

# The Inside Story

**On William Saroyan**

**By William Saroyan**

**Illustrated**

**by William Saroyan**



*Hundreds of thousands of people regard me, I believe, as something of a success: A well-dressed, well-fed young writer, famous for his ties, who has moved upward and forward in the world of letters with a speed veering on the imperceptible; an Oriental whose name has become a word in the English language. Saroyan, n., one with money, a gentleman, a scholar, an artist; v., to slay, butcher, club, strafe, bombard, or cause to spin; adj., pleasing, ill-mannered, gallant; prep., near-by, within, over, under, toward.*

**STAGE**  
November, 1940 \* p. 66



*What, however, is the inside story? What is the truth? Who is the real Saroyan? Is he a success, or a failure? I will go over the entire saga from there to here chronologically:*

- 1908** Born, squawked.
- 1909** Inarticulate, squawked.
- 1910** Stepped on beer bottle, cut foot, squawked.
- 1911** Laughed; burned finger, squawked; laughed; fell off chair, squawked; laughed; chased a rabbit, didn't catch it, squawked.
- 1912** Run over by a bicycle, squawked.
- 1913** Taken to kindergarten, squawked.
- 1914** Handed book and asked to read, squawked.
- 1915** Began to think, squawked.
- 1916** Moved 200 miles, squawked.
- 1917** Became William Saroyan, squawked.
- 1918** Asked question: What is life? Got no answer, squawked.
- 1919** Began to change the world, using a bicycle, a baseball bat, and a pair of pliers.

In 1920 I fell in love with the loveliest creature that ever breathed. A dancer at the Hippodrome Theatre, small, dark, and dainty as the devil. I decided to marry her immediately and let the rest of the world go one-two-three-four, as the saying is. Did I marry her? No. I didn't even talk to her. I followed her one night from the Hippodrome Theatre to a little broken-down house on O Street where she had a room. I stood in front of the house until both my feet went to sleep, but that was all. She left town three days later, and I haven't seen her since. They tore the house down about three years ago. I don't know what happened to her. What happened to me was awful.

- 1921** Clipped many coupons, received much mail, read many brochures.

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)

In 1923 I bought a typewriter. Decided to write the greatest story ever written. Did not do so.

In 1924 I again decided to write the greatest story ever written. Did not do so.

**1925** Left school. Went to work on a vineyard north of Sanger. Learned a little Mexican and a little Japanese.

**1926** Moved to San Francisco. Capital: thirty cents. Got a job at the Fior D'Italia Market evening of arrival, earned five dollars the following day, Saturday. Monday I got a job at the Southern Pacific. Decided to write the greatest story ever written. Did not do so. Quit the job after three weeks. Took a boat to Los Angeles. Boat sank a year later, twenty-two lives lost. Joined the National Guards for two weeks, Monterey and meals.

**1927** Went back to San Francisco. Lived at Public Library.

**1928** Went to N. Y. by bus. Suitcase containing \$80 sent to Memphis by mistake. Broke. Got job day of arrival. World still unchanged. Borrowed two dollars, lost it in a black-jack game. Stood in front of a restaurant, slept in the office on two chairs. Suitcase arrived after two months.

**1929** Returned to San Francisco. Lost a tooth. Gambled. Luck lousy.

**1930** Wrote the greatest story ever written. Got it back with a rejection slip. Rejected rejection slip.

**1931** Wrote it again. Got it back.

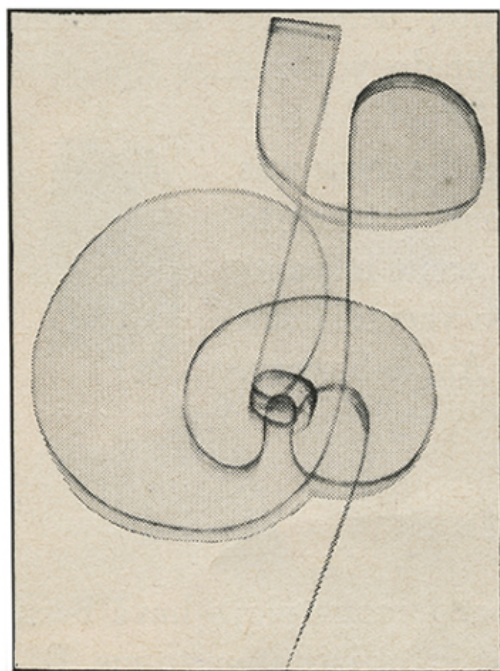
**1932** Wrote it again. Got it back. One day that year I didn't have a penny. I walked four miles to town. Got in a five-handed rummy game. High-hand paid. My hand was high-hand. Laid the cards out in front of me. A near-sighted player who believed his hand was high-hand paid for the game: twenty-five cents. I won three games straight. Went next door and bet Nankin and Volta Maid to win, a fifty-cent combination. They won. Got back \$15. Great triumph.

Went around town spending money and swearing. Got in a draw-poker game, intending to win enough money to go to Mexico. Went broke on the first hand. Held four sevens. Winning hand four aces.

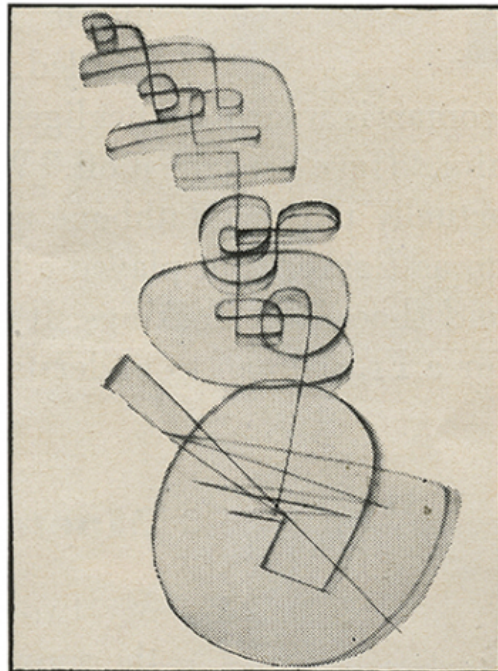
**1933** Wrote the greatest story ever written. Had no stamps. Borrowed a quarter, mailed it to *Story*. Accepted. Got busy. Got \$15.

**1934** Story published. Book published. Very angry. And so on and so forth.

Any who like may regard me as a success, but I know better. Any time you hold four sevens the first hand and lose to four aces, you're a failure.



1908: BORN, SQUAWKED



1911: DIDN'T CATCH RABBIT