

# **SONG OF WALT WHITMAN**



*A Play by*  
***RICHARD DAVIDSON***



***The Poet's Press***

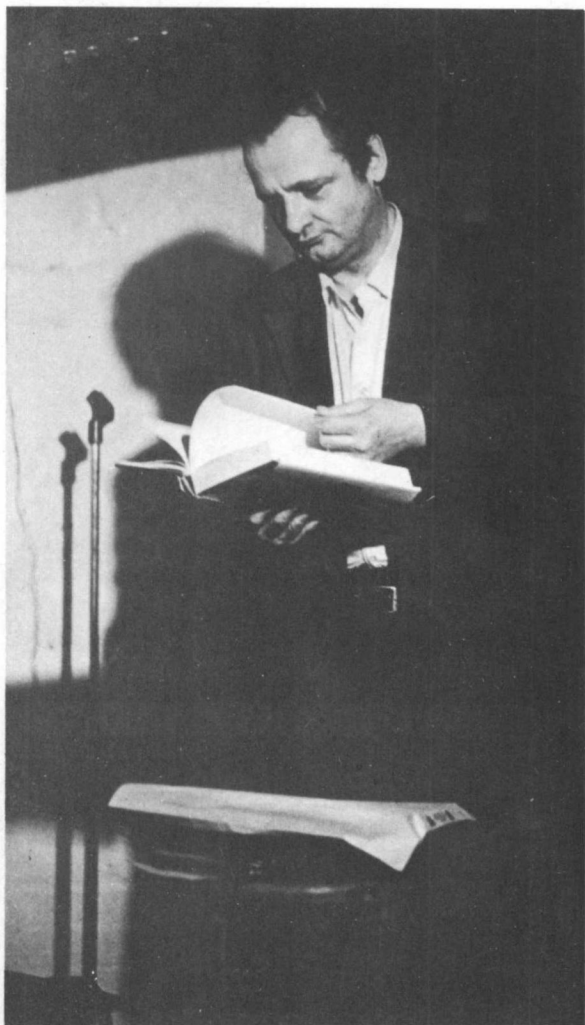


Photo by Paul Henning

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*Originally published in print in 1975 by*  
THE POET'S PRESS

*Ebook PDF Facsimile Edition 2015*  
*This is the 217th publication of*

THE POET'S PRESS  
2209 Murray Avenue #3  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217-2338  
[www.poetspress.org](http://www.poetspress.org)



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## THE SONG OF WALT WHITMAN, by Richard Davidson

From out of these pages, American poetry and American democracy cry out to the constant rolling out of contemporaries. "The Song of Walt Whitman" is a palimpsest begun in 1958, and by the time this book will have been published, will have received at least five different productions with no two texts exactly alike in its fifteen-year history. This of course parallels Whitman's continuous revision of "Leaves of Grass" over the half-century of that work's composing. "Who touches this, touches a man . . ." can apply equally, if not to "The Song of Walt Whitman" alone, then certainly to the entire body of Richard Davidson's gigantic, groping, altogether human work.

"I stand in the dark with drooping eyes," speaks the voice of Walt Whitman in this version . . . and he beholds the lives of office workers and factory workers and hopeful young actors and actresses (representing youth itself) and of course *soldiers* (representing youth betrayed by "the mind of the large desk," as Davidson has phrased it.) Other voices . . . a panhandler . . . a madam . . . a neurotic businessman . . . a weird evangelist . . . a maudlin drunk . . . all echoing the tensions and frustrations along with their dreamlike resolutions, inherent in American society. "I SEE YOU, LORD, hiding behind that Mustang!" shouts the Evangelist. . .

And the question is repeated over and over again in the script . . . "What makes a man a poet?" In the answer inferred by the play, is expounded the tradition of American poetry, derived essentially from Whitman, of a democratic art created in the souls of an entire people . . . "John and Helen, their dreams make a poet./ Their hidden dreams are a part of his song!!!"

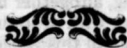
—Donald Lev



# THE SONG OF WALT WHITMAN, by Richard Davidson

From out of these pages, American poetry and American democracy cry out to the constant rolling out of constant poetry. "The Song of Walt Whitman" is a pastime of the past, in 1938, and by the time this book will have been published, will have received at least five different productions with its two texts exactly alike in its fifteen-year history. This is of course precisely Whitman's continuous revision of "Leaves of Grass" over the half-century of that work's composition. "Walt Whitman as a man . . ." can apply equally to the "Song of Walt Whitman".

For Gerry, with love . . .



"I stand in the way of my eyes," speaks the poem of Walt Whitman. . . and he beholds the lives of office workers and factory workers and hope-ful young actors and actresses (representing youth itself) and of course soldiers (representing youth betrayed by "the mind of the large desk," as Davidson has phrased it). Other voices . . . a preacher . . . a madman . . . a mendicant . . . a wild evangelist . . . a madman . . . a madman . . . all echoing the tensions and frustrations along with their dreamlike resolutions inherent in American society. "I SEE YOU, LORD, hiding behind that Mas-krade!" shouts the Evangelist. . . And the question is repeated over and over again in the script. . . "What makes a man a poet?" In the answer implied by the play, is expounded the tradition of American poetry, derived essentially from Whitman, of a dramatic art created in the souls of an entire people. . . "John and Helen, their dreams make a poet. Their hidden dreams are a part of his song!"

—Donald Lev



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR . . . A strong male voice. Tells the story of the play.

SECOND VOICE . . . Male or female. Helps to tell the story of the play.

HELEN . . . Housewife about forty. Been married a long time.

JOHN . . . Her husband. Advertising man. Tired, about 45.

HAWKER. . . Religious convert. A fanatic. About 50.

LEMUEL Q. SMART. . . A young bum. About 25. Not without a sense of humor. An almost tragic character.

POET. . . About 30. A young writer. Intelligent and compassionate.

WILLIAM. . . About 35. Businessman. Neurotic.

NICK. . . About 25. A drunk. Works in Wall Street.

NEWSDEALER. . . Fifty-five. Cheerful.

FIRST MAN. . . About thirty. Manual laborer. Likes young girls.

SECOND MAN. . . About 30. A talker. Spends his time picking up women.

GIRL. . . Young, sweet, innocent.

MARY LOU. . . About 20. Pretty and sensitive and in love.

LARRY. . . About 22. Takes odd jobs. Ready for the army. Is nuts about Mary Lou.

SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR. . . Works in an actors registry. About 40, female.

TOM. . . A young actor, about 25.

DICK. . . A young actor, about 20.

GRACE . . . An actress. About 25. Takes her acting seriously.

CYNTHIA . . . A young actress about 20. Misses home.

MADAM. . . About 50. Been a madam a long time. Loves her girls. Has a real feeling for her customers.

JOE. . . A soldier. . . About 22. Tough, cynical.

NURSE . . . Loving. Kind, about 25.

SOLDIER (singer) . . . About 20.

CONDUCTOR . . . Train conductor, about 50.

DICK . . . Soldier, older, about 30.

FIRST SOLDIER . . . Tough, about 25.

SECOND SOLDIER . . . Farmer. Family man. About 25.

THIRD SOLDIER . . . Young. Just got a college degree. About 23.

GENERAL . . . About 60. The usual phony officer.

FIRST VOICE . . . Male, about 30. With conviction.

SECOND VOICE . . . Female, same age.

THIRD VOICE . . . Male, about 25

FOURTH VOICE . . . Female, about 30.

and

WALT WHITMAN. . . A rather young Whitman, about 40.

Reading his own work. Sincere. Passionate.

(Most of the above parts can be tripled in production.)

# Part 1



## NARRATOR

*(Quietly)* What makes a man a poet?  
What makes a man sit down to write beneath a lamp,  
or at a wooden desk  
Or write the words after the subway battles or at the office  
Whose echoes he wants to forget: the water drunk very fast  
from the cooler, the quick trip on the IRT.  
The night that brings him back to painted gardens or  
Silvered streets, back to ancient empires, or the stock  
market report.  
Back to the small or large or middle sized room and  
The dream that waits; the hopes that wait.  
What makes a man hunger for this night, this breathing  
moment in the trembling dark?  
What makes a man a poet?

## WHITMAN

*(After a pause)* "This is no book.  
Who touches this, touches a man.  
Who touches this, touches a man.  
Who touches this, touches a man."

## NARRATOR

Walt Whitman, out of time and who has no regulated time.  
Who stands and listens and touches a book.  
Hear him in the roar of black.  
Hear him in the great trap of darkness whose lights  
Rise and fall like singing women.  
Hear him as you lie in bed or drink a beer or  
Wrap the evening around a single potato chip.  
Hear him for he talks *to* you and *of* you and of. . .

## WHITMAN

*(Whispering)* "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume, you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

### NARRATOR

(Pause) It is *his* song in the silence of the night.  
And of you who get out of bed or go under the long covers.  
Read a book, chew on a bar of candy or  
Shake the ground to snappy tunes and the trumpet  
crying across the faded bottle caps and torn napkins  
And you kissing, or waiting for a cab, or coming out of  
escape that's splashed on screens twenty feet high.  
And you bobbing for apples or gobbling chop suey  
Or voting for your favorite movie star.

### SECOND VOICE (O.S.)

With a free trip to Florida involved. With a set of dishes,  
newly wrapped and  
Smelling of Gimbel's on a Saturday afternoon, deeply,  
wonderfully involved.  
With wonderful memories and the holding of wet hands,  
so damn, damn, deeply involved.  
Listen.

### NARRATOR

It is nearing early night. The city is coming out of the dream  
of day.  
Coming out of the light-touched concrete and the buildings  
whose wires are on fire.  
And the endless chatter in the long elevator shafts and the  
names on the bright office doors.  
Names that swarmed through Yale or Columbia or finished high  
school with holes in the seat of the pants and planned  
the battle for floor twelve like a well-ordered general  
crossing a bridge.

It is nearly early night in the city and, poet, you sit at a  
the desk with the broken blotter or the pencil half-  
chewed or the phrases pouring over the open cellophane  
and the lettuce and tomato greeting the blue-black  
stains on the waiting sheet.

And, poet, you stand before a window or lie on your flat  
bed or walk around the block or grab a beer or  
grab for a newspaper,  
For the thought, the dream that takes you skyward,  
And maybe the rent's not paid and the dentist shoots another  
bill through the mail and it's "just another week,  
Mr. Greenberg," or "Christ, that's the fifth rejection  
in a month."  
And so, maybe you try to settle the turning stomach and the  
mind that loves its fellow man, but, Jesus, who can  
love when they're hungry?

But maybe the shadows have a certain kind of music.  
And maybe there's a whistle and a hunk of bread somewhere  
in the dark.

So together can we walk? Together, poet, whose Manhattan  
rose out of the trembling wheels of horse-drawn cars,  
whose cries faded in the rumbling bugles of the blue  
and gray.

Can we walk together now?  
To see a city that lives in all our dreams.  
Whose grass touches now as then the corner tips and the flat,  
flowing lands of the people's lives.  
Poet who taught us the riddle of the first leaf of summer,  
Take us by the hand, the city waits for eyes.

(A pause) Your song sung by atomic voices.  
By Helen who stands at the door of her apartment on West  
Ninety-Second.

Whose husband works for Baumont, Barsdorf, King &  
Wilson, Inc.

She has two children and watches them in the park.  
She stands at the ruffling of pure, spring grass.  
She stands, . . she *dreams*, poet.

#### HELEN

We live over on Ninety-Second Street . . . almost near  
the park,

In autumn the park is sea-swept and the earth is ours.  
I have two children. Two fine, fat children.

They grab for ice cream in the summer.

They become wild as wild leaves.

My husband works for Baumont, Barsdorf, King and  
Wilson, Inc.

Twenty years for Baumont, Barsdorf, King and Wilson.

Twenty years of eating the same sandwich on the same  
stool in the same drugstore.

We met at City College. We met at a dance. We met between  
two midnights.

He took me dancing. He took me to a play by Moss Hart.

We married and went to Palm Springs.

It was the fifth day of summer and there was a sunflower  
outside our window.

John got a little high that first night.

Claimed the flower was made of paper.

(A pause) We like the summer here.

The children like the summer.

The children like the long blades of grass.

The children like the television set.

It's not working now.

Something wrong with the screen, I think.

The wind slams against my kitchen door.

Sometimes it blows too hard.

## JOHN

Twenty years. I guess twenty years ago fades.  
Goes to sleep. Passes. Twenty years and Mr. Barsdorf  
still has hay fever and sniffles in the spring.  
I love Helen and my two children and the park,  
I work hard for Baumont, Barsdorf, King and Wilson.  
I work hard and come home at night and kiss my wife,  
And chuck my children underneath their (respective)  
chins.  
Take off my shirt if it's hot enough.  
Or make the coffee,  
Or slice the bread.  
And sit in my chair. In my great, comfortable, rolling  
chair.  
Get tired. Get sleepy. Put on TV.  
And between coffee and the late news everything is  
so, so damn groggy.

Mama, put my slippers on.  
Mama, put my shoes away.  
Mama, put your hand through my hair.  
*Mama, Mama, are you there?*  
Mama, hear the warm winds blow.  
Mama, turn the lights down low.

## NARRATOR

Stars blow gently,  
The night, armed with the moon and the late, late show,  
Glistens like the last foam of beer,  
Circles like a shadow,  
And goes quietly down the street.

## HAWKER

Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to save you.  
Get down on your knees. Look into my eyes,  
See the Redeemer. Do you know *Christ*? I say, do you know  
*Christ*? I say *Christ* lives! Not in your churches. Not in  
your temples. But here on Times Square. In the heart of  
Times Square. AMEN.

## ALL

AMEN.

## HAWKER

Lord I have sinned. I take my hat off Lord and tell you I  
have sinned. But I'm through sinning Lord. For I see  
you. I see you Lord hiding behind that Mustang. You're  
there. I tell you, you're there. AMEN.

## ALL

AMEN.



### HAWKER

Nobody at confession. Nobody with caps on. Everybody on their knees.

Lord, I have seen a new light. Oh Lord, I have seen the light.  
Oh, my good, dear ladies and gentlemen, I have seen the light.  
AMEN.

### ALL

AMEN.

### WHITMAN

"I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city.  
Whereupon, lo! Up sprang the aboriginal name.  
City of hurried and sparkling waters!  
City of spires and masts!  
City nested in bays!"

### NARRATOR

The city lives in hopes. Lives in whispers on  
Crowded pavements where houses crush together  
Like bundles of clothing.  
What is your song, Walt?  
What does it mean to John and Helen?  
To the firm of Baumont, Barsdorf, King and Wilson, Inc.?  
Population. . . somewhere in the thousands  
Maker of better things for better living through  
Wilson's powdered ads introducing Schwartz's Hose,  
Guaranteed to introduce madame to bank presidents and  
eligible daughters to their eligible sons.

No, the songs are *not* for Baumont, Barsdorf, King and  
Wilson, Inc.  
You will not hear melodies on crowded switchboards.  
Or will you?  
Deep in the dreams of John Doe, will you?

### JOHN

A house in the country.  
A house by the stream.

### NARRATOR

Helen by the stove.  
Helen walking out of thousands of magazine serials.

### HELEN

In the summer the children love the park,  
In the summer the leaves tremble and  
Wave a forgotten sigh.  
Oh, John, *Wake up, wake up!*  
The earth is fresh as a fresh, young child.  
Wake up! Wake up!

The trees are tall and the wind is mild.  
And tomorrow will come. Tomorrow *will* come.  
Wake up . . . Wake up.

#### NARRATOR

City of dreams. City of a thousand clocks  
Ticking off the seconds of a handful of generations.  
What is his song to John and Helen?  
Dreams and parks and children and the endless  
ticking second.

#### SECOND VOICE

Up at seven.  
Toast and jelly. Newspaper and coffee.  
Run for the car. Run for the train. Run for the sweat  
and smoke of time.  
Run and hang your hand on a great brown strap from  
the toothpaste ad.  
Punch the clock. Sit at the desk. Wind your watch.  
Pick a date on the calendar. Whisk away the hours  
with the blank pages of ledgers.  
And then for a moment you are not here.  
For a moment Palm Springs and a flower made of paper.

#### WHITMAN

*(Very quietly)* "City nested in bays! My city!"

#### NARRATOR

*(Very quietly)* John and Helen, their dreams make a  
poet.  
Their hidden dreams are part of his song!!!

#### WHITMAN

"The blind sleep, and the deaf and dumb sleep.  
The prisoner sleeps well in prison, the runaway son sleeps.  
The murderer that is to be hung next day, how does he  
sleep?  
And the murdered person, how does he sleep?  
I stand in the dark with drooping eyes by the worst-  
suffering and the most restless.  
I pass my hands soothingly to and fro a few inches  
from them,  
The restless sink in their beds, they fitfully sleep."

#### SMART

Say buddy, outside of you and paradise, got a penny,  
Got a nickle, got a dime?  
Hit the big town, mind you, at quarter past nine.  
Off the ships, mind you, and my wallet left high and dry,  
stuck in somebody's ear.

Listen, buddy, mac, pal, honest, I'm no bum in  
This ragged outfit sold to me on borrowed time.  
Buddy, got a nickle, penny, got a dime?

WHITMAN

"I stand in the dark with drooping eyes . . . I stand and  
watch in the dark."

SMART

Just a penny, just a crumb, just a piece of tooth.

NARRATOR

Ladies and gentlemen, the fine, bursting picture of  
Racquel Welch, prayed over by fifty tin angels  
In deep corporation with Hollywood, California,  
Looms over the eyes and ears and nose of Lemuel Q.

Smart.

Recently deprived of funds.

Recently via jail cell.

Recently promised the world in six delicious flavors.

His age last birthday is close to your son's.

And daughters, beware,

He wears one slightly used torn shirt,

And mumbles back at the moon.

Lemuel Q. Smart comes to us from the small tenement

half-way up on anybody's map.

At home he spit between his teeth and broke cocktail  
glasses.

It was predicted he would go far.

(He knows how to operate a motorcycle.)

Lemuel Q. Smart's philosophy spreads itself

Against the unsuspecting stars.

SMART

What the hell. The army's going to get me anyway.

NARRATOR

In retrospect television presents doom reports,

And sirens crack the day like the weeping wails of wide-  
eyed loons.

His song is a low, moaning blues and a cry that can  
challenge the moon.

What is his song, poet?

He reaches out his hand, and things are tough all over.

SMART

Oh, Christ, hard world. Look, all I need is a place to  
sleep.

Oh, Christ, all I need is somethin' to eat.

I got a sandwich here.  
Keep it with me in this piece of cellophane.  
Want a bite?

POET

No, thanks.

SMART

Yeah. What do you do?

POET

I write.

SMART

What kind of writin'?

POET

Poetry, short stories, plays.

SMART

Poetry! That's not commercial, buddy.

POET

You're an authority on commercialism?

SMART

Yeah, buddy, I seen it all.  
Graves, that big. Buried them in graves that big.  
Cut 'em right in the earth.  
And, man, do they stink. I'm not kiddin'.  
They smell.  
Yeah, we get 'em *all* out there.

POET

You bury people?

SMART

*Buried.* Listen, buddy, I'm a bum. I was in jail.  
We buried 'em. I was on a work detail here on the  
Island.  
Sure, they got 'em *piled up* out there.

POET

How long did you serve?

SMART

Ninety days.

POET

Vagrant?

SMART

Yeah. You know.

POET

How old are you?

SMART

I'm twenty-three.

POET

Is that *all*?

SMART

You know what, buddy? You know what your work needs?  
Humor. You write with humor.  
That's what everybody is cryin' for. Humor.

POET

You live here in New York?

SMART

I was born in the Bronx.

POET

What about your parents?

SMART

They're dead. Got a couple of sisters.  
I call 'em up once in a while. You know, ah, they don't  
like me very much.  
I call 'em up. And one, she's got about six kids.  
Well, I call up and she says, "What do you *want*, Lem?"  
You know how it is.

POET

You don't want to do *this* for the rest of your life, do you?

SMART

This? Yeah. I went to M.I.T. for a while.  
Started engineerin', but my eyes are bad or somethin'.  
Couldn't read after a while.  
I could get a job for eighty bucks a week, I guess, but  
these guys up there in the offices,  
Most of 'em I see are dead.  
But, what the hell, I'm healthy, and I pick up a couple  
of bucks.  
I'm a good bum, don't you think?

(No reply)

I'm not bad for my age.  
Remember one thing, though, buddy. Humor. You put  
humor in and you've got it made.  
Well, I — Hey, hey, mister,  
(Calling) Got a penny, a nickle, a dime?

WHITMAN

(After a pause) "I stand in the dark with drooping eyes. . ."

WILLIAM

And that's what happened, doctor.  
Somebody turns the screws on and the lights off.  
I'm reading over the stock report and then it starts,  
begins, takes off.  
Oh, is it my mother, my sister, my brother, my wife?  
Give me the pink pills, the blue pills, the yellow pills.  
I'll give you a piece of my stock, blow you to a nine-  
course dinner,  
The name and telephone number of the most beautiful,  
luscious —  
Doctor, stop my head from rolling.

Doctor, stop my head from rolling.  
Tell me a story.  
Tell me a joke.  
I can't sleep.  
I can't sleep tonight.  
Doctor, doctor, make me a smile, turn on the light.  
I'll let you drive my brand new Cougar.  
Doctor, doctor, turn on the light.  
Is it my mother, my sister, my brother, my wife?  
Give me the pink pills, the blue pills, the yellow pills.  
And turn on that goddamned light!!

NICK

Put a little water in this gin, Harry, and rock me to sleep,  
Because I am so prosperous.  
Drink me a gin and wind me a dream and Agnes won't give  
in to me for love or money and that's the secret,  
That's the secret behind your ever-loving bar, Harry.  
Love and a million dollars and my temperature goes up.  
And wrap some soap in a velvet bag and maybe if I smell nice  
and maybe if I shine the seat of my ever-loving pants  
nice,  
And maybe if I kiss somebody's ass nice, I, too, will get  
the ring.  
The ring at the end of the monkey's nose, Harry.  
And tomorrow my head will be like a busted valentine.  
That's what I am, Harry — a busted valentine.

**NARRATOR**

*(A pause)* The moon dreams and the stars remember  
And there is quiet turning in the quiet turning earth.

**WHITMAN**

"I dream in my dreams all the dreams of the other dreamers.  
And I become the other dreamers."

**NEWSDEALER**

What's that again, Mac? How many miles to the Brooklyn  
Bridge? Depends on how you go . . . by subway or by way of  
Detroit.

**FIRST MAN**

And, oh, Bernie, have you forgotten her soft hair and the way  
she spoke over a telephone and the way her shoulders stood in  
the pouring rain on the corner of fiftieth and park?

**NEWSDEALER**

And she left you for a guy from Moline with a suitcase and  
a hard brush,  
And all the money this side of the moon won't buy her back!

*(Spotting somebody. Suddenly professional)*

What do you read? What do you read? Get your times,  
get your News, get your Post. What do you read?  
What do you read?

**GIRL**

Excuse me, do you know the name of a good hotel where a  
sweet young thing can stay?

**FIRST MAN**

Hello, honey, where did you come from?

**GIRL**

I just came from Idaho . . .

**SECOND MAN**

Where did you get that beautiful red hair?

**GIRL**

I didn't take anything. I'm a good girl.

**SECOND MAN**

I bet you are.

**FIRST MAN**

Honey, you want to be on the stage?

SECOND MAN

Honey, you want to be in the movies?

NEWSDEALER

HONEY, YOU WANT TO BE FAMOUS?

FIRST MAN

Take my card.

SECOND MAN

Take my name.

NEWSDEALER

Take my phone number.

GIRL

But I don't even know you.

FIRST MAN

You will.

SECOND MAN

In time.

NEWSDEALER

Yes sir.

GIRL

(A pause) You really mean the movies? I could be in the movies?

SECOND MAN

Would I kid around with you? Honey, you'll be sensational.

FIRST MAN

You'll be the most.

NEWSDEALER

You'll be tops.

SECOND MAN

Let's grab a cup of coffee and talk it over.

GIRL

Well, I . . .

SECOND MAN

Honey, a chance in a million. Let's find out if you got some talent.



GIRL

Well I played an angel once in a Christmas pageant.

SECOND MAN

I could see it from here. You were great in it.

GIRL

I . . . I forgot my lines. But I looked very angelic.

SECOND MAN

Honey, you'll make a million dollars. Come on.

GIRL

But I was looking for a hotel.

SECOND MAN

We'll find you one with two sets of running water.

*(The two men start off with the girl)*

NEWSDEALER

Why don't you guys leave her alone? Enough is enough. . .

SECOND MAN

Ah go swallow a bottle of print.

FIRST MAN

*(to the Girl)* Love me, baby, up the street and love me,  
baby when the rain starts flowing and snow piles  
up like snow white rags . . .

SECOND MAN

Love me, baby, and watch the stars twinkle and the moon do  
a mambo in the sky jumping up and down and twisting into a  
crazy tango.

FIRST MAN

Love me, baby, because your eyes are blue and there's  
heaven in your mouth and your shoulders stand strong  
in the waiting dusk.

NEWSDEALER

*(Sotto voce. Sarcastically)* Yeah. Big love. Big love.  
Love me baby and dream tonight.

NARRATOR

Love me, baby, up the street.  
Love me, baby, at two-fifty a throw and I'll pay you back  
next week, baby,  
This horse is a cinch.

Oh, baby, kiss me on the forehead, kiss me on the temple.  
Love me, baby, for a dinner at Sardi's.  
I'm just off the boat, baby, work in a lumberyard, baby.  
Love me baby, on Central Park West,  
Got a good job and making ten over ten —  
Say, they couldn't run that office without me.  
Love me, Baby, and on every train, I'll think about you  
as I trudge those goddamn brushes.  
Love me, baby, in mid-July.  
Love me, baby, and what the hell, I'll be in Hollywood  
next week, next year.  
Why, my teacher says I've got Brando beat a mile.  
(And my speech is good.)  
Love me, baby, on a forty-third street hotel roof, share the  
rent, baby, and next week a gold mine, I swear to God.  
Love me, baby, in my GTO with the floating piano in the  
back seat mirror.  
On Thursdays, Fridays, baby, kiss your hand, your feet,  
your eyes.

## SECOND VOICE

And Mary Lou presses her precious flowers in the pages of  
her precious pressed books.  
And the dance was wonderful and the music divine,  
And Larry so fine in a long, black coat.

## MARY LOU

And he swung me around and the music played and he kissed  
and held my hand and cried against my breast.  
Oh, Larry, there is sadness in your touch and sadness in  
your eyes and darkness that's ripe on your long,  
black coat.  
Oh, Larry, Larry, Larry, I yearn for you, pray for you,  
Live for you, and next year I'll miss you at Ohio State,  
And when the girls make jokes and the boys make cracks,  
I'll walk with a smile so hidden from sight.  
Oh, Larry, remember me, love me, hold me forever,  
Read me poetry and I'll answer back.  
Oh, Larry, out of ourselves the music comes.  
Together, the music comes.

## LARRY

So, I tell you, Joe, she's cute as the devil and romantic as  
all hell and next week we're going on that hayride up  
at John's place.  
Nice girl. You know what I mean. Probably does it like  
a bunny.  
Look, Joe, could I borrow some dough?  
Want to buy her a flower. She's nuts on those orchids.  
Crap, lost my job last week. Old man Winston, tough as a  
bull.

Just because I came in twenty minutes late you'd think  
the world was busting loose,  
Came a lecture, gave me a sermon, then the old coot showed  
me the door.  
Jesus, out of a job and out of school. Oh, Joey, I can hear  
them bugles blow.

MARY LOU

Hold me, Larry, I'm scared of the dark.

LARRY

Honey, you've been the best in years.

NARRATOR

(Quietly) Love me, baby, in the trembling dark,  
Hold me, honey, against the white, hot light.

WHITMAN

"Double yourself and receive me darkness  
Receive me and my lover, too, he will not let me go without  
him."

SECOND VOICE

And you marry and set up house.  
And get a flat or apartment wide and notice the trees on the  
high, broad walk.  
And he buys you a ring, and buys you a table.  
And comes home tired with the whistles blowing,  
And his hands dirt worn from the shop or the office floor,  
Or his feet sore from standing in the heat of tracks,  
pounding spikes in the pounding steel.  
And tomorrow save on bread.  
And tomorrow save on sugar.  
And tomorrow get up and do my hair.  
And tomorrow clean the spare room, take the dust out of  
the corners.  
And tonight a movie, maybe, if he's not that tired and a  
walk down the street and ice cream in the heat.  
Oh, lordy, lordy, find me a chair, rock me to bed with a  
golden horn.

And where did he put Byron?  
What happened to the rose bushes in the park?  
What happened to the glories in the dark?  
But home, but bed, but maybe, but maybe,  
Tomorrow. For still we read where the poets wrote that  
tomorrow's dreams can come.  
So get out of bed, so climb the stairs, so ask for a  
raise in this prosperity month, so argue about politics  
and drink a beer, and place your bet on the next  
president.

But, lordy, lordy, give us back the time to dream, to walk,  
to pierce the dark with the old laughter.  
Oh, lordy, lordy, we're so damn tired of being afraid.

NARRATOR

Love me, baby, and the complexion of the world is changing.  
Love me, baby, and I promise devotion, I promise to work  
like hell.

I'll give up smoking, I'll give up drinking, sell my special  
little book.

Love me, baby, and tomorrow's not as bleak as you may think.

MARY LOU

Larry, Larry, I yearn for you, pray for you, live for you. . .

LARRY

Oh, Joey, I can hear them bugles blow.

NARRATOR

Love me, baby, and the world is mine, is beautiful.  
Love me, baby, and I'll work for you. Make for you.  
Die for you.

LARRY

(Quietly) Oh, Joey, I can hear them bugles blow.

NARRATOR

Love me, baby, and we'll show the earth about planting and  
buds and grass and songs in the winter time.

And you across the school-books, the railroad track, the  
dance hall, the big palaces with the windows you  
can hardly see through.

With me at twenty, thirty, forty. And you, ageless,  
honey, darling, sweetheart.

Lives dedicated to the pursuit of happiness and a reasonable  
flat located with running water, near the nearest IRT.

Love me, baby, on eighty a week, two hundred a week.

Love me, baby, and tomorrow will not be as bleak as you  
may think.

WHITMAN

"The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed.  
They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to  
west as they lie unclothed."

NARRATOR

What makes a man a poet?

For John and Helen, unresolved dreams.

For Larry and Mary Lou, hope and the first kiss.

For the sleepers in the long night, the trains crashing  
against the paperback books of stars, for them,  
belief.

For the lovers in small hideouts in between the barging  
trucks, for the lovers on sixty a week, well above  
the limit for welfare, where water drips slowly in  
the half-empty sink,

For lovers here, now and always!  
Always for them *he* sings  
Always for them tomorrow, tomorrow.

#### WHITMAN

(*Quietly*) "The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie  
unclothed.

They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to  
west as they lie unclothed."

#### NARRATOR

The moon dreams and the stars remember,  
And there is quiet turning in the quiet turning earth.  
And the hours of night come to the city sometimes  
in small doses.

Sometimes the office lights go off and the brown briefcase  
catches the 8:20.

Or Bob in night school catching up with English 3 and the  
life cut momentarily at the base of Vietnamese seas.

Now back, now dreams forming, now Mrs. Talbert at the  
church choir practice where sour notes are allowed  
and bad harmony is excused for sincerity.

Now the great mass of night. Night to the street corners,  
to the small drug stores, to candy shops opened after  
nine.

Night, too, to machines. The great human wail of machines.  
Night to machines in the high, steel factory just this side  
of the river.

Night to machines and to the men who use them.

The lights in the factory continue in the long, turning  
night.

#### WHITMAN

"Well do they do their jobs, these journeymen divine,  
Only from me can they hide nothing, and would not  
if they could."

# Part 2



## NARRATOR

What makes a man a poet?  
Dreams and hopes and tomorrows.  
And workers and work.  
And he was a part of them. He knew them.  
Who shovelled the earth and drove back the night with a  
thousand spinning nails.  
And Fred Miller, worker, rubs his hands across his face  
and flecks some dust off the machine in front and  
hopes Marian won't be worried that he's late.  
And Fred checks his watch and checks the button off  
his shirt and in his mind hopes the strike next week  
won't be long and that the men will get one hour  
cut down and their pay go up.  
Fred wipes his hand across his face and the sound of  
motors leads the stars in the pushing night sky.

## WHITMAN

"Now I pierce the darkness, new beings appear.  
The earth recedes from me into the night."

## NARRATOR

*(Quietly after pause)* Night and the dreams of night  
and preparations by some and plans of some,  
And hopes by some for the waiting, poring day.  
Night and some, even like Henry before the battle of  
Agincourt,  
Before their tents made from their own cloth, wait and  
move and tremble in the shadows,  
For the day and the crack of day. .

## WHITMAN

"I am the actor, actress, those finished with their parts  
and those waiting to commence."

## SWITCHBOARD

Hayes Registry,

## NARRATOR

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening.

**TOM**

Any letters for Calder?

**DICK**

Any wires for Smith?

**LARRY**

Any calls for Mason? Around nine or ten?

**TOM**

I'm dead.

**DICK**

I'm buried.

**LARRY**

I'm beat as a rock.

**TOM**

Some day, baby, I'll buy you a fur coat.

Someday there'll be hot water in that Goddamn room and no  
whistling from the floor below.

Someday I'm going to take my two big feet and stick them  
in the middle of a pearl-built swimming pool.

**NARRATOR**

And so you come, from Spokane, or Maine or the sleeping  
stink of Potato Junction on the Ohio.

**GRACE**

My name is Grace.

**CYNTHIA**

And mine is Cynthia.

**TOM**

I'm Tom down the hall.

**DICK**

Dick from upstairs.

**GRACE**

Study with Strassberg.

**LARRY**

Gonna try the Workshop on 54th.

**CYNTHIA**

Got a letter from home.

GRACE

My father's check didn't come. Damn it.

DICK

Haven't seen a check in God knows when.

SECOND VOICE

And so climb the stairs to the top fourth rear and pay it  
up right away and Mary and Helen will buy the  
groceries.

And why the hell doesn't the radio work?

And what do you do first? And what do you do second? .

LARRY

Join a registry.

TOM

Loan me a buck, baby.

DICK

Any mail for Smith?

CYNTHIA

Any letters for Poole, Cynthia Poole?

LARRY

I tell you, Tom, I've got to pay my rent. Just fifteen until  
Friday.

SWITCHBOARD

Hayes Registry, good afternoon.

NARRATOR

Anybody seen Kelly? With stuffed olives on his plate?  
Spitting image of Brando. Kelly sits on benches along  
the wall and curses bad luck turning his shoe leather.

DICK

Listen, Betty, I talked to this guy and no soap. He won't  
give options.

NARRATOR

Roll over and play dead and count the blues tearing off  
the elevators.

SECOND VOICE

Out of dramatic school, fresh from the dairy,  
Loaded poet with a zest for romance. The kind of romance  
that dreams in your grass.

Hear their voices in the gentle afternoon and the phones  
that never stop ringing.



## SWITCHBOARD

Hayes Registry, good afternoon.

## NARRATOR

Anybody seen Kelly? Sometimes the elevators won't work.

Sometimes you've got to walk up those damn stairs.

Sometimes the sun doesn't shine.

And so you drink a little and tell last week's laundry story and the trouble in this town and the wolf in no clothing.

And you smile across the cloth and reach for a cigarette and press your hand to your forehead in a satiric pose of internal suffering, when talked to concerning money, insurance, small bills.

## CYNTHIA

And where the hell does one study?

## GRACE

And who's a good teacher?

## SWITCHBOARD

And wear a purple glove, my dear, and be daring, but not too daring,

And by all means get yourself a hundred percent psychiatrist.

What good are you without a neurosis? No actress worth her salt . . .

## SECOND VOICE

And they come,

In bunches or alone,

And their lives scatter in the city

And become part of the laundromat and the quick lunch.

And some gnawing at the entrails of their lives like mice on a cheese;

They sing *your* song, poet.

From small, slimy alleys to the rolling greens of fertile Vermont,

They come here as seekers, poet.

The ones with phobias about open windows,

The kid with the torn handkerchief,

The old character man ready for the first job that floats along.

They are a part of this city.

Their yearning is a piece of cardboard in the wind,  
each reaching, reaching.

Eighty percent, poet, or even ninety, will be forgotten  
or will soon forget.

Some back to business, some to teach,

But each to have a moment, each a life to sing.

## CYNTHIA

I tell ya you've got to be seen. You've got to be seen.

**GRACE**

Anything open, Mr. Powell? A walk-on? Anything?

**SECOND VOICE**

The hope last year, the audition this year, the waiting next year. And so at five you meet Bill and Larry and Sam and Mae and Grace and one's got a promise; and one's got a headache; and one's all worn out; and one has hope.

**TOM**

So they're casting Andy Warhol's new movie called "Great to be Naked"

And I play the part of a bisexual who really digs small, fuzzy animals . . .

**SWITCHBOARD**

Hayes Registry, good evening.

**NARRATOR**

And evening turns to night and milk bottle tops and slow beer fizzles and love blooms over cheap coffee cups and torn potato chip wrappers.

**SECOND VOICE**

(Pause) Has anybody seen Kelly? He wears a bowtie that lights up and a derby that bobs under the bobbing stars. He was last seen before the flood of cameras and the contract neatly tucked in the back pocket,

Last seen headed West, and the long years that now pay off.

May it bring roses from the South

And so, luck to Sam or Charlie or Ted,

Luck, as the poets say in the roaring night.

But somehow lives are cut here,

Lives grow soggy in cheap coffee cups.

**TOM**

Any letters for Calder?

**DICK**

Any wires for Smith?

**LARRY**

Any calls for Mason, around nine or ten?

**WHITMAN**

"I am the actor, actress.

These through with their parts

And those waiting to commence."

### NARRATOR

What makes a man a poet?  
Dreams, living and dead.  
The night with trembling dreams.  
The day with bursting hopes.  
The waiting movements of man and boy.  
And so you, too, wait,  
Wait to grapple with twenty-four hours,  
Wait to buy the clothes or eat the evening meal.  
And so you mark the ballots and put your name where it  
says to put your name and check your score-card —  
You can't tell the weather or the price of onions  
without a score-card.  
And so, John and Helen walk outside their cool windows  
and the night drags into day and the dreams march on and,  
Poet, if you put your finger on those dreams,  
And if you place your thumb on those hopes,  
And if you walk the long, hot pavements,  
And if you sing in the long, hot corners of the people's hearts,  
Then, poet, you can begin to examine the meaning of the  
smallest part of the human soul.

### MADAM

There's talk around that my house ain't exactly what it  
used to be,  
But I'll get by. I know the restless movement of the young  
men of these states.  
I've seen them come in hungry as small, chubby bears,  
I've seen them look all over my flock and, so help me, God,  
one kid I know came in eating caramels.  
I've seen them all over, mister. I could tell you their names:  
Red or Pete or Charlie or Dave.  
Now Dave's the one with Sophia Loren tattooed on a certain  
area,  
Dave's a killer. Full of jokes, mister — and I can tell you,  
thick like flies in summer they come in or sometimes  
lonely as pups. (*Long pause*)

Look, I want to love 'em all.  
Maybe you can't understand that, mister.  
Maybe you can't feel trees *this thick* growing inside,  
But there is in me, mister. And these kids flocking in night  
after night,  
Not talking about old worn-out Joes, salesmen hot off the  
trail from North Dakota or businessmen looking for  
a fling, or the runts yelping in some alley.  
No, the young ones, I mean,  
The phony, young, tough ones sometimes,  
Or the kid with apples in his cheeks or the guy for the first  
time who wants to learn how to do it.

That's me. I'm a teacher of the earth, mister.  
And I can hear them at night.  
They come to me like great driving trains, like the roar  
of mighty engines.  
I can hear them, like ships that scream in the waters that  
surround my house. (Pause)

My girls aren't bad, mister.  
Some don't have what with to eat.  
Some their old ladies were tenants of mine before them.  
Some, sitting around the corner, nothing to do, with love  
in their hearts.  
But where are you going to put that love?  
Sure, picket fence, mister? Sweet little cottage, mister?  
We get the girls the fraternity boys pick up and drop off  
and forget about.  
No judge's daughter here. But the boy with the velvet  
handkerchief, his father fixes it with the judge, money  
talks good mister, and one of my girls goes to see old  
Doc Barnes. (Pause)

I can hear it, mister. I can hear it plain as an autumn day.  
I hear my boys crying in the night. I hear some damn fool has  
got himself a bugle.  
Oh, Jesus Christ, mister, my boys screaming in the night or  
strugglin' around like leaves waiting for the sun.  
(Oh, mister, put that bugle down.)

#### NARRATOR

I love a parade, ladies and gentlemen.  
Boys and girls, old dowagers and retired generals, make way  
for the biggest, damndest parade you ever saw!

#### WHITMAN

"From the houses then and the workshops and through all  
the doorways.  
Leapt they tumultuous and lo! Manhattan arming."

#### NARRATOR

And it's so long, Sally . . . and

#### NICK

So long, Sue.

#### LARRY

So long, Mary Lou, I kiss your breast in the pale moonlight.

#### JOE

Play a song on a guitar and lead me pell mell into battle,  
Leaping swords and small sunsets.

NARRATOR

And it's war last week or the war tomorrow morning,  
Or the war a hundred years ago.  
And, poet, some wars were fought, as you know, for freedom.  
But some wars are made in an atomic night for personal or  
public gain,  
And this night is susceptible to flame.

LARRY

And so you played cards at Max's . . .

JOE

And rolled Easter eggs at Harriet's.

LARRY

And now you're a couple of thousand miles from home and  
there's mud in the canteen.

NICK

Yeah, and the damn ship's stereo isn't worth the wire it comes  
with,  
Right in the middle of Arlo Guthrie, putt. . . putt. . . putter  
right out.

JOE

And so the sky is not New Hampshire and the air is not  
Brooklyn.  
And somehow you got stuck in the middle of quicksand; the  
clouds were clean like dried linen and the damn bugle  
sounded and you were standing around or shooting the  
bull and it blew and they played it on the radio and  
snuck it in the movies and the gassy announcer  
bellowing the prophets of doom sandwiched in with the  
nation's ten top tunes and  
Spilled a bomb in New Jersey in the morning,  
Spilled death right around the corner. Housewife, be wise,  
pull up stakes and rent a cave.  
And so you signed on the dotted line and learned to carry  
a helmet between your teeth.

SOLDIER

*(Sings) "I know a gal who lives on a hill.  
She won't give but her sister will."*

NARRATOR

In the glare of broken bandages  
Of the twilight's last scream,  
Going south on highway No-man's land with a bunch of  
scattered arms and legs.  
A vein, bloodless, cannot sing in the early morning.

JOE

(Pause) You fellows have to understand. We're from the nation's creamery.

NICK

*What the hell did that fool say?*

NARRATOR

And so it comes. And you wrap yourselves in a blanket but still it comes,  
The shell that comes,  
The blood that trickles down like the last winter's leaf comes.

NURSE

And the young ones cry and the not so young ones.  
The ones who have tasted the hard taste of death before,  
Shrug and curse and spit on the hard rock.

NARRATOR

In hospitals a hundred years ago or seconds or minutes ago,  
he stood over a bed with a warming pan.  
The poet heard the guns rolling in the night,  
And the tears rolling in the dark.  
And the sounds of the bugle blew loud and blew clear.  
They heard the bugle played last night or the night before,  
And they marched away because they were told to.

JOE

Or lonely.

LARRY

Or bored.

NARRATOR

Or sometimes like a hundred years ago, for a cause worth the trek.

NICK

But now no cause worth the stench of gauze and medicine  
drunk like whiskey down the drunkard's throat.

NARRATOR

And smoke came then,  
And bullets came then.  
And the mud of grass turned to the bone of youth,  
And bodies fell and names became blood spots on a map.

WHITMAN

"Blast! Beat! Drums! Blow! Bugles! Blow!  
Through the windows — through the 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 your drums — so shrill  
you bugles blow.”

#### NARRATOR

And you trade a suit bought with a month's allowance for  
a new suit country-free and signed for on the cool,  
black line.

Wave the pretty, bright flags from the poles and drop  
crepe paper over the city square.

We are sending our boys in the perilous night,  
We are sending our boys to fight! Fight! *Fight.*

Sorry, honey, marriage next year in a hail of orange blossoms.

Sorry, honey, he says, and she whispers and the little fellow  
cries and there are cars honking and the bugles blow in  
the free air.

#### LARRY

Goodbye, mom. So long, pop. I'll send you back a stinkin'  
helmet.

#### NARRATOR

They leave by engine, plane or bus whose wheels

Roll unknowing over the soon knowing ground.

The war last week or next month. The war that grows  
in the mind of the large desk.

#### CONDUCTOR

(*Bellowing*) Trains leaving for New Mexico, Ontario,  
points east, west, north and south, boarding now.

#### DICK

(*Yelling*) Don't break ranks! Don't break ranks!

#### HARRY

(*Yelling*) Platoon, attention! Right face! Right face!

#### NICK

Kiss the bar for me, Harry. See you, Toots.

#### LARRY

So long, Mary Lou. Take care.

#### JOE

Goodbye, orphanage. How I'll miss your damn numbers.

**NICK**

What the hell you got them *again!* (*A pause*)

**FIRST SOLDIER**

Got a match? Got a light?

**SECOND SOLDIER**

Anybody know the time? Anybody know the valuable time?

**THIRD SOLDIER**

Who said war was glorious? He was a liar!  
He was a Goddamn liar!

**FIRST SOLDIER**

Sometimes I ask myself a question. . . Sometimes I ask what  
are we here for? Simple question. . . Simple answer. **WHO  
THE HELL KNOWS WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR!!**

**SECOND SOLDIER**

I remember once I owned a farm,  
A small farm with the sun streaming through the corn.  
I had a wife and a couple of kids,  
A fine wife with gold in her hair.  
I remember what it felt like after gathering the grain,  
After hoeing the earth and gathering the grain,  
And my wife's head on my shoulder,  
And my kids playing in the dying sun.  
Now I've got a number. Now I've got a rifle.  
Now those kids are a thousand miles away.  
Now I've got a number in a Goddamn war I don't even  
Know the name of!  
Funny, so many ways to die. . .  
By bullet and by fire!

**THIRD SOLDIER**

I just got my degree ... Can you imagine?  
Twenty-three and my degree and the old world  
Right by the tail! My degree . . . I went to a fine college,  
Had me a fine education. Know all about the books and the  
poets,  
Can you imagine? I can even recite Shakespeare and Marlowe  
too. Twenty-three and the world was in its morning,  
And the world sprang up and bit me right on the ass . . .  
Twenty-three. Can you imagine? Got me a rifle now,  
Got me a beautiful platoon, got me death maybe at  
Three-o'clock in the morning . . . Can you imagine?  
All I wanted was the world and all its trimmings.  
Now I get the mud and all its dirt,  
Now I get a slice of murder at three-o'clock in  
The morning . . .



### FIRST SOLDIER

Sometimes I ask myself a question . . . Sometimes I ask what are we here for? Simple question. Simple answer.

### SECOND SOLDIER

Anybody know the time? Anybody know the valuable time?

### THIRD SOLDIER

There's a time to live and there's a time to die,  
And there's a time to be a valuable soldier . . .

### FIRST SOLDIER

*SHOVE THAT SHIT! (Pause)*

*Here they come . . . Over the hill . . . Get those rifles out . . .  
READY!*

### SECOND SOLDIER

Goodbye farm. . . Goodbye Susan. . . Goodbye kids. . .

### THIRD SOLDIER

My degree don't look so good from here!

*DOWN! DOWN! GET YOUR GODDAMN HEAD DOWN!*

*(Gun blasts. A short pause)*

It's all over for Peter. All over in a blinding second.  
Can you imagine?

### GENERAL

*(After a pause)* My dear Mrs. Harrison —

I write out of deepest sympathy for you and your  
husband. I know the loss of your son Private Peter . . .

### SOLDIER

*(Sings)* "I know a gal who lives on a hill,  
She won't give but her sister will."

### WHITMAN

"And the mother with thin form presently dressed in black,  
By day her meals untouched, then at night fitfully sleeping.  
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with deep longing.  
Oh, that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent from life;  
escape and withdraw,  
To flow, to seek, to be with her dear, dead son."

### NARRATOR

And they fell on fields rich with the pouring of their own  
good youthful blood.

And their bodies swelled in the heavenly moonlight and  
their bodies felt the ground seethe underneath them  
as though burdened with some great weight.

And he moved among them, poet, in the trembling darkness.  
Poet, whose finger touched on the points of their dreams.

## WHITMAN

*(Quietly, almost an echo)*

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

## NARRATOR

The sun of red hot flame is dying slowly and the smoke that  
touches the hill is dying slowly. *(Pause)*  
And then begin slowly, small bursts of seed in the park.  
Slowly, slowly, the broken legions march brokenly home.

## SOLDIER

*(Singing, weary)* "I know a gal who lives on a hill.  
She won't give but her sister will."

## NARRATOR

Slowly past the city with homes streaked with ruin and  
streets torn and bone filled,  
Slowly past the farms whose fields are ripped and whose  
crop aches like an aching pregnant woman left  
broken and alone,  
Slowly the child comes forth and waves a torn handkerchief  
at the passing row of fathers, a few more climb over the  
the wrecked bannisters and nod or giggle or make bets  
on who's the hero in this moving pack.

The park grows brighter and the tanks are buried beneath the  
benches;

Some booby traps may still be around but we have watchers  
for them and geiger counters,

And the lake is seen slightly warm and one by one, the  
children come out to play.

There will be statues made, later, of course.

There will be riders on bronze horses.

There will be speeches made and death will become a shrine  
and slaughter a thirty-two gun salute.

And there are great holes in the streets and buildings are  
craters and elevators are out of order and mothers wear  
black and infants cry behind the closed, locked doors  
and behind the safety of great mountain ranges of guards  
and behind the carefully laid out table and the row of  
chairs, men who press on the souls of leaves plan  
destinies for the tired street.

Poet, whose trembling hand has worked and washed the blood  
in the advancing dark,

Poet, who has heard the sounds of riders when they were alive  
and a safety pin could hurt them,

Poet, who smelled the rust at the tip of the living sword and  
who saw the tanks before the tanks were melted into  
congressional prose, speak in this atomic night.

#### WHITMAN

"Away with themes of War! Away with war itself!  
Hence from my shuddering sight to never more return that  
show of blackened, mutilated corpses!  
The hell unpent and raid of blood, fit for wild tigers or for  
lap-tongued wolves, not reasoning men,  
And in its stead speed industry's campaigns,  
With thy undaunted armies, engineering.  
Thy pennants labor, loosened to the breeze,  
Thy bugles sounding loud and clear."

#### SECOND VOICE

(After pause) There is silence now in the air and silence  
on the long slab of sidewalk.  
The drums no longer pound with the pounding bombs.  
Kids from Duluth or South Parkway or Fourteenth Street  
or South Carolina or Denver, Colorado.  
Kids tired and wanting to grab some sleep and wanting  
no medals, mister, but only ever-loving peace.

#### NARRATOR

What makes a man a poet?  
Standing at his window watching shadows move across the  
Walk or joining the shadows,  
And the shadows become forms,  
And the forms are bone,  
And the forms are flesh,  
And they focused their eyes on the first sun,  
And ran their hands over the first wheel,  
And built their cities and melted the raw earth into  
steaming steel.

It is these who heard the bird of autumn and dug trenches in  
the French snow this side of Paris  
And pushed back the club at Stalingrad and swam the  
hurricane seas at Dunkirk,  
It is these who write the books and sing the songs and hear  
the stirrings of summer pressed leaves.  
And so, poet, you walk among these and drink a coke or  
eat a hot dog or sip fine wine on the cushioned seat  
or throw your voice to the towering sky,  
In anger, poet, at the lynch rope,  
In anger, poet, at the black bones splattered on the flowing  
green grass,  
Splattered before the bright ballot box,  
Splattered or told to go where the signs point,

But now, our black brother is standing up,  
Now he is making his own demands . . .

#### FIRST VOICE

We fight for dignity . . .

#### SECOND VOICE

We fight for a decent wage . . .

#### THIRD VOICE

We fight for freedom. . . in this land denying freedom.

#### FOURTH VOICE

We fight for a better way . . . a better hour. . . a better time.

#### NARRATOR

On street corners, in the cramping of small tenements  
In the ache and pain of the backwash of a dozen cities  
They stand . . . people are on the move,  
Clearly as the dawn streaks to birth we hear the old poet  
    with the long, flowing beard,  
His voice rises like twilight in the spaces of our soul,  
He stands and spreads his faith against the universe,  
Like the burning star of freedom he pours his love of life  
    and us into the center of the very being  
of mankind:

#### WHITMAN

Now trumpeter for thy close,  
Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,  
Sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith and hope,  
Rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of the future,  
Give me for once its prophecy and joy.  
Oh glad, exulting, culminating song!  
A vigor more than earth's in thy notes,  
Marches of victory—man disenthralled—the conqueror at last.  
Hymns to the universal God from universal man—all joy!  
A reborn race appears—a perfect world, all joy!  
Women and men in wisdom, innocence and health—all joy!  
Riotous laughing bacchanals filled with joy!  
War, sorrow, suffering gone—the rank earth purged—nothing  
    but joy left!  
The ocean filled with joy—the atmosphere all joy!  
Joy! Joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in the ecstasy  
    of life!  
Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!  
Joy! joy! all over joy!

### NARRATOR

What makes a man a poet?

What makes a man sing his song?

A song that rises out of sunny hills and the splash of meadows,

A song that whispers at our front doors,  
that settles

Behind the water coolers, that becomes a part of the silver  
screen our faces are covered by,

The song of a poet, hoping, dreaming, and demanding, too,  
in this demanding night that justice will ride  
clear and clean on the land and there will be now  
and forever, ever-loving peace . . .

### SECOND VOICE

What makes a man hunger for this night, this breathing  
moment in the trembling dark?

*(Whispering)* What makes a man a poet?

### ALL

YOU AND ME AND LIVES YET TO COME . . .

### WHITMAN

*(Almost whispering)* Camerado, this is no book.

Who touches this, touches a man . . .

Who touches this, touches a man . . .

Who touches this, touches a man.

