**THE DRESSER.**

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| 1   An old man bending, I come, among new faces,  |

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| Years looking backward, resuming, in answer to chil-          dren,  |

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| *Come tell us old man,* as from young men and maidens          that love me;  |

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| Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions,          these chances,  |

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| Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the          other was equally brave;)  |

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| Now be witness again—paint the mightiest armies of          earth;  |

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| Of those armies so rapid, so wondrous, what saw you to          tell us?  |

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| What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious          panics,  |

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| Of hard-fought engagements, or sieges tremendous,          what deepest remains?  |

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| 2   O maidens and young men I love, and that love me,  |

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| What you ask of my days, those the strangest and sud-          den your talking recals;  |

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| Soldier alert I arrive, after a long march, cover'd with          sweat and dust;  |

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| In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly          shout in the rush of successful charge;  |

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| Enter the captur'd works . . . . yet lo! like a swift-          running river, they fade;  |

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| Pass and are gone, they fade—I dwell not on soldiers'          perils or soldiers' joys;  |

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| (Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the          joys, yet I was content.)  |
| 3   But in silence, in dream's projections,  |

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| While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes          on,  |

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| So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the          imprints off the sand,  |

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| In nature's reverie sad, with hinged knees returning, I          enter the doors—(while for you up there,  |

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| Whoever you are, follow me without noise, and be of          strong heart.)  |

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| 4   Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,  |

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| Straight and swift to my wounded I go,  |

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| Where they lie on the ground, after the battle brought          in;  |

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| Where their priceless blood reddens the grass, the          ground;  |

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| Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd          hospital;  |

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| To the long rows of cots, up and down, each side, I          return;  |

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| To each and all, one after another, I draw near—not          one do I miss;  |

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| An attendant follows, holding a tray—he carries a          refuse pail,  |

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| Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied,          and fill'd again.  |

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| 5   I onward go, I stop,  |

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| With hinged knees and steady hand, to dress wounds;  |

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| I am firm with each—the pangs are sharp, yet unavoid-          able;  |

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| One turns to me his appealing eyes—(poor boy! I          never knew you,  |

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| Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for          you, if that would save you.)  |

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| 6   On, on I go—(open, doors of time! open, hospital          doors!)  |
| The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand, tear not the          bandage away;)  |

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| The neck of the cavalry-man, with the bullet through          and through, I examine;  |

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| Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye,          yet life struggles hard;  |

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| (Come, sweet death! be persuaded, O beautiful death!  |

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| In mercy come quickly.)  |

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| 7   From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,  |

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| I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the          matter and blood;  |

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| Back on his pillow the soldier bends, with curv'd neck,          and side-falling head;  |

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| His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on          the bloody stump,  |

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| And has not yet looked on it.  |

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| 8   I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep;  |

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| But a day or two more—for see, the frame all wasted          and sinking,  |

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| And the yellow-blue countenance see.  |

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| 9   I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bul-          let wound,  |

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| Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so          sickening, so offensive,  |

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| While the attendant stands behind aside me, holding          the tray and pail.  |

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| 10   I am faithful, I do not give out;  |

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| The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdo-          men,  |

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| These and more I dress with impassive hand—(yet          deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame.)  |

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| 11   Thus in silence, in dream's projections,  |

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| Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals;  |
| The hurt and the wounded I pacify with soothing hand,  |

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| I sit by the restless all the dark night—some are so          young;  |

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| Some suffer so much—I recall the experience sweet          and sad;  |

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| (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have          cross'd and rested,  |

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| Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)  |