And there were days . . .
Days I loved . . .
When big machines
Came to my street
Tearing the earth
Of the vacant lot
With their great noise . . .
Erupting the soil,
Leaving long furrows
For the seeds of a new house.

And how I loved those days . . .
Walking to the edge
Of young dreams,
Where each mound
Torn from the bottomless pit
Became the peaks of the Pyrenees . . .
Deserts of the Sahara . . .
And, on rainy days,
The basin of the Nile . . .
The mudflats of the Amazon

Of longing until the bricks came.
When muddy hands
Sculptured castles medieval . . .
Roads to the Orient . . .
Paths for the soul to wander.
Ah, but then a tear
Rolled down a sandy cheek.
For too soon . . . too terribly soon
Did the seeds grow
And transparent people come to live.
People . . people planting . . changing
A boyhood world of fantasy
Into a tomb of lost dreams,
Filled with broken webs
Of shattered moods . . . ruptured joys
Changed that world of laughter
Into a mailing address.
“Occupant. . . .
Such and such a number . . .
So and so street.”

Green water-grass shot up
On the grave of great joy.
Death, proclaimed in technicolor
By rainbow flower-beds.
And whenever the little boy passed . . .
Passed the cemetery of lost days . . .
The grave of days gone down
With Columbus and Cortez,
With Sherman, Grant, and Lee . . .
There was seen an epitaph.

The last remains sanctified . . .
There for the lad to see . . .
A little sign,
Bathed in forlorn faces,
Bathed in long-drawn memories,
Lost and found again . . .
Boldly called back from the dead.
There, in that little sign . . .
Those unforgettable four words.
“Keep off the grass!”

—A. J. CLEVELAND, JR.