



THE
SLEEPERS

Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman

The Sleepers

.....

Fundacja FESTINA LENTE

--1--

I wander all night in my vision,
Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly stepping
and stopping,
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers,
Wandering and confused, lost to myself, ill-assorted,
contradictory,
Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping.

How solemn they look there, stretch'd and still,
How quiet they breathe, the little children in their
cradles.

The wretched features of ennuyes, the white features of
corpses, the livid faces of drunkards, the sick-gray faces
of onanists,
The gash'd bodies on battle-fields, the insane in their
strong-door'd rooms, the sacred idiots, the new-born
emerging from gates, and the dying emerging from
gates,
The night pervades them and infolds them.

The married couple sleep calmly in their bed, he with
his palm on the hip of the wife, and she with her palm
on the hip of the husband,

The sisters sleep lovingly side by side in their bed,
The men sleep lovingly side by side in theirs,
And the mother sleeps with her little child carefully
wrapt.

The blind sleep, and the deaf and dumb sleep,
The prisoner sleeps well in the prison, the runaway son
sleeps,
The murderer that is to be hung next day, how does he
sleep?
And the murder'd person, how does he sleep?

The female that loves unrequited sleeps,
And the male that loves unrequited sleeps,
The head of the money-maker that plotted all day
sleeps,
And the enraged and treacherous dispositions, all, all
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.

Now I pierce the darkness, new beings appear,
The earth recedes from me into the night,
I saw that it was beautiful, and I see that what is not
the earth is beautiful.

I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the
other sleepers each in turn,
I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other
dreamers,
And I become the other dreamers.

I am a dance--play up there! the fit is whirling me
fast!

I am the ever-laughing--it is new moon and twilight,
I see the hiding of douceurs, I see nimble ghosts
whichever way I look,
Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and
where it is neither ground nor sea.

Well do they do their jobs those journeymen divine,
Only from me can they hide nothing, and would not if
they could,
I reckon I am their boss and they make me a pet
besides,
And surround me and lead me and run ahead when I
walk,
To lift their cunning covers to signify me with
stretch'd arms, and resume the way;
Onward we move, a gay gang of blackguards! with
mirth-shouting music and wild-flapping pennants of
joy!

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,
The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in
the box,
He who has been famous and he who shall be famous
after
to-day,
The stammerer, the well-form'd person, the wasted or
feeble person.

I am she who adorn'd herself and folded her hair
expectantly,
My truant lover has come, and it is dark.

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

I roll myself upon you as upon a bed, I resign myself
to the dusk.
He whom I call answers me and takes the place of my
lover,
He rises with me silently from the bed.

Darkness, you are gentler than my lover, his flesh was
sweaty and panting,
I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me.

My hands are spread forth, I pass them in all
directions,

I would sound up the shadowy shore to which you are journeying.

Be careful darkness! already what was it touch'd me?
I thought my lover had gone, else darkness and he are one,
I hear the heart-beat, I follow, I fade away.

--2--

I descend my western course, my sinews are flaccid,
Perfume and youth course through me and I am their wake.

It is my face yellow and wrinkled instead of the old woman's,
I sit low in a straw-bottom chair and carefully darn my grandson's stockings.

It is I too, the sleepless widow looking out on the winter midnight,
I see the sparkles of star shine on the icy and pallid earth.

A shroud I see and I am the shroud, I wrap a body and lie in the coffin,
It is dark here under ground, it is not evil or pain here, it is blank here, for reasons.

(It seems to me that every thing in the light and air
ought to be happy,
Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave let him
know he has enough.)

--3--

I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked
through the eddies of the sea,
His brown hair lies close and even to his head, he
strikes out with courageous arms, he urges himself
with his legs,
I see his white body, I see his undaunted eyes,
I hate the swift-running eddies that would dash him
head-foremost on the rocks.

What are you doing you ruffianly red-trickled waves?
Will you kill the courageous giant? will you kill him
in the prime of his middle age?

Steady and long he struggles,
He is baffled, bang'd, bruise'd, he holds out while his
strength holds out,
The slapping eddies are spotted with his blood, they
bear him away, they roll him, swing him, turn him,
His beautiful body is borne in the circling eddies, it
is continually bruise'd on rocks,
Swiftly and out of sight is borne the brave corpse.

--4--

I turn but do not extricate myself,
Confused, a past-reading, another, but with darkness
yet.

The beach is cut by the razory ice-wind, the wreck-guns
sound,
The tempest lulls, the moon comes floundering through
the drifts.

I look where the ship helplessly heads end on, I hear
the burst as she strikes, I hear the howls of
dismay, they grow fainter and fainter.

I cannot aid with my wringing fingers,
I can but rush to the surf and let it drench me and
freeze upon me.

I search with the crowd, not one of the company is
wash'd to us alive,
In the morning I help pick up the dead and lay them in
rows in a barn.

--5--

Now of the older war-days, the defeat at Brooklyn,
Washington stands inside the lines, he stands on the

intrench'd hills amid a crowd of officers,
His face is cold and damp, he cannot repress the
weeping drops,
He lifts the glass perpetually to his eyes, the color
is blanch'd from his cheeks,
He sees the slaughter of the southern braves confided
to him by their parents.

The same at last and at last when peace is declared,
He stands in the room of the old tavern, the
well-belov'd soldiers all pass through,
The officers speechless and slow draw near in their
turns,
The chief encircles their necks with his arm and kisses
them on the cheek,
He kisses lightly the wet cheeks one after another, he
shakes hands and bids good-by to the army.

--6--

Now what my mother told me one day as we sat at
dinner
together,
Of when she was a nearly grown girl living home with
her parents on the old homestead

A red squaw came one breakfast-time to the old
homestead,

On her back she carried a bundle of rushes for
rush-bottoming chairs,

Her hair, straight, shiny, coarse, black, profuse,
half-envelop'd her face,
Her step was free and elastic, and her voice sounded
exquisitely as she spoke.

My mother look'd in delight and amazement at the
stranger,
She look'd at the freshness of her tall-borne face and
full and pliant limbs,
The more she look'd upon her she loved her,
Never before had she seen such wonderful beauty and
purity,
She made her sit on a bench by the jamb of the
fireplace, she cook'd food for her,
She had no work to give her, but she gave her
remembrance and fondness.

The red squaw staid all the forenoon, and toward the
middle of the afternoon she went away,
O my mother was loth to have her go away,
All the week she thought of her, she watch'd for her
many a month,
She remember'd her many a winter and many a summer,

But the red squaw never came nor was heard of there
again.

--7--

A show of the summer softness--a contact of something
unseen--an amour of the light and air,
I am jealous and overwhelm'd with friendliness,
And will go gallivant with the light and air myself.

O love and summer, you are in the dreams and in me,
Autumn and winter are in the dreams, the farmer goes
with his thrift,
The droves and crops increase, the barns are
well-fill'd.

Elements merge in the night, ships make tacks in the
dreams,
The sailor sails, the exile returns home,
The fugitive returns unharm'd, the immigrant is back
beyond months and years,

The poor Irishman lives in the simple house of his
childhood with the well-known neighbors and faces,
They warmly welcome him, he is barefoot again, he
forgets he is well off,
The Dutchman voyages home, and the Scotchman and
Welshman voyage home, and the native of the
Mediterranean voyages home,
To every port of England, France, Spain, enter
well-fill'd ships,

The Swiss toots it toward his hills, the Prussian goes
his way, the Hungarian his way, and the Pole his
way,
The Swede returns, and the Dane and Norwegian return.

The homeward bound and the outward bound,
The beautiful lost swimmer, the ennuye, the onanist,
the female that loves unrequited, the money-maker,
The actor and actress, those through with their parts
and those waiting to commence,
The affectionate boy, the husband and wife, the voter,
the nominee that is chosen and the nominee that
has fail'd,
The great already known and the great any time after
to-day,
The stammerer, the sick, the perfect-form'd, the
homely,
The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that sat
and sentenced him, the fluent lawyers, the jury,
the audience,
The laughter and weeper, the dancer, the midnight
widow,
the red squaw,
The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is
wrong'd,
The antipodes, and every one between this and them in
the dark,
I swear they are averaged now--one is no better than
the other,

The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored them.

I swear they are all beautiful,
Every one that sleeps is beautiful, every thing in the
dim light is beautiful,
The wildest and bloodiest is over, and all is peace.

Peace is always beautiful,
The myth of heaven indicates peace and night.
The myth of heaven indicates the soul,
The soul is always beautiful, it appears more or it
appears less, it comes or it lags behind,
It comes from its embower'd garden and looks
pleasantly
on itself and encloses the world,
Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, and
perfect and clean the womb cohering,
The head well-grown proportion'd and plumb, and the
bowels and joints proportion'd and plumb.

The soul is always beautiful,
The universe is duly in order, every thing is in its
place,
What has arrived is in its place and what waits shall
be in its place,
The twisted skull waits, the watery or rotten blood
waits,
The child of the glutton or venerealee waits long, and
the child of the drunkard waits long, and the

drunkard himself waits long,
The sleepers that lived and died wait, the far advanced
are to go on in their turns, and the far behind
are to come on in their turns,
The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall
flow and unite
--they unite now.

--8--

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,
The Asiatic and African are hand in hand, the European
and American are hand in hand,
Learn'd and unlearn'd are hand in hand, and male and
female are hand in hand,
The bare arm of the girl crosses the bare breast of her
lover, they press close without lust, his lips
press her neck,
The father holds his grown or ungrown son in his arms
with measureless love, and the son holds the
father in his arms with measureless love,
The white hair of the mother shines on the white
wrist of the daughter,

The breath of the boy goes with the breath of the man,
friend is inarm'd by friend,
The scholar kisses the teacher and the teacher kisses

the scholar, the wrong'd is made right,
The call of the slave is one with the master's call,
and the master salutes the slave,
The felon steps forth from the prison, the insane
becomes sane,
the suffering of sick persons is reliev'd,
The sweatings and fevers stop, the throat that was
unsound is sound, the lungs of the consumptive are
resumed, the poor distress'd head is free,
The joints of the rheumatic move as smoothly as ever,
and smoother than ever,
Stiflings and passages open, the paralyzed become
supple,
The swell'd and convuls'd and congested awake to
themselves in condition,
They pass the invigoration of the night and the
chemistry of the night, and awake.

I too pass from the night,
I stay a while away O night, but I return to you again
and love you.

Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?
I am not afraid, I have been well brought forward by
you,
I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her in
whom I lay so long,
I know not how I came of you and I know not where I
go

with you, but I know I came well and shall go well.

I will stop only a time with the night, and rise
betimes,
I will duly pass the day O my mother, and duly return
to you.

Walt Whitman
The Sleepers

Redakcja: *Anna Oldak, Hanna Milewska*
Projekt okładki: *Studio Ożywiania Książki KARTALIA*

Copyright © for the e-book edition
by FUNDACJA FESTINA LENTE 2013

Warszawa 2013

ISBN 978-83-7904-228-9, Festina 2013

Fundacja Festina Lente
ul. Nowoursynowska 160B/7
02-776 Warszawa



FUNDACJA
FESTINA LENTE

www.festina-lente.org.pl



www.chmuraczytania.pl



www.eLib.pl