

[by Maryory Stoneman Douglas]

BUILDERS

There was the jewelled green of tropic trees,
There was the river, sparkling to the bay,
There was the crystal skies infinities
And lonely dawns of many a crystal day.
Westward, the open Glades, remote, green-grey,
Eastward the radiant, shifting sapphire sea
Wave-wash, wind beat, bird call and silence endlessly.

Until the buzzards, circling slow, that swung,
Etched sharp and inky in the silver air,
Broke into fluttering at the clangor rung
With metal strokes upon clear metal there.
And then the shattered silence seemed more rare.
Since it had passed forever. Nevermore
Such utter soundlessness should breathe along this shore.

Picks clinking, ringing as they lift and sweep
And clattered shovels, shouting, curses, cries,
The nail shod shoes of singing negroes keep
A steady monotone. The axes rise,
Trees crash and fall and hammers then begin
Their brisk staccato, beating sharply over all the din.

Then came the linked and ringing rails of steel,
Tying this outpost to the smoking towns,
And locomotives, whose long eery squeal,
Ripped through the tropic night and its soft sounds

(THE BUILDERS)

Racing across the pinelands, iron hounds
Coursing with clamor that far fleeting hare
Distance that they desire, straining to snatch and tear.

That was the opening page of this, our city,
Mothered by beauty such as earth makes known,
Fathered by all the greed of men, hot, gritty,
Eager to mark this also as his own.

Unpainted shacks, tin awnings, swift had grown
Upon the scarred, cleared places, ugly, cheap,
Man cannot reach great beauty with one sudden leap.

Ant hills that grow to some fine symmetry
Corals that branche in slow and stoney bloom,
Fireflies that stitch a glitt'ring tapestry,
Follow a pattern lovely as old doom
So all the choked and huddled lives of men
Build in their cities beauty born in spite of them.

Somehow a pattern, worked in new cement,
In brick, in pine boards and in plaster, grew,
And still the sky curved when men, vehement,
Shouted and struggled and the town was new.
Much wasted effort, frothings, foamings, few
That looked beyond next week, or the week after,
And there was horseplay, lynchings, murder, love and
laughter.

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Masons and merchants, tailors, plumbers, ad men,
Tourists and priests and lawyers, negroes, Greeks,
Crowded the streets with good men and with bad men
Just as spring freshets boil down empty creeks,
And where had been the jungle there were reeks
From spoiling garbage, gasoline and train smoke
And miles of roofs shone wetly when the rains broke.

But white and shining, whiter still and better
The streets were carven and new walls were raised,
Spelling from out of chaos the first letter
Of all that beauty some day shall see phrased,
In spite of waste and shoddy thought and slattern
Cleaving through clutter to some hidden, half-guessed
pattern.

Gardens and gracious lawns and new set trees,
Swept streets and shiney, careful subdivisions,
Tuned somehow nearer to high harmonies,
A city builded of ten thousand visions,
Ten thousand guesses, held against derision,
A city rising to a mighty future
Greater than all men's dreams that gave it nurture.