

## Four Poems by Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

### BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!

Beat! beat! drums!—Blow! bugles! blow!  
Through the windows—through the doors—burst like a force  
of armed men,  
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 plowing 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—and 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 en-  
treaties. Recruit! recruit!  
Make the very trestles shake under the dead, where they  
lie in their shrouds awaiting the hearses.  
So strong you thump, O terrible drums—so loud you bu-  
gles blow.

## **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.

## **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, 'tis 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 just-grown 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.

## **Dirge for Two Veterans**

The last sunbeam  
Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath,  
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking,  
Down a new-made double grave.

Lo, the moon ascending,  
Up from the east the silvery round moon,  
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,  
Immense and silent moon.

I see a sad procession,  
And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed bugles,  
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding,  
As with voices and with tears.

I hear the great drums pounding,  
And the small drums steady whirring,  
And every blow of the great convulsive drums,  
Strikes me through and through.

For the son is brought with the father,  
(In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,  
Two veterans son and father dropped together,  
And the double grave awaits them.)  
Now nearer blow the bugles,  
And the drums strike more convulsive,  
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,  
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,  
The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumined,  
( 'Tis some mother's large transparent face,  
In heaven brighter growing.)

O strong dead-march you please me!  
O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!  
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!  
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,  
And the bugles and the drums give you music,  
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,  
My heart gives you love.