

James Rorty

CITY FEAR

Last night,
Standing outside the door of my house,
I saw the white face of the city, lying asleep in the mist
Dreaming, with blind eyes turned inward.
Last night,
Listening outside the door of my house I heard
The silence of the dreaming city
Listening and attending to its dream.
Rigidly the lamp-posts waited in stiff rows, silent.
And the street-lamps spread white blotches in the mist;
Hoo..... on the river a ferry-boat hoo.....
While on the roof-tops the cats
Paused, paw in air.....
Sheltered in silence, the listening city
Cowered and trembled lest Terror be loosened;
Clung to its dream lest the red ghost of Fear
Leap from the darkness, clamoring,
Bound and ricochet down the empty avenues,
Scatter the cats on the roof-tops,
Flicker the lights of the sentinel lamp-posts,
Beat on the faces of sleepers until
Up through the roofs a million voices rise,
Wailing, "I am alone,"
Screaming, "I am afraid!"

Liberator, June 1923, p. 10