

LBRIS

We know
books

LEAVES OF GRASS

WALT WHITMAN



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SONG OF MYSELF

I celebrate 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.

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, and buzzed whispers.... loveroot, silkthread,
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 belched words of my voice.... words loosed
 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 reckoned 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 yourself.

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 a knit of identity.... always distinction.... always a
 breed of life

To elaborate is no avail.... Learned 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 God comes a loving bedfellow and sleeps at my side all
 night and close on the peep of the day,
 And leaves for me baskets covered with white towels bulging
 the house with their plenty,
 Shall I postpone my acceptance 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 contents of one, and exactly the contents of two,
 and which is ahead?

Trippers and askers surround me,
 People I meet.... the effect upon me of my early life.... of the
 ward and city I live in.... of the nation,
 The latest news.... discoveries, inventions, societies.... authors
 old and new,
 My dinner, dress, associates, looks, business, 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,
 They 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,
 Looks with its sidecurved 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.

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 valved voice.

I mind how once we lay, such a transparent summer morning;
 You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned 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 joy and
 knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth;
 And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own,

And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest 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 wormfence, and heaped stones, and
 elder and mullen and pokeweed.

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 dropped,
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 and from women, and 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 ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward.... and nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and
luckier.
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-washed
babe.... and am not contained 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 all 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 sweetheart 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.

Who need be afraid of the merge?
Undrape.... you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,
And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless.... and can
never be shaken away.

The little one sleeps in its cradle,
I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away
flies with my hand.
The youngster and the redfaced girl turn aside up the bushy
hill,
I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom.
It is so.... I witnessed the corpse.... there the pistol had fallen.

The blab of the pave.... the tires of carts and sluff of bootsoles
and talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb,
the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
The carnival of sleighs, the clinking and shouted jokes and
pelts of snowballs;

The hurrahs for popular favorites.... the fury of roused mobs,
The flap of the curtained litter—the 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,

The souls moving along.... are they invisible while the least
atom of the stones is visible?
What groans of overfed or half-starved who fall on the flags
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 restrained by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made,
acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
I mind them or the resonance of them.... I come again and
again.

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 packed to the sagging mow:
I am there.... I help.... I came stretched atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts.... one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the crossbeams, and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels, and tangle my hair full of wisps.

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 freshkilled game,
Soundly falling asleep on the gathered leaves, my dog and
gun by my side.

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