Walt Whitman

From *Song of Myself* (1855/1881)

10

Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt,  
Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,  
In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the night,  
Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-kill'd game,  
Falling asleep on the gather'd leaves with my dog and gun by my side.

The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud,  
My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for  me,  
I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time;  
You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far  west, the bride was a red girl,  
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly  smoking, they had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging from their shoulders,  
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant beard and curls protected his neck, he held his bride by the hand,  
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,  
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,  
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,  
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,  
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,  
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse clean clothes,  
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,  
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;  
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,  
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

33

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 steamship, and Death chasing it up and down the storm,  
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,  
And chalk'd in large letters on a board, *Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;*

How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would not give it up,  
How he 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 life me forth.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,  
Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,  
White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared 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,  
He gasps through the clot *Mind not me — mind — the entrenchments*.

52

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

I too 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,  
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,  
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

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

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you 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 filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

“I Hear America Singing”

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,

Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,

The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,

The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,

The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,

The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,

The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,

The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,

Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Emily Dickinson

Because I could not stop for Death

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess – in the Ring –

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –

We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed us –

The Dews drew quivering and chill –

For only Gossamer, my Gown –

My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries –

 and yet Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity –

“This Is My Letter to the World”

This is my letter to the world,  
That never wrote to me,--   
The simple news that Nature told,   
With tender majesty.   
Her message is committed   
To hands I cannot see;   
For love of her, sweet countrymen,  
Judge tenderly of me!

“Tell all the Truth, but Tell it Slant”

Tell all the truth but tell it slant,  
Success in circuit lies,  
Too bright for our infirm delight  
The truth's superb surprise;   
  
As lightning to the children eased  
With explanation kind,  
The truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind.

“Much Madness is the Divinest Sense”

Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

’Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -

Assent - and you are sane -

Demur - you’re straightway dangerous -

And handled with a Chain -