

Rhythm At Twilight

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Manhattan's pulse throbs in the twilight.
As her light-studded avenues glow in the cool blue of dusk
She pulsates with noise.
Good sounds pour from her throat,
The cough of motors,
The gurgle of laughing women,
The shout of brakes and sellers of news.
Mists rise from her teeming mobs and veil her sun-warmed buildings.
And a strange lullaby creeps over her tired face.
Her bridges sway with rumbling feet and wheels
And a kind of waiting descends.
Manhattan is waiting for her night to begin
 She is waiting in front of gaudy drug stores
 And in restaurants, flooded with the tinkle of glasses and weary voices,
 And in train stations.
 She waits, and the thrill of what is to come is veiled with waves of
 chatter . . . rising . . . then falling back into a new wave.
And then the waiting ends.
 The Waldorf, Leon and Eddies, Shrafft's, the Automat, Joe's Place, and
 Walgreen's
 Have fed the waiters
 And Manhattan's maze of crosstown arteries and avenues
 And nerve centers of squares and intersections
 Again throb with those who no longer wait.
Green and red and yellow bulbs flash on,
Fabulous names course the Broadway marquees,
The generation's fame is gaudily spread for the waiter to stare upon and judge.
And the rhythm begins.
 Shiny, black hands rock over oblong, ivory keys in a fashionable uptown
 club,
 And rows of snowy teeth gleam from creased black faces
 As the sallow-faced men and their woman of the evening
 Huddle in a smoke-filled booth, not feeling the rhythm,
 Trying for a cheap passion that possesses none of the beauty
 Of the black rhythm.
And there is a long, slender grand piano on the stage at Carnegie—
An ugly little man in black and white leans and hovers over the keyboard

Pressing lovely sounds into the stillness:
The rhythm here is delicate, fanciful, intricate
Obscure as the sea and the wind and the clouds.
Here is the fury of storms, the throttled choking of a sullen sea, the
 splash of water, falling from great heights,
Yet rhythm as strange and thrilling as the tom-tom beat of the uptown
 club,
The rhythm of the theater foyer.
A new musical is born, and a million throats whistle a song
On the following day.
And the song is heard in the streets.
 The heretics cackle—
 The prostitutes laugh—
 The soldier whistles a strange little tune
As he hurries, hands in pockets, to a rendezvous.
The song swells in the whispers of lovers
Standing in each other's arms in the shadows of Central Park,
The hoof click of the hansom horse, waiting for the lights to change
 at Seventieth Street,
The music of a Negro's laugh,
The gurgle of the infant,
And the oily East River, latent and deep as it lies at the side of a moon-
 cooled city.

Oh, the rhythm of this city—
The symphony of hours, the perfection of her lines
Her steel bridges, her cloud-crowned buildings
Her tapestry of dark, cavernous streets
Her dirty lines of clothes, tying tenements together
Her cases of jewels, bars of dust in Pennsylvania Station
Her smudged, rainy skyline. like an etching that has been dropped in the rain,
Or her sparkling, riotous skyline all silver and shimmering
With bands of color pinned to her horizon at twilight.
And the sea, washing onto the city's hot breast in easy waves of sound and
 loveliness,
Casting bright shells onto her naked, gray sands,
Its blue foam pulsating at the base of her greatness,
The sea that encases New York is a piece of dishevelled indigo velvet
Gently placed about a gleaming jewel.
And the beat and eternal wash of the sea is the rhythm of the city's heart
And its people sway in that rhythm.