

O a word to clear one's path ahead endlessly!
 O something ecstatic and undemonstrable! O music wild!
 O now I triumph—and you shall also;
 O hand in hand—O wholesome pleasure—O one more desirer
 and lover!
 O to haste firm holding—to haste, haste on with me.

SONG OF MYSELF

I

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this
 air,

Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their
 parents the same,

I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
 Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
 Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never
 forgotten,

I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
 Nature without check with original energy.

2

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are
 crowded with perfumes,

I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
 The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let
 it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the
 distillation, it is odorless,

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
 I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and
 naked,

I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,
 Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch
 and vine,

My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the
 passing of blood and air through my lungs,
 The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and
 dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
 The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies
 of the wind,

A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,
 The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs
 wag,

The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the
 fields and hill-sides,

The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising
 from bed and meeting the sun.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd
 the earth much?

Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin
 of all poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are
 millions of suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look
 through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in
 books,

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things
 from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

3

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of
 the beginning and the end,

But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,

Nor any more youth or age than there is now,

And will never be any more perfection than there is now,

Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Urge and urge and urge,
 Always the procreant urge of the world.
 Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance
 and increase, always sex,
 Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.
 To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.
 Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well
 entretied, braced in the beams,
 Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,
 I and this mystery here we stand.
 Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is
 not my soul.
 Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
 Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.
 Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,
 Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while
 they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.
 Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man
 hearty and clean,
 Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall
 be less familiar than the rest.
 I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;
 As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through
 the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy
 tread,
 Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the
 house with their plenty,
 Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at
 my eyes,
 That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
 And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
 Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and
 which is ahead?

4

Trippers and askers surround me,
 People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward
 and city I live in, or the nation,

The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old
 and new,
 My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
 The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,
 The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or
 loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
 Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news,
 the fitful events;
 These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
 But they are not the Me myself.
 Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
 Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
 Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain
 rest,
 Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
 Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering
 at it.
 Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog
 with linguists and contenders,
 I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.

5

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase
 itself to you,
 And you must not be abased to the other.
 Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
 Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or
 lecture, not even the best,
 Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.
 I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
 How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd
 over upon me,
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
 tongue to my bare-stript heart,
 And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held
 my feet.
 Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
 that pass all the argument of the earth,
 And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,

And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
 women my sisters and lovers,
 And that a kelson of the creation is love,
 And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
 And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
 And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein
 and poke-weed.

6

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with
 full hands;
 How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any
 more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful
 green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
 A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
 Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we
 may see and remark, and say *Whose?*

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the
 vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
 And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow
 zones,
 Growing among black folks as among white,
 Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same,
 I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
 It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
 It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
 It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon
 out of their mothers' laps,
 And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old
 mothers,
 Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
 Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
 And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for
 nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and
 women,
 And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken
 soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
 And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
 The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
 And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at
 the end to arrest it,
 And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
 And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

7

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
 I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I
 know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd
 babe, and am not contain'd between my hat and boots,
 And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,
 The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
 I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal
 and fathomless as myself,
 (They do not know how immortal, but I know.)

Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and
 female,

For me those that have been boys and that love women,
 For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be
 slighted,

For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and
 the mothers of mothers,

For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
 For me children and the begetters of children.

Whore! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,

In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder'd bones,
 In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold shapes,
 In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great monsters
 lying low,

In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,
 In vain the snake slides through the creepers and logs,
 In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the woods,
 In vain the razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador,
 I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

32

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so
 placid and self-contain'd,
 I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
 They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
 Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania
 of owning things,
 Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of
 years ago,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
 They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in
 their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,
 Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?

Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
 Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
 Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,
 Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrances,
 Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on
 brotherly terms.

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my
 caresses,

Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
 Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
 Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly
 moving.

His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
 His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around
 and return.

I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
 Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
 Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

33

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
 What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
 What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
 And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the
 morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
 I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
 I am afoot with my vision.

By the city's quadrangular houses—in log huts, camping with
 lumbermen,
 Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet
 bed,

Wending my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips,
 crossing savannas, trailing in forests,

Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,
 March'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down
 the shallow river,

Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where
 the buck turns furiously at the hunter,

Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where
 the otter is feeding on fish,

Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,
 Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the
 beaver pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail;

Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant,
 over the rice in its low moist field,

Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and
 slender shoots from the gutters,

Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over
 the delicate blue-flower flax,

Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there
 with the rest,

Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;
 Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged limbs,
 Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,
 Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,
 Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great goldbug drops through the dark,
 Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,
 Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides,
 Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle the hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;
 Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,
 Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,
 Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking composedly down,)
 Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand,
 Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,
 Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,
 Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,
 Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,
 Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;
 Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,
 Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,
 Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,
 Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,
 Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,
 At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, ball-dances, drinking, laughter,

At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw,
 At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,
 At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raising;
 Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,
 Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,
 Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare, where the cock is treading the hen,
 Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,
 Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,
 Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,
 Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding,
 Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh,
 Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,
 Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,
 Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,
 Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,
 Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs,
 Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,
 Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,
 Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,
 Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,
 Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or public hall;
 Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,
 Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,
 Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks seriously.

Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,
 Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist
 preacher, impress'd seriously at the camp-meeting;
 Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole
 forenoon, flattening the flesh of my nose on the thick plate
 glass,
 Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the
 clouds, or down a lane or along the beach,
 My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in
 the middle;
 Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind
 me he rides at the drape of the day.)
 Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or
 the moccasin print,
 By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish
 patient,
 Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a
 candle;
 Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,
 Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,
 Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,
 Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from
 me a long while,
 Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by
 my side,
 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
 Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the
 diameter of eighty thousand miles,
 Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its
 belly,
 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
 Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
 I tread day and night such roads.
 I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,
 And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.
 I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
 My course runs below the soundings of plummetts.
 I help myself to material and immaterial,
 No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.

I anchor my ship for a little while only,
 My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to
 me.
 I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-
 pointed staff, clinging to topples of brittle and blue.
 I ascend to the foretruck,
 I take my place late at night in the crow's-nest,
 We sail the arctic sea, it is plenty light enough,
 Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful
 beauty,
 The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the
 scenery is plain in all directions,
 The white-topt mountains show in the distance, I fling out my
 fancies toward them,
 We are approaching some great battle-field in which we are
 soon to be engaged,
 We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass
 with still feet and caution,
 As we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin'd city,
 The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities
 of the globe.
 I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,
 I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,
 I happen her all night to my thighs and lips.
 My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the
 train.
 They hitch my man's body up dripping and drown'd.
 I understand the large hearts of heroes,
 The courage of present times and all times,
 How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of
 the steam-ship, and Death chasing it up and down the
 storm.
 I was buckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was
 faithful of days and faithful of nights,
 I made it in large letters on a board, *Be of good cheer, we
 will not desert you;*
 I follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days
 and would not give it up,
 I saved the drifting company at last,

How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from
 the side of their prepared graves,
 How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the
 sharp-lipp'd unshaved men;
 All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes
 mine,
 I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
 The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry
 wood, her children gazing on,
 The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence,
 blowing, cover'd with sweat,
 The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the
 murderous buckshot and the bullets,
 All these I feel or am.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
 Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the
 marksmen,
 I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the
 ooze of my skin,
 I fall on the weeds and stones,
 The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,
 Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with
 whip-stocks.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
 I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become
 the wounded person,
 My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
 Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
 Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my
 comrades,

I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,
 They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me out.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush
 my sake,

Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy.
 White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads
 of their fire-caps,

The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.
 Distant and dead resuscitate,
 They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the
 clock myself.

I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,
 I am there again.

Again the long roll of the drummers,
 Again the attacking cannon, mortars,
 Again to my listening ears the cannon responsive.

I take part, I see and hear the whole,
 The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim'd shots,
 The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip,
 Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs,
 The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped
 explosion,

The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air.
 Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves
 with his hand,
 the gaps through the clot *Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments.*

34

How I tell what I knew in Texas in my early youth,
 How I tell the fall of Alamo,
 How I escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
 How I tell and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo,
 How I tell the tale of the murder in cold blood of four hundred and
 twelve young men.

How I tell they had form'd in a hollow square with their baggage
 in their works,
 How I tell lives out of the surrounding enemy's, nine times
 their number, was the price they took in advance,
 How I tell was wounded and their ammunition gone,
 How I tell for an honorable capitulation, receiv'd writing
 and, gave up their arms and march'd back prisoners of
 war.

How I tell the glory of the race of rangers,
 How I tell with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship,
 How I tell, generous, handsome, proud, and affectionate,

Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
 Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,
 Toss, sparkles of day and dusk—toss on the black stems that
 decay in the muck,
 Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
 I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams
 reflected,
 And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great
 or small.

50

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know
 it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes
 sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
 It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
 To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and
 sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal
 life—it is Happiness.

51

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
 And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?

Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,

(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a moment
 longer.)

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,
 (I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the distant

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with
 his supper?

Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too
 late?

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains
 of my gab and my loitering.

I am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
 I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
 I fling my likeness after the rest and true as any on the
 shadow'd wilds,

I become me to the vapor and the dusk.

I sweat as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
 I refine my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I burrow myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
 I want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,

But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,

And I will filter and fibre your blood.

When I am to fetch me at first keep encouraged,

When I am to bring me one place search another,

When I am to come somewhere waiting for you.