

# **Memories of Lincoln**

**Walt Whitman**

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Haldeman-Julius Company, Kansas, 1915



TEN CENT POCKET SERIES NO. 351

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

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HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY  
GIRARD, KANSAS

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# MEMORIES OF LINCOLN

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He knew to bide his time,  
And can his fame abide,  
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,  
Till the wise years decide.  
Great captains, with their guns and drums.  
Disturb our judgment for the hour,  
But at last silence comes;  
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,  
Our children shall behold his fame.  
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,  
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,  
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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## FOREWORD

Whitman did not subject Lincoln to the literary but to the human motive. Lincoln does not become a literary figure by his touch. Does not become a man in a book. After Whitman is done with him Lincoln still remains Lincoln. No way reduced. No way aggrandized. Only better understood. His background does not become a book. His background remains what it was. Remains life. Generic life. As life is where life finds life at the root. I may let

Whitman put in a word for himself. Whitman said to me of Lincoln:

“Lincoln is particularly my man—particularly belongs to me; yes, and by the same taken I am Lincoln’s man: I guess I particularly belong to him: we are afloat in the same stream—we are rooted in the same ground.”

To know the Lincoln of Whitman you want to know the Whitman of Whitman. Whitman was literary. But he was not first of all literary. Or last of all literary. First of all he was human. He was not the leaves of a book. He was the bone and flesh of a man. Yes, he was that something or other not bone or flesh which is also of a man—which finally is the man. Simply literary analysis can make little out of Whitman. He does not yield to the scalpel. He is not to be resurrected from an inkpot. His voice falls in with the prophet voices. He was not unlettered. He knew the alphabet. But he kept all alphabetical, arrogance well in hand. The letter was kept in hand. The spirit was left free. You cannot buy a ticket for Athens or Weimar or Paris or London or Boston and reach Whitman. He is never reached in that circle. The literary centers do not lead to him. You have got to travel to him by another route. You go East and find the Buddhistic canticles. You consult the Zoroastrian avatars. And you take the word of Jesus for a great deal. And you may hit Socrates on the way. And you keep on with your journey, touching here and there in European history certain men, certain influences. Going into port now and then. Never going where men compete for literary judgment. Never where men set out to acquit themselves immortally as artists. Keeping forever close to the careless rhythms of original causes. So you go on. And go on. And by and by you arrive at Whitman. Not by way of the university. Not by way of Shakespeare. Not by way of the literary experts and adepts. But by human ways. To try to find Whitman by way of Shakespeare or Molière would be hopeless. I do not disparage the other routes to other men. I am only describing this route to Whitman. This route, which is the only route. Whitman chants and prays and soars. He is not pretty. He is only beautiful. He is not beautiful with the beauty of beauty. He is beautiful with the beauty of truth. The pen can easily miss Whitman. But the heart reaches him direct. Whitman is therefore the best route to Lincoln. The same process which provides Whitman for you provided Lincoln for. Whitman. Whitman said to me again about Lincoln:

“There was no reason why Lincoln should not have been a prophet rather than a politician; he was in fact a divine prophet-politician; in him for almost the first time prophecy had something to say in politics. I shouldn’t wonder but that in another age of the world Lincoln would have been a chosen man to lead in some rebellion against ecclesiastical institutions and religious form and ceremony.”

HORACE TRAUBEL



The main effect of this poem is of strong solemn, and varied music; and it involves in its construction a principle after which perhaps the great composers most work—namely, spiritual auricular analogy. At first it would seem to defy analysis, so rapt is it, and so indirect. No reference whatever is made to the mere fact of Lincoln’s death; the poet does not even dwell upon its unprovoked atrocity, and only occasionally is the tone that of lamentation; but, with the intuitions of the grand art, which is the most complex when it

seems most simple, he seizes upon three beautiful facts of nature, which he weaves into a wreath for the dead President's tomb. The central thought is of death, but around this he curiously twines, first, the early-blooming lilacs which the poet may have plucked the day the dark shadow came; next the song of the hermit thrush, the most sweet and solemn of all our songsters, heard at twilight in the dusky cedars; and with these the evening star, which, as many may remember, night after night in the early part of that eventful spring, hung low in the west with unusual and tender brightness. These are the premises whence he starts his solemn chant.

The attitude, therefore, is not that of being bowed down and weeping hopeless tears, but of singing a commemorative hymn, in which the voices of nature join, and fits that exalted condition of the soul which serious events and the presence of death induce.

JOHN BURROUGHS



## I. WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D

### 1

When lilacs last in the dooryard  
bloom'd,  
And the great star early droop'd in the  
western sky in the night,  
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with  
ever-returning spring.  
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to  
me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping  
star in the west,  
And thought of him I love.

### 2

O powerful western fallen star!  
O shades of night—O moody, tearful  
night!  
O great star disappear'd—O the black  
murk that hides the star!  
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—  
O helpless soul of me!  
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not  
free my soul.

### 3



In the dooryard fronting an old farmhouse  
near the white-wash'd  
palings,  
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with  
heart-shaped leaves of rich green,  
With many a pointed blossom rising  
delicate, with the perfume strong  
I love,  
With every leaf a miracle—and from  
this bush in the dooryard,  
With delicate-color'd blossoms and  
heart-shaped leaves of rich green,  
A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,  
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a  
song.

Solitary the thrush,  
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding  
the settlements,  
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,  
Death's outlet song of life, (for well  
dear brother I know,  
If thou wast not granted to sing thou  
would'st surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land,  
amid cities,  
Amid lanes and through old woods,  
where lately the violets peep'd  
from the ground, spotting the  
gray debris,  
Amid the grass in the fields each side of  
the lanes, passing the endless  
grass,  
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every  
grain from its shroud in the  
dark-brown fields uprisen,

Passing the apple-tree blows of white  
and pink in the orchards,  
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest  
in the grave,  
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and  
streets,  
Through day and night with the great  
cloud darkening the land,  
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags  
with the cities draped in black,  
With the show of the States themselves  
as of crape-veil'd women standing,  
With processions long and winding and  
the flambeaus of the night,  
With the countless torches lit, with the  
silent sea of faces and the unbarred  
heads,  
With the waiting depot, the arriving  
coffin, and the sombre faces,  
With dirges through the night, with the  
thousand voices rising strong  
and solemn,  
With all the mournful voices of the  
dirges pour'd around the coffin,  
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering  
organs—where amid these you  
journey,  
With the tolling, tolling bell's perpetual  
clang,  
Here, coffin that slowly passes,  
I give you my sprig of lilac.

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,  
Blossoms and branches green to coffins  
all I bring,  
For fresh as the morning, thus would  
I chant a song for you O sane  
and sacred death.  
All over bouquets of roses,

O death, I cover you over with roses and  
early lilies,  
But mostly and now the lilac that  
blooms the first,  
Copious I break, I break the sprigs  
from the bushes,  
With loaded arms I come, pouring for  
you,  
For you and the coffins all of you O  
death.)

8

O western orb sailing the heaven,  
Now I know what you must have meant  
as a month since I walk'd,  
As I walk'd in silence the transparent  
shadowy night,  
As I saw you had something to tell as  
you bent to me night after night,  
As you droop'd from the sky low down  
as if to my side, (while the other  
stars all look'd on,)  
As we wander'd together the solemn  
night, (for something I know  
not what kept me from sleep,)  
As the night advanced, and I saw on the  
rim of the west how full you  
were of woe,  
As I stood on the rising ground in the  
breeze in the cool transparent  
night,  
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was  
lost in the netherward black of  
the night,  
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied  
sank, as where you sad orb.  
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was  
gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,  
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your  
notes, I hear your call,

I hear, I come presently, I understand  
you,  
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous  
star has detain'd me,  
The star my departing comrade holds  
and detains me.

**10**

O how shall I warble myself for the  
dead one there I loved?  
And how shall I deck my song for the  
large sweet soul that has gone?  
And what shall my perfume be for the  
grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,  
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown  
from the Western sea, till there  
on the prairies meeting,  
These and with these and the breath of  
my chant,  
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

**11**

O what shall I hang on the chamber  
walls?  
And what shall the pictures be that I  
hang on the walls,  
To adorn the burial-house of him I  
love?

Pictures of growing spring and farms  
and homes,  
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown,  
and the gray smoke lucid and  
bright,  
With floods of the yellow gold of the  
gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun,  
burning, expanding the air,  
With the fresh sweet herbage under  
foot, and the pale green leaves  
of the trees prolific,  
In the distance the flowing glaze, the

breast of the river, with a wind-dapple  
here and there,  
With ranging hills on the banks, with  
many a line against the sky, and  
shadows,  
And the city at hand with dwellings so  
dense, and stacks of chimneys,  
And all the scenes of life and the workshops,  
and the workmen homeward  
returning.

## 12

Lo, body and soul—this land,  
My own Manhattan with spires, and  
the sparkling and hurrying tides,  
and the ships,  
The varied and ample land, the South  
and the North in the light, Ohio's  
shores and flashing Missouri,  
And ever the far-spreading prairies  
cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and  
haughty,  
The violet and purple morn with just-felt  
breezes,  
The gentle soft-born measureless light.  
The miracle spreading bathing all, the  
fulfill'd noon,  
The coming eve delicious, the welcome  
night and the stars,  
Over my cities shining all, enveloping  
man and land.

## 13

Song on, sing on you gray-brown bird,  
Sing from the swamps, the recesses,  
pour your chant from the bushes,  
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the  
cedars and pines.  
Sing on dearest brother, warble your  
reedy song,  
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost

woe.

O liquid and free and tender!  
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous  
singer!  
You only I hear—yet the star holds me,  
(but will soon depart,)  
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds  
me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd  
forth,  
In the close of the day with its light  
and the fields of spring, and the  
farmers preparing their crops,  
In the large unconscious scenery of my  
land with its lakes and forests,  
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after  
the perturb'd winds and the  
storms,)  
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon  
swift passing, and the  
voices of children and women,  
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw  
the ships how they sail'd,  
And the summer approaching with  
richness, and the fields all busy  
with labor,  
And the infinite separate houses, how  
they all went on, each with its  
meals and minutia of daily  
usages,  
And the streets how their throbbings  
throbb'd, and the cities pent—lo,  
then and there,  
Falling upon them all and among them  
all, enveloping me with the rest,  
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long  
black trail,  
And I knew death, its thought, and the  
sacred knowledge of death.  
  
Then with the knowledge of death as  
walking one side of me,

And the thought of death close-walking  
the other side of me,  
And I in the middle as with companions,  
and as holding the hands of  
companions,  
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night  
that talks not,  
Down to the shores of the water, the  
path by the swamp in the dimness,  
To the solemn shadowy cedars and  
ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest  
receiv'd me,  
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd  
us comrades three,  
And he sang the carol of death, and a  
verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,  
From the fragrant cedars and the  
ghostly pines so still,  
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,  
As I held as if by their hands my comrades  
in the night,  
And the voice of my spirit tallied the  
song of the bird.

*Come lovely and soothing death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,  
arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later delicate death.*

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and  
knowledge curious,  
And for love, sweet  
praise! praise!  
For the sure-enwinding arms of  
cool-enfolding death.  
Dark mother always gliding near with  
soft feet,  
Have none chanted for thee a chant of*

*fullest welcome?  
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee  
above all,  
I bring thee a song that when thou  
must indeed come, come unflatteringly.*

*Approach strong deliveress,  
When it is so, when thou hast taken  
them I joyously sing the dead,  
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,  
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.*

*From me to thee glad serenades,  
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee,  
adornments and feastings for  
thee,  
And the sights of the open landscape  
and the high-spread sky are fitting,  
And life and the fields, and the huge  
and thoughtful night.*

*The night in silence under many a star,  
The ocean shore and the husky whispering  
wave whose voice I know,  
And the soul turning to thee O vast and  
well-veil'd death,  
And the body gratefully nestling close  
to thee.*

*Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,  
Over the rising and sinking leaves, over  
the myriad fields and the prairies  
wide,  
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the  
teeming wharves and ways,  
I float this carol with joy, with joy to  
thee O death.*

## 15

*To the tally of my soul,  
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown  
bird,  
With pure deliberate notes spreading  
filling the night.*

*Loud in the pines and cedars dim,*



Clear in the freshness moist and the  
swamp-perfume,  
And I with my comrades there in the  
night.

While my sight that was bound in my  
eyes unclosed,  
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,  
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of  
battle-flags,  
Borne through the smoke of the battles  
and pierc'd with missiles I saw  
them,  
And carried hither and yon through  
the smoke, and torn and bloody,  
And at last but a few shreds left on the  
staves, (and all in silence),  
And the staves all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,  
And the white skeletons of young men,  
I saw them,  
I saw the debris and debris of all the  
slain soldiers of the war,  
But I saw they were not as was thought,  
They themselves were fully at rest, they  
suffer'd not,  
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the  
mother suffer'd,  
And the wife and the child and the musing  
comrade suffer'd,  
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

## 16

Passing the visions, passing the night,  
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades'  
hands,  
Passing the song of the hermit bird and  
the tallying song of my soul,  
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet  
varying ever-altering song,  
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes,  
rising and falling, flooding the

night,  
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning  
and warning, and yet again  
bursting with joy,  
Covering the earth and filling the  
spread of the heaven,  
As that powerful psalm in the night I  
heard from recesses,  
Passing, I leave thee lilac with  
heart-shaped leaves,  
I leave thee there in the dooryard,  
blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,  
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting  
the west, communing with  
thee,  
O comrade lustrous with silver face in  
the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements  
out of the night,  
The song, the wondrous chant of the  
gray-brown bird,  
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd  
in my soul,  
With the lustrous and drooping star  
with the countenance full of woe,  
With the holders holding my hand nearing  
the call of the bird,  
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and  
their memory ever to keep, for  
the dead I loved so well,  
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my  
days and lands—and this for his  
dear sake,  
Lilac and star and bird twined with the  
chant of my soul,  
There in the fragrant pines and the  
cedars dusk and dim.



## II. O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip  
is done,

The ship has weather'd every rack, the  
prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the  
people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the  
vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain  
lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! rise up and  
hear the bells;  
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for  
you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths  
—for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass,  
their eager faces turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the  
deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are  
pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has  
no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its  
voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes  
in with object won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.



### III. HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TODAY

*(May 4, 1865)*

Hush'd be the camps to-day,  
And soldiers let us drape our war-worn

weapons,  
And each with musing soul retire to  
celebrate,  
Our dear commander's death.  
No more for him life's stormy conflicts,  
Nor victory, nor defeat—no more time's  
dark events,  
Charging like ceaseless clouds across  
the sky.

But sing poet in our name,  
Sing of the love we bore him—because  
you, dweller in camps, know it  
truly.

As they invault the coffin there,  
Sing—as they close the doors of earth  
upon him—one verse,  
For the heavy hearts of soldiers.



#### **IV. THIS DUST WAS ONCE THE MAN**

This dust was once the man,  
Gentle, plain, just and resolute, under  
whose cautious hand,  
Against the foulest crime in history  
known in any land or age,  
Was saved the Union of these States.



#### **LYRICS OF THE WAR**

#### **BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!**

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles!  
blow!  
Through the windows—through doors  
—burst like a ruthless force.  
Into the solemn church, and scatter  
the congregation,  
Into the school where the scholar is  
studying;  
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no  
happiness must he have now

with his bride,  
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace  
ploughing his field or gathering  
his grain,  
So fierce you whirr and pound you  
drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles!  
blow!  
Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble  
of wheels in the streets;  
Are beds prepared for sleepers at night  
in the houses? no sleepers must  
sleep in those beds,  
No bargainers' bargains by day—no  
brokers or speculators—would  
they continue?  
Would the talkers be talking? would the  
singer attempt to sing?  
Would the lawyer rise in the court to  
state his case before the judge?  
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you  
bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles!  
blow!  
Make no parley—stop for no  
expostulation,  
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper  
or prayer,  
Mind not the old man beseeching the  
young man,  
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor  
the mother's entreaties,  
Make even the trestles to shake the  
dead where they lie awaiting the  
hearses,  
So strong you thump O terrible drums  
—so loud you bugles blow.

—

### **COME UP FROM THE FIELDS FATHER**

Come up from the fields father, here's  
a letter from our Pete,  
And come to the front door mother,

here's a letter from thy dear son.

Lo, 't is autumn,  
Lo, where the trees, deeper green,  
    yellower and redder,  
Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with  
    leaves fluttering in the moderate  
    wind,  
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang  
    and grapes on the trellis'd vines,  
(Smell you the smell of the grapes on  
    the vines?  
Smell you the buckwheat where the bees  
    were lately buzzing?)  
Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so  
    transparent after the rain, and with  
    wondrous clouds,  
Below too, all calm, all vital and  
    beautiful, and the farm prospers well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,  
But now from the fields come father,  
    come at the daughter's call,  
And come to the entry mother, to the  
    front door come right away.  
Fast as she can she hurries, something  
    ominous, her steps trembling,  
She does not tarry to smooth her hair  
    nor adjust her cap.  
Open the envelope quickly,  
O this is not our son's writing, yet his  
    name is sign'd,  
O a strange hand writes for our dear  
    son, O stricken mother's soul!  
All swims before her eyes, flashes with  
    black, she catches the main words  
    only,  
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the  
    breast, cavalry skirmish, taken  
    to hospital,*  
*At present low, but will soon be better.*

Ah now the single figure to me,  
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with  
    all its cities and farms,  
Sickly white in the face and dull in the

head, very faint,  
By the jamb of a door leans.

*Grieve not so, dear mother, (the  
justgrown daughter speaks through  
her sobs,  
The little sisters huddle around speechless  
and dismay'd,)  
See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete  
will soon be better.*  
Alas poor boy, he will never be better,  
(nor may-be needs to be better,  
that brave and simple soul,)  
While they stand at home at the door he  
is dead already,  
The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,  
She with thin form presently drest in  
black,  
By day her meals untouch'd, then at  
night fitfully sleeping, often  
waking,  
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing  
with one deep longing,  
O that she might withdraw unnoticed,  
silent from life escape and  
withdraw,  
To follow, to seek, to be with her dear  
dead son.



## THE WOUND-DRESSER

### 1

An old man bending I come among new  
faces,  
Years looking backward resuming in  
answer to children,  
Come tell us old man, as from young  
men and maidens that love me,  
(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat  
the alarum, and urge relentless  
war,  
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face

droop'd and I resign'd myself,  
To sit by the wounded and soothe them,  
or silently watch the dead;)   
Years hence of these scenes, of these  
furious passions, these chances,  
Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so  
brave? the other was equally  
brave;)   
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest  
armies of earth,  
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous  
what saw you to tell us?  
What stays with you latest and deepest?  
of curious panics,  
Of har'd-fought engagements or sieges  
tremendous what deepest  
remains?

2

O maidens and young men I love and  
that love me,  
What you ask of my days those the  
strangest and sudden your talking  
recalls,  
Soldier alert I arrive after a long march  
cover'd with sweat and dust,  
In the nick of time I come, plunge in the  
fight, loudly shout in the rush of  
successful charge,  
Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a  
swift-running river they fade,  
Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not  
on soldiers' perils or soldiers'  
joys,  
(Both I remember well—many the hardships,  
few the joys, yet I was  
content.)

But in silence, in dreams' projections,  
While the world of gain and appearance  
and mirth goes on.  
So soon what is over forgotten, and  
waves wash the imprints off the  
sand,  
With hinged knees returning I enter the



doors, (while for you up there,  
Whoever you are, follow without noise  
and be of strong heart.)  
Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,  
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,  
Where they lie on the ground after the  
battle brought in,  
Where their priceless blood reddens the  
grass the ground,  
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or  
under the roof'd hospital,  
To the long rows of cots up and down  
each side I return,  
To each and all one after another I draw  
near, not one do I miss,  
An attendant follows holding a tray, he  
carries a refuse pail,  
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and  
blood, emptied, and fill'd again,  
I onward go, I stop,  
With hinged knees and steady hand to  
dress wounds,  
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp  
yet unavoidable,  
One turns to me his appealing eyes—  
poor boy! I never knew you,  
Yet I think I could not refuse this  
moment to die for you, if that  
would save you.

### 3

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open  
hospital doors!)  
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed  
hand tear not the bandage  
away,)  
The neck of the cavalry-man with the  
bullet through and through I  
examine,  
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed  
already the eye, yet life struggles  
hard,  
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O  
beautiful death!  
In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated  
hand,  
I undo the clotted lint, remove the  
slough, wash off the matter and  
blood,  
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with  
curv'd neck and side-falling head,  
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he  
dares not look on the bloody  
stump,  
And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,  
But a day or two more, for see the frame  
all wasted and sinking,  
And the yellow-blue countenance see.  
I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot  
with the bullet-wound,  
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and  
putrid gangrene, so sickening, so  
offensive,  
While the attendant stands behind aside  
me holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,  
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound  
in the abdomen,  
These and more I dress with impassive  
hand, (yet deep in my breast a  
fire, a burning flame.)

#### 4

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,  
Returning, resuming, I thread my way  
through the hospitals,  
The hurt and wounded I pacify with  
soothing hand,  
I sit by the restless all the dark night,  
some are so young,  
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience  
sweet and sad,  
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this  
neck have cross'd and rested,  
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these

bearded lips.)



## **SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE**

*(Washington City, 1865)*

Spirit whose work is done—spirit of  
dreadful hours!  
Ere departing fade from my eyes your  
forests of bayonets;  
Spirit of gloomiest fears and doubts,  
(yet onward ever unfaltering  
pressing,)  
Spirit of many a solemn day and many  
a savage scene—electric spirit,  
That with muttering voice through the  
war now closed, like a tireless  
phantom flitted,  
Rousing the land with breath of flame,  
while you beat and beat the drum,  
Now as the sound of the drum, hollow  
and harsh to the last, reverberates  
round me,  
As your ranks, your immortal ranks, return,  
return from the battles,  
As the muskets of the young men yet  
lean over their shoulders,  
As I look on the bayonets bristling over  
their shoulders,  
As those slanted bayonets, whole forests  
of them appearing in the distance,  
approach and pass on, returning  
homeward,  
Moving with steady motion, swaying to  
and fro to the right and left,  
Evenly lightly rising and falling while  
the steps keep time;  
Spirit of hours I knew, all hectic red one  
day, but pale as death next day,  
Touch my mouth ere you depart, press  
my lips close,  
Leave me your pulses of rage—bequeath  
them to me—fill me with currents  
convulsive,  
Let them scorch and blister out of my

chants when you are gone,  
Let them identify you to the future in  
these songs.



## ASHES OF SOLDIERS

Ashes of soldiers South or North,  
As I muse retrospective murmuring a  
chant in thought,  
The war resumes, again to my sense  
your shapes,  
And again the advance of the armies.

Noiseless as mists and vapors,  
From their graves in the trenches  
ascending,  
From cemeteries all through Virginia  
and Tennessee,  
From every point of the compass out of  
the countless graves,  
In wafted clouds, in myriads large, or  
squad of twos or threes or single  
ones they come,  
And silently gather round me.

Now sound no note O trumpeters,  
Not at the head of my cavalry parading  
on spirited horses,  
With sabres drawn and glistening, and  
carbines by their thighs, (ah my  
brave horsemen!  
My handsome tan-faced horsemen! what  
life, what joy and pride,  
With all the perils were yours.)

Nor you drummers, neither at reveille  
at dawn,  
Nor the long roll alarming the camp,  
nor even the muffled beat for a  
burial,  
Nothing from you this time O drummers  
bearing my warlike drums.

But aside from these and the marts of  
wealth and the crowded promenade,

Admitting around me comrades close  
unseen by the rest and voiceless,  
The slain elate and alive again, the dust  
and debris alive,  
I chant this chant of my silent soul in  
the name of all dead soldiers.

Faces so pale with wondrous eyes, very  
dear, gather closer yet,  
Draw close, but speak not.

Phantoms of countless lost,  
Invisible to the rest henceforth become  
my companions,  
Follow me ever—desert me not while I  
live.

Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the  
living—sweet are the musical  
voices sounding,  
But sweet, ah sweet, are the dead with  
their silent eyes.  
Dearest comrades, all is over and long  
gone,  
But love is not over—and what love, O  
comrades!  
Perfume from battle-fields rising, up  
from the fœtor arising.

Perfume therefore my chant, O love,  
immortal love,  
Give me to bathe the memories of all  
dead soldiers,  
Shroud them, embalm them, cover them  
all over with tender pride.

Perfume all—make all wholesome,  
Make these ashes to nourish and  
blossom,  
O love, solve all, fructify all with the  
last chemistry.

Give me exhaustless, make me a  
fountain,  
That I exhale love from me wherever  
I go like a moist perennial dew,

For the ashes of all dead soldiers South  
or North.



### **PENSIVE ON HER DEAD GAZING**

Pensive on her dead gazing I heard the  
Mother of All,  
Desperate on the torn bodies, on the  
forms covering the battle-fields  
gazing,  
(As the last gun ceased, but the scent  
of the powder-smoke linger'd,)  
As she call'd to her earth with mournful  
voice while she stalk'd,  
Absorb them well O my earth, she cried,  
I charge you lose not my sons,  
lose not an atom,  
And you streams absorb them well, taking  
their dear blood,  
And you local spots, and you airs that  
swim above lightly impalpable,  
And all you essences of soil and growth,  
and you my rivers' depths,  
And you mountain sides, and the woods  
where my dear children's blood  
trickling redden'd,  
And you trees down in your roots to bequeath  
to all future trees.  
My dead absorb or South or North—my  
young men's bodies absorb, and  
their precious, precious blood,  
Which holding in trust for me faithfully  
back again give me many  
a year hence,  
In unseen essence and odor of surface  
and grass, centuries hence,  
In blowing airs from the fields back  
again give me my darlings, give  
my immortal heroes,  
Exhale me them centuries hence,  
breathe me their breath, let not  
an atom be lost,  
O years and graves! O air and soil! O  
my dead, an aroma sweet!  
Exhale them perennial sweet death,

years, centuries hence.



## CAMPS OF GREEN

Not alone those camps of white, old comrades  
of the wars,  
When as order'd forward, after a long  
march,  
Footsore and weary, soon as the light  
lessens we halt for the night,  
Some of us so fatigued carrying the gun  
and knapsack, dropping asleep in  
our tracks,  
Others pitching the little tents, and the  
fires lit up begin to sparkle,  
Outposts of pickets posted surrounding  
alert through the dark,  
And a word provided for countersign,  
careful for safety,  
Till to the call of the drummers at daybreak  
loudly beating the drums,  
We rise up refresh'd, the night and sleep  
pass'd over, and resume our journey,  
Or proceed to battle.

Lo, the camps of the tents of green,  
Which the days of peace keep filling,  
and the days of war keep filling,  
With a mystic army, (is it too order'd  
forward? is it too only halting  
awhile,  
Till night and sleep pass over?)

Now in those camps of green, in their  
tents dotting the world,  
In the parents, children, husbands,  
wives in them, in the old and  
young,  
Sleeping under the sunlight, sleeping  
under the moonlight, content and  
silent there at last,  
Behold the mighty bivouac-field and  
waiting camp of all,  
Of the corps and generals all, and the  
President over the corps and generals

all,  
And of each of us O soldiers, and of  
each and all in the ranks we  
fought,  
(There without hatred we all, all meet.)

For presently O soldiers, we too camp  
in our place in the bivouac-camps  
of green,  
But we need not provide for outposts,  
nor word for the countersign,  
Nor drummer to beat the morning  
drum.