

BOOK XI

A Song of Joys

O to make the most jubilant song!

Full of music--full of manhood, womanhood, infancy!

Full of common employments--full of grain and trees.

O for the voices of animals--O for the swiftness and balance of fishes!

O for the dropping of raindrops in a song!

O for the sunshine and motion of waves in a song!

O the joy of my spirit--it is uncaged--it darts like lightning!

It is not enough to have this globe or a certain time,

I will have thousands of globes and all time.

O the engineer's joys! to go with a locomotive!

To hear the hiss of steam, the merry shriek, the steam-whistle, the
laughing locomotive!

To push with resistless way and speed off in the distance.

O the gleesome saunter over fields and hillsides!

The leaves and flowers of the commonest weeds, the moist fresh
stillness of the woods,

The exquisite smell of the earth at daybreak, and all through the forenoon.

O the horseman's and horsewoman's joys!

The saddle, the gallop, the pressure upon the seat, the cool
gurgling by the ears and hair.

O the fireman's joys!

I hear the alarm at dead of night,

I hear bells, shouts! I pass the crowd, I run!

The sight of the flames maddens me with pleasure.

O the joy of the strong-brawn'd fighter, towering in the arena in
perfect condition, conscious of power, thirsting to meet his opponent.

O the joy of that vast elemental sympathy which only the human soul is
capable of generating and emitting in steady and limitless floods.

O the mother's joys!

The watching, the endurance, the precious love, the anguish, the
patiently yielded life.

O the of increase, growth, recuperation,

The joy of soothing and pacifying, the joy of concord and harmony.

O to go back to the place where I was born,

To hear the birds sing once more,

To ramble about the house and barn and over the fields once more,

And through the orchard and along the old lanes once more.

O to have been brought up on bays, lagoons, creeks, or along the coast,
To continue and be employ'd there all my life,
The briny and damp smell, the shore, the salt weeds exposed at low water,
The work of fishermen, the work of the eel-fisher and clam-fisher;
I come with my clam-rake and spade, I come with my eel-spear,
Is the tide out? I Join the group of clam-diggers on the flats,
I laugh and work with them, I joke at my work like a mettlesome young man;
In winter I take my eel-basket and eel-spear and travel out on foot
 on the ice--I have a small axe to cut holes in the ice,
Behold me well-clothed going gayly or returning in the afternoon,
 my brood of tough boys accompanying me,
My brood of grown and part-grown boys, who love to be with no
 one else so well as they love to be with me,
By day to work with me, and by night to sleep with me.

Another time in warm weather out in a boat, to lift the lobster-pots
 where they are sunk with heavy stones, (I know the buoys,)
O the sweetness of the Fifth-month morning upon the water as I row
 just before sunrise toward the buoys,
I pull the wicker pots up slantingly, the dark green lobsters are
 desperate with their claws as I take them out, I insert
 wooden pegs in the 'oints of their pincers,

I go to all the places one after another, and then row back to the shore,

There in a huge kettle of boiling water the lobsters shall be boil'd
till their color becomes scarlet.

Another time mackerel-taking,

Voracious, mad for the hook, near the surface, they seem to fill the
water for miles;

Another time fishing for rock-fish in Chesapeake bay, I one of the
brown-faced crew;

Another time trailing for blue-fish off Paumanok, I stand with braced body,
My left foot is on the gunwale, my right arm throws far out the
coils of slender rope,

In sight around me the quick veering and darting of fifty skiffs, my
companions.

O boating on the rivers,

The voyage down the St. Lawrence, the superb scenery, the steamers,
The ships sailing, the Thousand Islands, the occasional timber-raft
and the raftsmen with long-reaching sweep-oars,

The little huts on the rafts, and the stream of smoke when they cook
supper at evening.

(O something pernicious and dread!

Something far away from a puny and pious life!

Something unproved! something in a trance!

Something escaped from the anchorage and driving free.)

O to work in mines, or forging iron,
Foundry casting, the foundry itself, the rude high roof, the ample
and shadow'd space,
The furnace, the hot liquid pour'd out and running.

O to resume the joys of the soldier!
To feel the presence of a brave commanding officer--to feel his sympathy!
To behold his calmness--to be warm'd in the rays of his smile!
To go to battle--to hear the bugles play and the drums beat!
To hear the crash of artillery--to see the glittering of the bayonets
and musket-barrels in the sun!

To see men fall and die and not complain!
To taste the savage taste of blood--to be so devilish!
To gloat so over the wounds and deaths of the enemy.

O the whaleman's joys! O I cruise my old cruise again!
I feel the ship's motion under me, I feel the Atlantic breezes fanning me,
I hear the cry again sent down from the mast-head, There--she blows!
Again I spring up the rigging to look with the rest--we descend,
wild with excitement,
I leap in the lower'd boat, we row toward our prey where he lies,
We approach stealthy and silent, I see the mountainous mass,
lethargic, basking,
I see the harpooneer standing up, I see the weapon dart from his
vigorous arm;

O swift again far out in the ocean the wounded whale, settling,
 running to windward, tows me,
Again I see him rise to breathe, we row close again,
I see a lance driven through his side, press'd deep, turn'd in the wound,
Again we back off, I see him settle again, the life is leaving him fast,
As he rises he spouts blood, I see him swim in circles narrower and
 narrower, swiftly cutting the water--I see him die,
He gives one convulsive leap in the centre of the circle, and then
 falls flat and still in the bloody foam.

O the old manhood of me, my noblest joy of all!
My children and grand-children, my white hair and beard,
My largeness, calmness, majesty, out of the long stretch of my life.

O ripen'd joy of womanhood! O happiness at last!
I am more than eighty years of age, I am the most venerable mother,
How clear is my mind--how all people draw nigh to me!
What attractions are these beyond any before? what bloom more
 than the bloom of youth?
What beauty is this that descends upon me and rises out of me?

O the orator's joys!
To inflate the chest, to roll the thunder of the voice out from the
 ribs and throat,
To make the people rage, weep, hate, desire, with yourself,
To lead America--to quell America with a great tongue.

O the joy of my soul leaning pois'd on itself, receiving identity through
materials and loving them, observing characters and absorbing them,
My soul vibrated back to me from them, from sight, hearing, touch,
reason, articulation, comparison, memory, and the like,
The real life of my senses and flesh transcending my senses and flesh,
My body done with materials, my sight done with my material eyes,
Proved to me this day beyond cavil that it is not my material eyes
which finally see,
Nor my material body which finally loves, walks, laughs, shouts,
embraces, procreates.

O the farmer's joys!
Ohioan's, Illinoisian's, Wisconsinese', Kanadian's, Iowan's,
Kansian's, Missourian's, Oregonese' joys!
To rise at peep of day and pass forth nimbly to work,
To plough land in the fall for winter-sown crops,
To plough land in the spring for maize,
To train orchards, to graft the trees, to gather apples in the fall.

O to bathe in the swimming-bath, or in a good place along shore,
To splash the water! to walk ankle-deep, or race naked along the shore.

O to realize space!
The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,
To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and moon and flying

clouds, as one with them.

O the joy a manly self-hood!

To be servile to none, to defer to none, not to any tyrant known or unknown,

To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,

To look with calm gaze or with a flashing eye,

To speak with a full and sonorous voice out of a broad chest,

To confront with your personality all the other personalities of the earth.

Knowist thou the excellent joys of youth?

Joys of the dear companions and of the merry word and laughing face?

Joy of the glad light-beaming day, joy of the wide-breath'd games?

Joy of sweet music, joy of the lighted ball-room and the dancers?

Joy of the plenteous dinner, strong carouse and drinking?

Yet O my soul supreme!

Knowist thou the joys of pensive thought?

Joys of the free and lonesome heart, the tender, gloomy heart?

Joys of the solitary walk, the spirit bow'd yet proud, the suffering

and the struggle?

The agonistic throes, the ecstasies, joys of the solemn musings day

or night?

Joys of the thought of Death, the great spheres Time and Space?

Prophetic joys of better, loftier love's ideals, the divine wife,

the sweet, eternal, perfect comrade?

Joys all thine own undying one, joys worthy thee O soul.

O while I live to be the ruler of life, not a slave,
To meet life as a powerful conqueror,
No fumes, no ennui, no more complaints or scornful criticisms,
To these proud laws of the air, the water and the ground, proving
 my interior soul impregnable,
And nothing exterior shall ever take command of me.

For not life's joys alone I sing, repeating--the joy of death!
The beautiful touch of Death, soothing and benumbing a few moments,
 for reasons,
Myself discharging my excrementitious body to be burn'd, or render'd
 to powder, or buried,
My real body doubtless left to me for other spheres,
My voided body nothing more to me, returning to the purifications,
 further offices, eternal uses of the earth.

O to attract by more than attraction!
How it is I know not--yet behold! the something which obeys none
 of the rest,
It is offensive, never defensive--yet how magnetic it draws.

O to struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted!
To be entirely alone with them, to find how much one can stand!
To look strife, torture, prison, popular odium, face to face!
To mount the scaffold, to advance to the muzzles of guns with

perfect nonchalance!

To be indeed a God!

O to sail to sea in a ship!

To leave this steady unendurable land,

To leave the tiresome sameness of the streets, the sidewalks and the
houses,

To leave you O you solid motionless land, and entering a ship,

To sail and sail and sail!

O to have life henceforth a poem of new joys!

To dance, clap hands, exult, shout, skip, leap, roll on, float on!

To be a sailor of the world bound for all ports,

A ship itself, (see indeed these sails I spread to the sun and air,)

A swift and swelling ship full of rich words, full of joys.