equally famous stage partnership with Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905), although they never married. For more on Marlowe, see Letter 1.

⁷That is, Saxton Farm: see Letter 100.

103) "No letter till tonight . . ."

Wednesday afternoon
[May 13, 1914]

Dear Saraphim:
Tell me just what you think of this revision.

N.V.L.

No letter till tonight!

[Enclosure: "The *Santa-Fé Trail."]

104) "It is wicked to waste friends, or be careless with them . . ."

Springfield Ill.
May 13, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim:

Tonight Jen's^ *Jensen & Wife, & daughter Mrs. Wheeler were back in town and insisted on having me to eat at the Leland.¹ Then they obtained [~~got~~] from me a promise to recite for the Friends of American Landscape on June 13th in a piece of woods north of Chicago. *Harriet will probably be there and several other friends. Last year I wrote and read for them Hawk of the Rocks. It was twice as long at that time, as the version you banished from me^ book.² I will have a much more effective performance this time, having learned to roar. Jensen wants the *Santa Fe Trail, and perhaps the *Chinese Nightengale will be done. But that will be rushing matters—since it is only a month. I made Jensen promise to get me some kind of a Chicago engagement to pay my way, a day beforehand, so I would not be dependent on the Friends of American Landscape, since I would like to move in that body as a regular member, and pay dues if possible, and be self-respecting and really cooperating. He insisted they would be glad to foot the bills—but I prefer the other way.

And now one of my boys at Knox—sends me such an absolutely clamorous letter—I may go there from Bloomington. He wants me the Wednesday immediately following. He is the Poet-Caddy-master at Charlevoix summer time, and quite the hero at Knox I understand, and has built up quite a cult for me there. Really, I had not the heart to refuse, especially after his mother laid siege to me in the library this afternoon.

I know you will laugh when I tell you I have forty letters to answer tomorrow. Be sure I will be ruthless and send as many of them straight to the waste-basket [~~if I~~] as I can.

Sara—when I have such good strong new friends as Jensen—and old friends as *Rickaby at Knox I am quite put out to try to be steady and true to them, and stop and realize them as it were, and take the goods that God provides. It is wicked to waste friends, or be careless with them. God help me to keep and be true to all I get that really care for me.

The *Vrooman's have been steadily and seriously friends a long time, and that's^ why I must go to Bloomington.

I devoutly hope all boards will be cleared so I can begin on the Nightengale day after tomorrow. I have eight pages of catch-phrases and notes.

Jensen appears to me to be a real man. And its^ great to have a real man for a friend.

I sent your kind message to Mary *Humphrey tonight.

Dear Heart—dear Saraphim—playmate in fairyland—God bless you—and good night.

But I must tell you the ladies of Mama's little literary club³ here ordered her state-room all bowered with roses through a Seattle firm all unbeknownst to her. How surprised and happy she will be. She will most weep—who is generally pretty stoical.

With love

Goodnight—N.V.L.

Notes

¹At this time, the Leland was one of Springfield's finest hotels. It was located just a few short blocks from the Lindsay home, at the corner of Capitol Avenue and 6th Street, just one block south of VL's father's downtown office. The hotel dining room was one of VL's favorite "haunts" from the time he was in ward school (that is, grade school). See Olive Lindsay-Wakefield, "Vachel Lindsay, Disciple." *The Shane Quarterly* 5 (1944): 184. Also see Letter 142.

²VL refers to his poem "The Black Hawk War of the Artists" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 190-192), soon to be published in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry Magazine* (July 1914): see Letter 127. The poem was included in *The *Congo and Other Poems*, in spite of ST's disapproval.

³For "Mama's little literary club," see Letter 14 (note 5).

105) "It looks like one-Hel-of-a-Jamboree up at Bloomington . . ."

Springfield Ill.
May 15, 1914.

My Dear Saraphim:

I spent this morning reading *Untermeyer's Book¹ with Mary *Humphrey and her sister Maude whose nickname very properly is Rosebud. Well—I told the girls you might be here a few hours June 5 and they are bent on entertaining you. So is the daughter of *Lyssippus who had me at a dinner with my friends the enemy last night. And so I told Mary Humphrey—and our plan is that if the Daughter of L. can be caught on the wing she is to be included somewhere in the afternoon. She is really the one most worth starting with in Springfield, after these other two, these Humphreys. They may both be at the *Pagent, by the way, both Humphreys. And they will make grand and discreet Chaperones for Springfield, and your mother will highly approve of them both, if she gets sight of them. I told Mary you expected to try to call her up while she was in St. Louis, if your father's condition permitted, and she made her prettiest bow.

The daughter of Lyssipus would make an even more entertaining hostess, but she would go at it a little too hard, for a starter, and isn't as sure—rain or shine, as the notable Humphrey.

We can probably have the Humphrey machine for part of the afternoon if we want it and if anything happens to that family—why I will just roust out the *Johnsons. A hurry call doesn't worry them a bit. As a matter of fact they are a little better taken that way.

Well—what else? Oh yes. Write to me—Care of Mrs. Carl *Vrooman, Bloomington—the letter to arrive before Monday afternoon. I leave there Tuesday morning for Galesburg. After the Monday letter—write to me at Knox College, Galesburg Illinois, care of Franz *Rickaby—letter to arrive by Thursday afternoon, [~~Then~~] or Friday morning. Then—to Springfield again.

Sunday the 24th—in the Evening in the Big Methodist Church,² Springfield, I am going to have a real jamboree. This is all Pastor Piersel's idea—none of it my own. He is the same person who presented my poems to the big London Preacher. Well—I am going to distribute 3 to 400 copies of "Censers are Swinging Over the Town" to the audience via the ushers, and [~~read~~] recite the poem.³ Then [~~read~~] recite The *Building of Springfield. Then there will be a religious^ solo—"The City Foresquare^." Then I will recite the "*Congo." Then a quartet will sing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Then I will Recite^ General *Booth. Then a Quartet will sing "Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb," and the audience will join in the chorus. All this is Piersel's idea, and quite picturesque—me thinks.

As for meeting me half way at a middle point—it is a pretty idea, and may work sometime, but the Humphrey Scheme is far more practical. I really like it (the half-way scheme), but lets^ save it awhile.

If you can hold over with *Harriet—you might go to the Friends of our Native Landscape, June 13.⁴ But—being on the programme—I am likely to be a rotten cavalier^—I mean an awkward one, and you must be Harriet's beau and not mind me.

The pictures have just come.

Delighted—lady Bird. I choose the one on the road to the Spring. You must get some girl friend to take twenty five Kodak pictures of you close-to.—All kinds of snapshots, and then let me choose. Some are bound to be more vital and reminiscent than what the photographer does, and be sure that the corners of your forehead show 1/ \2 - and that your hair curls up over in my style, and your face looks long and grand. I like it much better so. It has real distinction so.

It looks like one-Hel-of-a-Jamboree up at Bloomington. So many different things have combined to advertise me there—that I will have a mighty solid audience—if not a large one. Mrs. Vrooman expects 100. I expect 75, but I'll bet they listen. A teacher over at Normal has lectured on my work—another Springfield teacher is over there. Rev. De Witt Jones has been blowing my horn for some time, and reciting my Pieces,⁵ Mrs. William Vaughn *Moody will be there, and Mrs. Vrooman of course will rally her clans. Also other things.

And it looks like the same situation up at Knox. The English Department has been rooting for me for some times, and there is quite a Springfield delegation.

I have taken your advice—and the Wind-mills are now “Singing”⁶—But as to the revised poem—No dear—I am not sure you are right. A poem 11 lines shorter—is always the better for it—if the 11 lines are not too much missed. I think it will make a crisper recitation now. I am going to read it awhile—the short style, anyhow—and then decide which shall go in the book.

I shouldn’t write to you midday like this. But I got all my correspondence off yesterday—and worked so hard and felt so virtuous that today I feel I have most earned a day. And I have just begun to get it through my head I am going to Bloomington.

Now Sara—thinking it over—I really oughtn’t to call up Mrs. Pettus.⁷ I—well—I guess I will. No—I musn’t. I want to write that *nightengale before you get to Springfield. I have all the first loose notes—now I must plunge into making the skeleton. These 8 pages of notes should be developed into twenty-five pages of nightengale. Then the 25 should be cut down to three pages. Then they should be read to the ten amiable listeners of Springfield. Then all their criticisms taken. Then the piece read to darling golden-eyed Saraphim for final revision. And none of this can be rushed. It takes time—and nothing else [~~but time~~] so much as Time.

Alone—In the Wind.⁸

I know a Seraph that has golden eyes—
 And hair of gold and body like the snow—
 Ah in the wind I dream her unbound locks
 Are blowing round me and desires sweet glow
 Has touched her proud keen face
 And wilful^ mein^—
 And though she steps as one in manner born
 To tread the forests of fair Paradise
 The usual Earthly woods it is she decks
 Wearing no crown of intricate device—
 But with bowed head—bent with her half-desire
 I see her in my memory's grey dream
 Walk glowing in the mists of earthly woods
 Beside a half-awakened pebbly stream.
 Within my dream I shake with a Spring flood
 That may be gone before the Spring-days go—
 And yet I kiss—with many laughing fays
 And hope that friendship will have deathless days—
 Her hair of gold, and sweet throat like the snow.

With esteem

N.V.L.

[Enclosure: Tribute verses to VL, dated “5/8/’14” and entitled “An Appreciation,” by “C. R. Piety.” The tribute begins: “Mr. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, / Fitting name for poet star . . .” and continues in praising VL’s sense of music and love for mankind. VL writes: “I sent an extra copy of this to your friend Jessie B. *Rittenhouse”; he marks two lines: “Few are brave and true reformers; / Most of them should be reformed.”]

Notes

¹For Untermeyer’s book, see Letter 116 (note 2).

²For VL’s performance at Springfield’s Methodist church, see Letter 111 (note 7).

³For VL’s “Censers,” see Letter 13.

⁴See the beginning of Letter 104.

⁵The *Bloomington Daily Bulletin* (May 17, 1914) announced VL’s impending visit and reported that “Rev. Edgar DeWitt Jones of this city” has been a supporter of VL for “some months.”

⁶See “The *Santa-Fé Trail” (l. 145).

⁷For “Mrs. Pettus,” see Letters 86, 88, and 101.

⁸This is the first version of VL’s “Alone in the Wind, on the Prairie” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 316). Also see next letter.

106) “Of course all this will make Springfield talk . . .”

Springfield Ill.
May 17, 1914.

Most adorable of Saraphims:

Your letter fills me with all kinds of agitations and delights and misgivings and I am in danger of writing to you all this Sunday morning. I hope to be briefer.

The *Vroomans want me Monday, instead of today.

Now there are all sorts of alternate plans—which I feel like bringing forward.

(1.) If you just want to escape Charlevoix as a main proposition, why not be awful sweet to Mary *Humphrey, and get her to invite you out to the Guinella^ Ranch in Colorado¹—where she and two of her sisters and Marian Roberts (Sister of the Daughter^ of Bob.) may spend the summer. They would prefer, of course, to fill up the Ranch-house with their own kind of folks like you, instead of Denver people. And adventures—my!—the Colorado air teems with them.

Draw Mary out on the subject when you meet her. She will be the head of the expedition, and I havn’t^ the least doubt she will invite you the minute she really likes you. And it is about the cheapest summer-resorting known. Mama and Papa have camped on that ranch for 15 years. You and the girls will of course board in the ranch-house.

Next—if its^ me you want to see—and its^ certainly you I want to see—why not get your scheming head to work seducing the Springfield girls with the magic of your ways till you get asked here? I am more or less on the job and think I probably should remain here till the folks get back.

Thirdly if you want to see me as much as I want to see you you will at least give Springfield a chance and see if you can get used to it. You don't know till you try and if you are properly launched, (and The Humphrey's could certainly launch you and in your own style) you will have a chance to see whether censors are actually swinging over the town.² If you can see the censors, maybe you would like to stay.

If you want to stay—there are three possibilities. First, and most preferred—*Joy's Room—just next to mine—East. There you could sit and write and take naps in my Great Grandmother's 4 poster—, and look out the windows at the Elm tree and the Governor's yard. Then you could run downstairs and go out and see the lady neighbors, all in walking distance, every time you were tired, or walk to the little library and read.

If its^ a park and park benches you want—we have a nice park within healthy walking distance, a lotus pond—and a (somewhat artificial) Spring. Of course I prefer to be the person who walks there with you—but its^ as you say. No. I am to be the person.

If you don't like Joy's Room—Harriet Bouldin's Room across the hall—will be empty soon (she is a High School teacher—and probably goes for good—this Summer.) In either case if you want me you can call me or knock on my door. I will come in to correct your poems, to criticise^ your low-combed hair or anything you ask. Or lace your shoes.

Of course all this will make Springfield talk—unless you are properly chaperoned or married or something.

We can take for our motto—the real translation of the Song of Song's refrain—

“I charge you, oh ye daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awaken love untill^ it please.”³

Of course this plan requires financing. We will have to jolly that family down stairs⁴—and they are really kind sweet people and anxious to please—so we will be sure of their twenty-five dollars. We will eat—excellent board across the street—with some very representative citizens of our little burg—none better. Not a mussy place at all. A librarian and a banker and a preacher, etc.

Next—I suppose—if you are a real devil at persuading, you can devise some way of getting me a little more income from me verses, by giving me a nightly cross-examination.

But the finances of the thing look sort of vague. I only know we have a quiet roof—for sure here. That is something. Next we can get the eats figured out, etc.

Of course I do not want to have you snuggled here in the next room—if there is some other MAN you are clamoring to see. If you cannot put a bridle on your heart for me and never unharness it—unless you sleep—it would perhaps be rather futile.

I am not particular about a Honeymoon or anything of the kind. That's what you will have to think out. I had much prefer to stick to the Springfield property—where I have a free roof over my head—where the family has credit, where I do not have to throw fits about money—but can go on making music all the livelong day—and all and all!

One of our flats in the back yard is vacant—and maybe—if you are inclined—we might try that. But it looks to me lots more trouble for people like us than this house already furnished and the Roe family apparently taking care of it. We would have to handle them very sweetly of course—to get them to let you in—but I will promise to sweep your room if you don't want to. That will make that part all right. I promised to sweep my own, b'gosh. I didn't do it, but then I promised, and that made it all right.

What we need is a twilight zone—half way between married & single—with a few occasional kissing privileges or something like that—without smothering each other. But the law and sassiety don't provide it, and so far as I can see we'd better get married - legal as it were—that is, a license—and a veil and flowers—if that pleases you—but not be married—but what one may say—almost engaged, with no one else on the preserves having the privilege of unbinding your hair or lacing your shoes.—Just now—I think it better to slowly and gently get acquainted, and be very cautiously learning each others' ways.

Sister Joy lived in that East Room and before her *Olive, from the time Olive was a little girl. I think it would be nice for you to live in there on the same terms and see you about as often—and borrow each others mucilage and ink and stamps once in awhile, but see each other mainly in the evenings.

Mama has been writing writing writing all her life. This house is accustomed to having a writing woman in it.

I wish there were some lightfooted way of your giving Springfield and things around here a gentle and considerate trial.

As to your plan there are three objections.

(1.) I do not want to leave this town. I am as fond of it as you are of New York.

(2.) I do not want to borrow Miss R's flat.⁵ I would go to the Cran's boarding house. I think it would be nice for you to have the flat. I would want Miss R. to know me better before I borrowed anything of hers.

(3.) I do not want to go to N.Y. and divide you with other gentlemen. If you belong to the other lad—I would not be happy on his preserves. Make up your mind who you belong to—and tell him and tell me, and go to the one or the other. This world is a place of choices.

4. Well—there were just three objections.

The *Metropolitan Magazine brings out The *Congo in August. That will sure stir up the animals, with so much preliminary publicity.

I have not yet congratulated you on the acceptance of the Fog in the Park poem and “To the Mother of a Poet poem.”⁶ I get glad and very proud when I think of these things. If after so much glory, you can descend to human fare, I send you a star.

[Drawing of a star.] Never never have I risen to the grandness of the old line magazines. Maybe I had best humbly kiss your hand.

Oh yes—the fourth objection: When I go to New York, I want to look J.H.W.⁷ straight in the eye and have him for a friend. That cannot be if I am poaching. He must know and I must know—and it must be settled where you belong. Certainly I am not going to pull up stakes and whirl to the great and terrible city and smash all my habits thoughts, ideas, plans and egotistical and selfish hopes—all for a lady that could pretty well be as happy with him as with me. If its^ me you really care for, you will care for the rock from which I was hewn, and the pit from which I was digged.

Am I getting rough and untoward? Child I love your letter—nothing has stirred me with so much happiness and strange expectation for many a day. But you plan things so amply and quickly, the same little brains that laid one plan—can lay another.

Read this letter over—and think up a comprimise^.

And above all—we must not be too impatient. You are going to be beautiful and young to the day you die. We are here to enjoy each other and not to be impatient. Nothing is good in an awful hurry, especially if it kills the Goose that lays the golden egg—. I do not mean this financially. But you and I need not think that this summer and fall is our last chance for privacy and companionship. We must be patient with the days. This year for me, has been very sweet and fine with your presence—and it has scarcely begun. What deep dark secret do you hide from me—that threatens to part us forever? None—I'll venture. Only fidgety misgivings. My life will not be hustled. I learned that long ago. If I take everything in its due time—then many sweet surprises come. We must not hurry the green fruit, knowing it grows more sun-kissed every day. Our kindness for each other must last many years if possible. Let us live on the interest, not the principal.

Alone—In the Wind.⁸

I know a Seraph that has golden eyes—
 And hair of gold, and body like the snow.
 Here in the wind I dream her unbound locks
 Are blowing round me, that desire's sweet glow
 Has touched her proud keen face and willful mein^—
 And though she steps as one in manner born
 To tread the forests of fair Paradise,
 She [~~loves these~~] chooses earthly wood-paths to adorn.
 Here, with bowed head, bashful [~~beant~~] with [~~her~~] half-desire
 I see her in my memory's deep dream,
 Walk glowing in the misty, ferny woods
 Beside a half-awakened pebbly stream.
 My veins are stirred with love-and-friendships flood
 I fear its going ere the spring days go—
 Yet pray these glories may have deathless days
 And kiss her hair, and sweet throat like the snow.

I want those photographs. Hurry, Oh Photographs. I suppose you are on the road!

Mama told me—well—I will tell you what Mama told me—after you answer this letter.

Who—are the Dawsons?⁹

Good morning—Pretty lady,

N.V.L.

[Enclosures: (1) Newspaper clipping—article about and picture of Lucy *Bates, mentioning VL's tribute poem, "How a Little Girl Danced." (2) Newspaper clipping about Springfield's many attributes, including "a real poet, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay." Both clippings are from Springfield's *Illinois State Register* (May 16, 1914).]

Notes

¹For the "Guanella Ranch," Colorado, see Letter 1 (note 12).

²For the "censers," see Letter 13.

³Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

⁴That is, the Roe family: see Letter 101.

⁵*Rittenhouse, Jessie B.

⁶ST's "Spring Night" begins: "The park is filled with night and fog": see Letter 9. For "The Mother of a Poet," see Letter 14.

⁷*Wheelock, John Hall.

⁸Second version: see previous letter.

⁹Miles Dawson was the treasurer of the *Poetry Society of America. VL and ST will spend an idyllic afternoon at the Dawson country home, Cornwall-on-the-Hudson: see Letters 132, 137, 139, 148, 162, and 232. Also see Letter 196.
