

I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies
with my hand.

The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill,
I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol
has fallen.

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of
the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the
clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his
passage to the centre of the crowd,
The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,
What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and
give birth to babes,
What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls
restrain'd by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances,
rejections with convex lips,
I mind them or the show or resonance of them--I come and I depart.

9

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

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 bruise'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.

11

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair,
Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the
sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

12

The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife
at the stall in the market,
I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down.

Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,
Each has his main-sledge, they are all out, there is a great heat in
the fire.

From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements,
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,
Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so sure,
They do not hasten, each man hits in his place.

13

The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags
underneath on its tied-over chain,

The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and
tall he stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over
his hip-band,
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat
away from his forehead,
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of
his polish'd and perfect limbs.

I behold the picturesque giant and love him, and I do not stop there,
I go with the team also.

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as
forward sluing,
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,
Absorbing all to myself and for this song.

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade, what
is that you express in your eyes?
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck on my distant and
day-long ramble,
They rise together, they slowly circle around.

I believe in those wing'd purposes,
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,
And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else,
And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty well to me,
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.

14

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.

The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill, the
chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law.

The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections,
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

I am enamour'd of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships and the wielders of axes and
mauls, and the drivers of horses,
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
Scattering it freely forever.

15

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,

The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane
whistles its wild ascending lisp,
The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,
The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,
The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,
The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day loafe and
looks at the oats and rye,
The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,
(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's
bed-room;)
The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,
He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;
The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
The quadron girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by
the bar-room stove,
The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat,
the gate-keeper marks who pass,
The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do
not know him;)
The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,
The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their
rifles, some sit on logs,
Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;
The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee,
As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them
from his saddle,
The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their
partners, the dancers bow to each other,
The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the
musical rain,
The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,
The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and
bead-bags for sale,
The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut
eyes bent sideways,
As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for
the shore-going passengers,
The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it
off in a ball, and stops now and then for the knots,
The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne
her first child,
The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the
factory or mill,
The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead
flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering
with blue and gold,
The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his
desk, the shoemaker waxes his thread,
The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,
The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,
The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white
sails sparkle!)
The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,
The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling
about the odd cent;)
The bride unrumple her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock
moves slowly,

The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
 The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and
 pimpled neck,
 The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to
 each other,
 (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)
 The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great
 Secretaries,
 On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,
 The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,
 The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,
 As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the
 jingling of loose change,
 The floor-men are laying the floor, the tanners are tanning the
 roof, the masons are calling for mortar,
 In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;
 Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it
 is the fourth of Seventh-month, (what salutes of cannon and small arms!)
 Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows,
 and the winter-grain falls in the ground;
 Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in
 the frozen surface,
 The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep
 with his axe,
 Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-trees,
 Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through
 those drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,
 Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or Altamahaw,
 Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons
 around them,
 In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after
 their day's sport,
 The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
 The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
 The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife;
 And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
 And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
 And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

16

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
 Regardless of others, ever regardless of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff
 that is fine,
 One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the
 largest the same,
 A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and
 hospitable down by the Oconee I live,
 A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest
 joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,
 A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin
 leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,
 A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;
 At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen
 off Newfoundland,
 At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking,
 At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the
 Texan ranch,
 Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving
 their big proportions,)