



Street in Packingtown

**Willa Cather**



# Street in Pakingtown

## Willa Sibert Cather

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IN the gray dust before a frail gray shed,  
By a board fence obscenely chalked in red,  
A gray creek willow, left from country days,  
Flickers pallid in the haze.

Beside the gutter of the unpaved street,  
Tin cans and broken glass about his feet,  
And a brown whisky bottle, singled out  
For play from prosier crockery strewn about,  
Twisting a shoestring noose, a Polack's brat  
Joylessly torments a cat.

His dress, some sister's cast-off wear,  
Is rolled to leave his stomach bare.  
His arms and legs with scratches bleed;  
He twists the cat and pays no heed.  
He mauls her neither less nor more  
Because her claws have raked him sore.  
His eyes, faint-blue and moody, stare  
From under a pale shock of hair.

Neither resentment nor surprise  
Lights the desert of those eyes --  
To hurt and to be hurt; he knows  
All he will know on earth, or need to know.

But there, beneath his willow-tree,  
His tribal, tutelary tree,  
The tortured cat across his knee,  
With hate, perhaps, a threat, maybe,  
Lithuania looks at me.